

The Intellectual Origins of the Eurasian Union Project

Stephen Blank

The Eurasian Economic Union and its component Customs Union comprise Vladimir Putin's "flagship" policies.¹ But these organizations are merely the latest iteration of an increasingly crystallized Russian policy aspiration dating back to the collapse of the Soviet Union. As Jeffrey Mankoff recently observed, "In one form or another, re-integrating the states of the former Soviet Union has been on Russia's agenda almost since the moment the Soviet Union collapsed."² Arguably, Russia has never reconciled itself to losing an empire. The reintegration program that is proceeding under Putin in fact began under Boris Yeltsin's leadership, notwithstanding the fact that the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) was first thought of as "divorce court" for former Soviet Republics.

Furthermore, these organizations are not the only elements of Putin's reintegration plan. The overall project has always had a military dimension, namely the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) that grew out of the 1992 Tashkent Collective Security Treaty (CST).³ And the leitmotif of all these plans has not just been economic or military integration, but equally crucially, the privileging of Russian sovereignty over that of CIS countries, a hallmark of neo-imperial and sphere of influence policies. Russian leaders do not refrain from admitting this openly. In August 2008, immediately after the war in

¹ Iwona Wisniewska, *Eurasian Integration: Russia's Attempt at the Economic Unification of the Post-Soviet Area*, OSW Studies: Centre for Eastern Studies, Warsaw, 2013.

² Jeffrey Mankoff, *Eurasian Integration: the Next Stage*, Central Asia Policy Brief, Elliott School of International Affairs, George Washington University, 2013, p. 1.

³ Carmen Amelia and Gayoso Descalzi, *Russian Hegemony in the CIS Region: an Examination of Russian Influence and of Variation in Consent and Dissent By CIS States to Regional Hierarchy*, Doctoral Thesis submitted to the Department of International Relations, London School of Economics, 2013, pp. 52-85, 124-160.

Georgia, President Dmitry Medvedev famously told an interviewer that Russia has privileged interests in countries that he would not define, demonstrating that Russia not only wants to revise borders or intervene abroad, but also demands a sphere of influence throughout Eurasia.⁴

These statements reinforced what had become an official consensus by 1995, when Yeltsin's government announced that reintegration was the fundamental strategic goal of the government and all of its departments, who would be guided by the precept of not damaging Russian interests. This document also clearly implied the subordination of neighboring states to Russia on economic and military issues. Moreover, it quite suggestively indicated that an integration process was needed to counteract centrifugal tendencies in Russia itself.⁵

Thus, both Yeltsin's and Putin's regimes have confirmed by words and deeds their belief that without a neo-imperial bloc around Russia and under its leadership, the continuity of the Russian state is itself at risk. As several writers have observed, empire is the Russian state's default option and it cannot, according to its masters, be governed or survive otherwise.⁶ For example, Alexei Malashenko observed that Russia's response to the Chechen threat in 1999-2000 only made sense if Russia continues to regard itself as an empire.⁷ Subsequently, Russian political scientist Egor Kholmogorov has observed that,

'Empire' is the main category of any strategic political analysis in the Russian language. Whenever we start to ponder a full-scale, long-term construction of the Russian state, we begin to think of empire and in terms of empire. Russians are inherently imperialists.⁸

⁴ Interview given by Dmitry Medvedev to Television Channels Channel One, Russia, NTV, August 31, 2008, http://www.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2008/08/31/1850_type82916_206003.shtml.

⁵ Moscow, *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, in Russian, September 23, 1995, *FBIS SOV*, September 23, 1995.

⁶ Alexander Etkind, *Internal Colonization: Russia's Imperial Experience*, London: Polity Press, 2011.

⁷ Maura Reynolds, "Moscow Has Chechnya Back – Now What?," *Los Angeles Times*, June 19, 2000.

⁸ Quoted in Boris Rumer, "Central Asia: At the End of the Transition," Boris Rumer, ed., *Central Asia At the End of Transition*, Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe & Co. Inc., 2005, p. 47.

