

**RUSSIAN POLICY TOWARDS THE CIS, 1991-1996