And if Russia is an empire of this sort, or still hankers for that empire, then it becomes clear why the membership of former Soviet republics—or even of Russia's erstwhile satellites in Eastern Europe—in NATO or the EU becomes a threat to Russian sovereignty. Indeed, by the time Putin had become Prime Minister in 1999, Russia insisted on this policy and on foreign organizations like the EU recognizing it. Russia's 1999 official submission to the EU of its strategy for relations with it, made by Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, is one example:

As a world power situated on two continents, Russia should retain its freedom to determine and implement its foreign and domestic policies, its status and advantages of a Euro-Asian state and largest country of the CIS. The 'development of partnership with the EU should contribute to consolidating Russia's role as the leading power in shaping a new system of interstate political and economic relations in the CIS area,' and thus, Russia would 'oppose any attempts to hamper economic integration in the CIS [that may be made by the EU], including through 'special relations' with individual CIS member states to the detriment of Russia's interests.'⁹

This document reflected the elite consensus linking together the preservation of an increasingly undemocratic, even autocratic polity with the creation of a great continental bloc subordinated to Russia and simultaneously disdainful of the other CIS members' sovereignty. For as Deputy Foreign Minister Ivan Ivanov stated in 1999,

Our country is not in need of affiliation with the EU. This would entail loss of its unique Euro-Asian specifics, the role of the center of attraction of the re-integration of the CIS, independence in foreign economic and defense policies, and complete restructuring (once more) of all Russian statehood based on the requirements of the European Union. Finally great powers (and it is too soon to abandon calling ourselves such) do not dissolve in international unions – they create them around themselves.¹⁰

⁹ *Strategiia Razvittia Otnoshenii Rossiiskoi Federatsii s Evropeiskim Soiuzom na Srednesrochnuiu Perspektivu (2000-2010)*, *Diplomaticheskii Vestnik*, November 1999, www.ln.mis.ru/website/dip_vest.nsf/items/1.1.1.6, and 1.8.2000, cited in Hannes Adomeit and Heidi Reisinger, *Russia's Role in Post-Soviet Territory: Decline of Military Power and Political Influence*, Norwegian Institute for Defence Studies, Forsvarstudier No. 4, 2002, p. 5.

¹⁰ Quoted in Michael Emerson, "From an Awkward Partnership to a Greater Europe: A European Perspective," Dana Allin and Michael H. Emerson, eds., *Readings in European Security*, III, Brussels and London: Center for European Policy Studies and International Institute for Security Studies, 2005, p. 19.

Thus, in this logic, Russia must be an independent sovereign actor, unbounded by any other political association and exercising unfettered power in its own domain. Moreover, it is essential for the concept of Russia as a unique, autocratic, great power not only that Russia assert its great power status but that others recognize it as such and thus grant it a superior status, first of all vis-a-vis the neighboring CIS countries.

This notion obviously directly descends from the Tsarist and Soviet heritage. As Stalin wrote in 1920 about the Soviet borderlands,

Only two alternatives confront the border regions: Either they join forces with Russia and then the toiling masses of the border regions will be emancipated from imperialist oppression; or they join forces with the Entente, and then the yoke of imperialism is inevitable.¹¹

The concurrent and deep-rooted demand for recognition of Russia as a great autocratic and neo-imperial power with a right to an exclusive sphere of influence in the former Soviet Union coincided with Yeltsin's turn towards autocracy and the end of reforms in 1992-93. Indeed, in the minds of many of this elite, if Russia is not a great power (i.e. a neo-imperial empire) it will not only not be a great power, it will be nothing more than a newly minted version of medieval apauage pryncedoms. Moreover, as many analysts claim, democracy is contra-indicated to the preservation of the large state, if not the state as such because it will lead to Islamist rule in the south and other similar breakdowns of power at the center.¹²

¹¹ I.V. Stalin, "The Policy of the Soviet Government on the National Question in Russia," *Pravda*, October 10, 1920, Joseph Stalin, *Marxism and the National Question: Selected Writings and Speeches*, New York: International Publishers, 1942, p. 77.

¹² Richard Hellie, "The Structure of Russian Imperial History," *History and Theory*, XLIV, No. 4, December 2005, pp. 88-112; Peter Baker and Susan Glasser, *Kremlin Rising: Vladimir Putin's Russia and the End of Revolution*, New York: Scribner's, 2005, p. 417; Steven Rosefielde, *Russia in the 21st Century: the Prodigal Superpower*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004; Marshall T. Poe, *The Russian Moment in World History*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003; Stefan Hedlund, *Russian Path Dependence*, London: Routledge, 2005; Emil Pain, "Will Russia Transform Into a Nationalist Empire," *Russia in Global Affairs*, III, No. 2, April-June 2005, pp. 71-80; Stephen Kotkin, "It's Gogol Again," Paper Presented as part of the project *The Energy Dimension in Russian Global Strategy*, James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy, Rice University, Houston, These are only a few of the authors who now see the vitality of the Tsarist metaphor as a means of explaining Putin's Russia; Center for Strategic and International Studies, Praeger, 2004, *pas-*

Today the invasion of Ukraine and annexation of Crimea confirm that the Putin regime openly believes that its system can only survive if Russia is an empire, a situation that *ab initio* puts the sovereignty and integrity of other CIS members at risk. Putin has made this clear from his speech to the Duma in March 2014 to his recent remarks saying that Kazakhstan was never a state before 1991.¹³ Over the last generation, these ideas have been expounded by a series of “geopoliticians” and Eurasianists, Aleksandr Dugin being the most prominent among them.¹⁴ Although there are different streams within this current, the central motif is that Russia must be a great power (*Velikaya Derzhava*) and that means an empire, reuniting the lands of the former USSR under its control. In practical terms—and this has been the case since the war with Georgia if not before—it means that the sovereignty and integrity of those other states are, in Russian eyes, merely expedients, not something enshrined in international treaties and laws even if Russia has signed those accords.¹⁵

This has been a consistent policy for years. As James Sherr has written,

while Russia formally respects the sovereignty of its erstwhile republics, it also reserves the right to define the content of that sovereignty and their territorial integrity. Essentially Putin’s Russia has revived the Tsarist and Soviet view that sovereignty is a contingent factor depending on power, culture, and historical norms, not an absolute and unconditional principle of world politics.¹⁶

Putin has now used force twice to back that view up. Similarly, Susan Stewart of the Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik recently wrote that Russia’s coercive diplomacy to force its neighbors into its Eurasian Economic Union and Cus-

sim; Richard Pipes, *Russia Under the Old Regime*, New York: Scribner’s, 1975; Stephen Blank, *Rosoboroneksport; Its Place in Russian Defense and Arms Sales Policy* Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2007; Harley Balzer, “Confronting the Global Economy After Communism: Russia and China Compared,” Paper presented to the Annual Convention of the International Studies Association, Honolulu, Hawaii, March 1-5, 2005.

¹³ “Address by President of the Russian Federation,” March 18, 2014, <http://eng.kremlin.ru/transcripts/6889>.

¹⁴ On Eurasianism see Marlene Laruelle, *Russian Eurasianism: An Ideology of Empire*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012, and on Russian views of Self-determination, see Stephen Blank, “The Values Gap Between Moscow and the West: the Sovereignty Issue,” *Acque et Terre*, No. 6, 2007, pp. 9-14 (Italian), 90-95 (English).

¹⁵ James Sherr, *Hard Diplomacy and Soft Coercion: Russia’s Influence Abroad*, London: Chatham House, 2013, pp. 61-62.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

toms Union undermines any pretense that this integration project is based on anything other than Russia making other countries “an offer that they cannot refuse.” Furthermore, its coercive behavior shows its own nervousness about the viability of these formats and the necessity to coerce other states into accepting it.¹⁷ She also notes that,

Russia is more than willing to tolerate instability and economic weakness in the neighboring countries, assuming they are accompanied by an increase in Russian influence. In fact, Russia consciously contributes to the rising instability and deterioration of the economic situation in some, if not all, of these countries.¹⁸

Other scholars have found the same pattern in Central Asia and the Caucasus. In regard to Central Asia, Alexey Malashenko has not only confirmed this point, he has also observed that the issue of protecting Russians abroad is merely an instrument or tactic not a principled policy. Listing the goals of Russian policy in Central Asia, Malashenko writes that,

This list does not mention stability, since that is *not* one of Russia’s unwavering strategic demands for the region. Although the Kremlin has repeatedly stressed its commitment to stability, Russia nevertheless finds shaky situations more in its interests, as the inherent potential for local or regional conflict creates a highly convenient excuse for persuading the governments of the region to seek help from Russia in order to survive.¹⁹ (*Italics in original*)

As Malashenko notes, this list omits an interest in the six million Russians left behind in Central Asia. In fact, by ignoring this group and leaving them to their own fate, Moscow makes clear that Russia gains a card that it can play whenever it is so motivated and indeed, has never used this issue in public polemics with its Central Asian neighbors.²⁰ However, it has played this card in private against Kazakhstan.²¹ Russian spokesmen have invoked this outlook since 2006 if not earlier. Thus in 2006 the official Russian Foreign Ministry spokesman, Mikhail Kamynin, stated that

¹⁷ Susan Stewart, “The EU, Russia and Less Common Neighborhood,” *SWP Comments*, Stiftung Wissenschaft Und Politik, January, 2014, pp.2-3.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Alexey Malashenko, *The Fight for Influence: Russia in Central Asia*, Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2013, p. 3

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Conversations with American experts on Central Asia, Washington D.C., 2010.

We respect the principle of territorial integrity. But at the moment this integrity is, in relation to Georgia, more a possible state of affairs than an existing political reality, and it can only be created as a result of complex talks in which the initial South Ossetian position, as we understand it, is based on a principle that is no less respected in the international community – the right to self-determination.²²

It should therefore be clear to readers that a straight line, in terms of both ideology and policy, runs from this posture to Putin's most recent calls for creating a new state called "Novorossia" (New Russia) out of captured Ukrainian territories, that will sooner or later be incorporated into Russia as is now happening with Abkhazia and South Ossetia in the Caucasus.²³

These ideas accompanied and predated the current policy. But they show that its roots are not in economics but in geopolitics and that Putin's program is fundamentally geopolitical in its thrust, not economic. Indeed, the stimulus for an economic union beginning with customs seems to have been largely political. While Putin and others may have discerned economic advantages that could accrue to Russia from a union in order to emerge out of the global financial crisis that began in 2008, other stimuli were clearly political. These included NATO's rejection of a European Security Treaty offered by Russia, the EU's Eastern Partnership aiming at attracting former Soviet states while excluding Russia, and the first signs that China was economically eclipsing Russia in Central Asia.²⁴

As Hannes Adomeit has suggested, it is probably no coincidence that Putin's call for the economic union, the centerpiece of Moscow's integration program,

²² Semen Novoprudsky, "Diplomacy of Disintegration," www.gazeta.ru (in Russian), June 2, 2006, *Open Source Center, Foreign Broadcast Information Service, Central Eurasia*, (Henceforth FBIS SOV), June 2, 2006.

²³ Joshua Kucera, "Russia, Abkhazia Discuss Forming 'Unified Defense Space'" *Eurasia Insight*, August 28, 2014, www.eurasianet.org; Karoun Demirchan and Arnie Gowan, "Putin Talks about 'Statehood' for Eastern Ukraine," *Washington Post*, August 31, 2014.

²⁴ Wisniewska, *Eurasian Integration*, pp. 26-27, Stephen Blank and Younkyoo Kim, "Same Bed, Different Dreams: China's 'Peaceful Rise' and Sino-Russian Rivalry in Central Asia," *Journal of Contemporary China*, vol. 22 no. 82, 2013, pp. 63-80; Julie Wilhemsen and Geir Flikke, "Chinese-Russian Convergence and Central Asia," *Geopolitics*, col. 12, no. 4, 2012, pp. 865-901; Vilnius, BNS, in English, January 10, 2014, *FBIS SOV*, January 10, 2014; Hannes Adomeit, "Putin's 'Eurasian Union': Russia's Integration Project and Policies in Post-Soviet Space," *CIES Neighborhood Paper*, no. 4, 2012, p. 3.

came less than a week after a 2011 summit of the EU and the members of the Eastern Partnership countries (minus Belarus) in Warsaw. As he notes, this economic union seamlessly fits into the Kremlin efforts to counterbalance the attractiveness and influence of the EU in the former Soviet Union and Central and Eastern Europe.²⁵ Given the importance to Moscow's dreams of being a pole in the multipolar world order that it ceaselessly proclaims, the formation of such a continental bloc is essential to the survival of the Putin system and the sharpest conflicts with the EU occur in those borderlands closest to Russia or most strategically important to it, particularly Ukraine.²⁶ Beyond these considerations, the union lets Moscow present an image of itself as a Eurasian great power that enhances its own self-esteem and supposedly its standing in the eyes of foreign audiences.

Likewise, in Central Asia if not East Asia, the anti-Chinese thrust of the program is unmistakable. There are close connections between Russian policy in Asia, EURASEC, and the Customs Union. These connections assume two dimensions: first, the effort to reduce or inhibit Chinese economic penetration of Central Asia; and second, Russia evidently believes that it cannot effectively function as an Asian power without "command" of this great bloc behind it.²⁷

In practice, this means challenging China's effort to dominate Central Asia economically. As Mankoff and others have noted, the Customs Union has already diverted Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan's trade away from China to Russian goods that would otherwise not be competitive.²⁸ But beyond that, Mankoff stresses the overwhelming geopolitical drive behind these economic programs, a drive possessing significant relevance to Moscow's "Ostpolitik."

Indeed, from Moscow's perspective, the entire process of Eurasian integration has political undertones. Russia's leaders seek to maintain influence across at least a significant swathe of the former Soviet Union, while limiting opportunities for other powers to overtake Russia as the principal actor in the region. This dynamic is visible in Central Asia, where Chinese economic power has

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 5-6; Rika Dragneva and Kataryna Wolczuk, "Russia, the Eurasian Customs Union and the EU: Cooperation, Stagnation, or Rivalry," *Chatham House Briefing Paper*, 2012, pp. 10-13.

²⁷ Wisniewska, p. 27; Descalzi, p. 147

²⁸ Wisniewska, p. 15; Mankoff, p. 2

rapidly displaced Russia as the major trading partner and source of investment. The trade-diverting impact of the Customs Union then has an underlying geopolitical logic; by raising barriers to trade with the outside world, the Customs Union limits the economically driven re-orientation of the Central Asian states into Beijing's orbit.²⁹

However, this drive for great power status and perquisites at the expense of the sovereignty of smaller states simultaneously undercuts Russia's ability to play a leadership role anywhere in Asia. Russia's integration project does not and cannot meet the economic and security interests of the other projected members. Instead, those are to be subordinated to Moscow's overriding vision. This posture prevents Russia from being a driver for regional economic development unlike what China has done in East Asia.³⁰

The Military Dimension

The CST and ensuing CSTO were officially intended as collective security measures to retain as much as possible of the integrated Soviet military system. But the CST clearly failed to provide security, and disintegration continued throughout the 1990s. The chaos of this period allowed the emerging Russian army and then the government to act unilaterally to claim a sphere of influence regarding CIS peacemaking. Yeltsin advocated such a sphere in his 1993 speech to the UN Security Council. Although the UN failed to accept this, nobody acted to prevent this from coming into being.³¹ But the failure of the original CST to ensure security led to the formation of the CSTO during Putin's first presidency.³²

However, the force has never deployed and appears increasingly to be a paper command and control organization rather than a truly functioning military alliance. Moreover, Moscow has apparently come to see the CSTO as not just a force to defend against territorial invasion but also a force to uphold order in member countries, a kind of regional gendarme as well as a counter to foreign

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 6

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ John Mackinlay and Peter Cross, Eds., *Regional Peacekeepers: The Paradox of Russian Peacekeeping*, New York: United Nations University Press, 2003.

³² Descalzi, pp. 133-136.

organizations like NATO.³³ For example, after protracted bargaining in 2006, Uzbekistan granted Russia the right to use its airfield at Navoi as a base, but only under special conditions. Russia will only be able to gain access to Navoi in case of emergencies, or what some reports called “force majeure,” contingencies. In return, Russia will provide Uzbekistan with modern navigation systems and air defense weapons. In other words, Uzbekistan wanted a guarantee of its regime’s security and Russian support in case of a crisis. But it would not allow peacetime Russian military presence there.³⁴ Since then Uzbekistan, discerning a threat from efforts to develop a real interventionary force in the CSTO, walked out of the CSTO, essentially leaving it an empty shell.

The CSTO has not participated in any conflict situations in and around Central Asia since its inception. Neither is it likely to be able to do much as Russian military relations in Central Asia have largely followed a bilateral trajectory. Moscow has therefore been able to build up a seemingly sizable infrastructure in Central Asia.³⁵ Yet it still cannot prevent Uzbekistan from threatening all of its neighbors, or clashes like recent episodes of Tajik and Kyrgyz border guards shooting at each other—despite having sizable forces in both countries.³⁶ Indeed, in these clashes the two sides probably used Russian weapons, sold to them at discounted prices in order to prevent them from buying or otherwise acquiring U.S. weapons as the U.S. and NATO leave Afghanistan.³⁷ Thus Russia is not a security provider but rather an insecurity provider in Central Asia.

Although these weapons and sizable Russian contingents have gone to those countries under CSTO auspices to guard against terrorist and other threats emanating from Afghanistan, the reality is rather different. As Kiril Nourzhanov has observed, though great power rivalries and potential insurgencies are cer-

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 136-137.

³⁴ “Uzbek Airfield Is Made Available to Russia in Emergencies,” *Ferghana.ru*, December 22, 2006.

³⁵ Sebastien Peyrouse, “Russia-Central Asia: Advances and Shortcomings of the Military Partnership,” Stephen J. Blank, Ed., *Central Asian Security Trends: Views From Europe and Russia*, Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2011, pp. 1-34

³⁶ Fozil Mashrab, “Russian Arms Nudge Central Asia to Edge,” *Asia Times Online*, January 8, 2014, www.atimes.com; David Trilling, “Kyrgyzstan & Tajikistan: Border Guards Injured in Shootout, Possibly With Mortars,” *Eurasia Insight*, January 11, 2014, www.eurasianet.org.

³⁷ *Ibidem*.

tainly real threats in Central Asia, they hardly comprise the only challenges to Central Asian security.³⁸

Border problems, mainly between Uzbekistan and all of its neighbors, have long impeded and today continue to retard the development of both regional security and prosperity.³⁹ Indeed, it is hardly inconceivable that given the antagonism between Uzbekistan and its neighbors, especially Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, hostile relations could escalate into the use of force.⁴⁰ Meanwhile, every writer on Central Asian security has noted that not a single regional security organization works as intended or has even acted to do so. Under the circumstances, the CSTO's role remains something of a mirage or a camouflage for Russia's real intentions and, equally importantly but less well understood, its relatively meager and diminishing real capabilities to deal with security threats in Central Asia.

In the Caucasus, the situation is, if anything, worse. Putin in 2012 admitted that Russia planned the 2008 war with Georgia from 2006 and deliberately involved the use of separatists, indicating that Russia cannot accept any of the post-Soviet states' independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity, and that as a result, Eurasian or European security cannot be taken for granted.⁴¹ Beyond this fact, Russia has undertaken an enormous and ongoing buildup of its military forces in the Caucasus to ensure its hegemony and to maintain a threat to Georgia and to the West whom it assumes is itching to intervene there.⁴²

Russian threats to Caucasian and by extension European security do not end with Russia's creeping annexation of Abkhazia and South Ossetia and its continuing pressure on Georgia. Moscow has secured its base at Gyumri in Armenia until 2044 and now deployed its dual-capable Iskander-M missiles to its forces in the Caucasus, threatening missile attacks, potentially even nuclear

³⁸ Kirill Nourzhanov, "Changing Security Threat Perceptions in Central Asia," *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, vol. 63 no. 1, 2009, p. 94.

³⁹ Chingiz Umetov, "Uzbekistan-Kyrgyzstan: Border Hassles Abound," *Transitions Online*, May 4, 2009, www.tol.org.

⁴⁰ By June 2009 Uzbekistan had again closed its borders with Kyrgyzstan and the latter was digging trenches along that border while relations with Tajikistan were hardly better.

⁴¹ "Putin Admits Russia Trained S. Ossetians Before 2008 Georgia war," Transcript, President of Russia, www.kremlin.ru, August 10, 2012.

⁴² Stephen Blank, "Russian Defense Policy in the Caucasus," *Caucasus Survey*, Vol. 1, No. 1, October 2013, pp. 75-89.

ones, against any threatening force.⁴³ Ruslan Pukhov, Director of the Moscow Center for the Analysis of Strategies and Technologies, also observes that this military buildup signifies that Moscow has acted to remain “in the lead” militarily in the Caucasus and invoked U.S. and Israeli military assistance to Azerbaijan as an alleged justification for this posture.⁴⁴

But beyond its extensive and ongoing military buildup in the Caucasus and the sale of weapons to Armenia at concessionary prices, Moscow revealed in 2013 that it has also sold \$4 billion of high-quality weapons to Azerbaijan in the past few years. Moreover, Russian elements aligned with organized crime are using Montenegro, a notorious playground for Russian organized crime, to run weapons covertly to Nagorno-Karabakh. Since 2010, the arms tracking community has recorded 39 suspicious flights leaving Podgorica airport in Ilyushin-76 aircraft for Armenia’s Erebuni military airport in Stepanakert with arms intended for Nagorno-Karabakh, where there has been a wave of border incidents since 2010.⁴⁵ The use of these Russian planes and the link to the long-standing large-scale arms trafficking between Russia and Armenia immediately raises suspicions of Russian involvement, if not orchestration, of this program. Thus Russia is both openly and clandestinely arming both sides in this conflict that has become steadily more dangerous with increasing numbers of incidents between both forces. Russia does so to keep both sides dependent to a greater or lesser degree upon it and its “mediation” efforts there since 2011, which also revealed its unremitting focus on undermining local sovereignty. Beyond that, Moscow exploits the conflict to keep its forces in Armenia permanently. Thus again, Moscow provides insecurity rather than security.

Armenian political scientist Arman Melikyan claims that in earlier tripartite negotiations with Armenia and Russia in 2011 on Nagorno-Karabakh that Russia ostensibly “brokered,” Moscow was to arrange for the surrender of liberated territories, thereby ensuring its military presence in return and establishing a network of military bases in Azerbaijan to prevent any further cooperation be-

⁴³ “Iskander- M Systems Being Deployed in Southern Russia-Defense Ministry,” *Interfax-AVN*, December 17, 2013.

⁴⁴ Paul Goble, “From Tripwire to Something More? Moscow Increases Military Readiness in the South,” *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, January 16, 2013.

⁴⁵ Joshua Kucera, “The Art of the Arms Deal,” *Eurasia Insight*, September 27, 2012, www.eurasianet.org; www.statebusiness.tumblr.com.

tween Azerbaijan and NATO. While Armenian authorities reportedly accepted this plan, Baku rejected it and saved Armenia—which clearly wants to incorporate Nagorno-Karabakh—from relinquishing the territory to it in return for a further compromising of both its own sovereignty and Azerbaijan’s security.⁴⁶

But Russian machinations against the integrity and sovereignty of the South Caucasian states do not end here. In 2008 Vafa Quluzada observed that President Medvedev’s visit to Azerbaijan was preceded by deliberate Russian incitement of the Lezgin and Avar ethnic minorities there to induce Azerbaijan to accept Russia’s gas proposals.⁴⁷ These are apparently systematic Russian policies as Putin’s admission suggests. It has intermittently encouraged the separatist movement among the Armenian minority in Javakheti in Georgia and has now annexed Crimea and invaded Eastern Ukraine, thus committing what are by any standard acts of war against Ukraine.⁴⁸ At the same time Russia denies that it has claims on Azerbaijani territories, but Russian media have advocated government action to protect these Azerbaijani minorities as Russian citizens to punish Azerbaijan for flirting with NATO.⁴⁹ Similarly, as the chapter on Azerbaijan in this volume details, Russia used similar instruments of pressure against Azerbaijan ahead of Putin’s visit in August 2013. At that time, Moscow also organized a club of Azeri billionaires in Russia and toyed with using that organization to provide a counterweight to the Aliyev government in Azerbaijan, thus reminding Baku that it possesses and can deploy such an instrument to obtain what it wants.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Joshua Kucera, “Azerbaijan told the U.S. It Wants ‘full Membership’ in NATO,” *Eurasia insight*, September 5, 2011, www.eurasianet.org.

⁴⁷ *Kavkazskiy Uzel* (in Russian), June 19, 2008, *FBIS SOV*, June 19, 2008.

⁴⁸ Maciej Falkowski, *Russia’s Policy in the Southern Caucasus and Central Asia*, Centre for Eastern Studies, Warsaw, June 15, 2006, p. 56, www.osw.waw.pl; William Varretoni, “Sweetness of the Status Quo: Strategic Patience and the Technology of Russia’s Capture of Crimea,” Paper Presented to the Annual Convention of the Association for the Study of Nationalities, Columbia University, New York, April 15, 2010; Lada Roslycky, *The Soft Side of Dark Power: a Study in Soft Power, National Security and the Political-Criminal Nexus With a Special Focus on the Post-Soviet Political-Criminal Nexus, the Russian Black Sea Fleet and Separatism in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea*, Doctoral Dissertation, University of Groningen, 2011.

⁴⁹ Moscow, *Interfax* (in English), February 13, 2011, *FBIS SOV*, February 13, 2011; Makhachkala, *Novoye Delo* (in Russian), August 29, 2008, *FBIS SOV*, August 29, 2008.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

Thus in both word and deed, Moscow has shown that war in Eurasia is neither inconceivable nor impossible. Neither should it be forgotten that Russian law permits the president to dispatch troops abroad to defend the “honor and dignity” of other Russians (a group who can be fabricated out of thin air, by means of Russia’s preexisting “passportization” policy) without any parliamentary debate or accountability.⁵¹

The invasion of Ukraine shows quite conclusively that Russia does not believe that the sovereignty and territorial integrity of any of its neighbors is anything more than a contingency whose continuation is dependent upon Russia’s perception of expediency. It also shows that the treaties it has signed with them are merely “a scrap of paper.” Furthermore, Putin’s calls for using ethnic Russianness, defined by speaking Russian as a criterion of nationhood, and the ensuing ethnicization of the Russian state not only resurrects the policies of Hitler and Stalin in the 1930s, but also places a landmine under the sovereignty and territorial integrity of every state in the former Soviet sphere, to include former Warsaw Pact members as well. This is a recipe for war, showing that here too, Russia provides insecurity, not security. These developments, and Russia’s brutal and coercive diplomacy against Moldova, Armenia, and Ukraine to keep them out of Association Agreements with the EU, are a bizarre way to foster collective security. But it only looks bizarre if we think we are discussing a genuine integration project rather than a camouflaged imperial grab. As Susan Stewart of the Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik makes plain, Russia’s coercive diplomacy undermines any pretense that this integration project is based on anything other than Russia making other countries “an offer that they cannot refuse.” Furthermore, its coercive behavior shows its own nervousness about the viability of these formats and the necessity to coerce other states into accepting it. Perhaps worse yet, she notes that:

Russia is more than willing to tolerate instability and economic weakness in the neighboring countries, assuming they are accompanied by an increase in Russian

⁵¹ Yuri E. Fedorov, *Medvedev’s Amendments to the Law on Defence: The Consequences For Europe*, Finnish Institute of International Affairs, Briefing Paper No. 47, November 2009.

influence. In fact, Russia consciously contributes to the rising instability and deterioration of the economic situation in some, if not all, of these countries.⁵²

The smaller intended targets of this integration project, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, are visibly trying to bargain their way in and get more concessions.⁵³ But while this may be an offer they cannot refuse, it also is an intrinsically compromised effort to impose security on shifting sands. It already is clear that it provides little economic benefit and has yet to provide for anyone's security. Rather it is an instrument for the destabilization of governments. It still is the case that what the Czarist Minister of Interior Petr Valuev described as "the lure of something erotic in the borderlands" still drives Russian policy. For now this may be an integration project, but most likely this, like previous incarnations of the Russian empire, will promote war, insecurity, instability, and the very centrifugal forces it was meant to block.

⁵² Susan Stewart, "The EU, Russia and Less Common Neighborhood," *SWP Comments*, Stiftung Wissenschaft Und Politik, January, 2014, pp.2-3.

⁵³ Viktoriya Panfilova, "Dushanbe Chooses Kiev's Path: Tajikistan Begins Integration Bargaining With Russian Federation," Moscow, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* (in Russian), December 20, 2013, *FBIS SOV*, January 14, 2013; Bishkek, *Tushtuk* (in Russian), December 27, 2013, *FBIS SOV*, December 28, 2013.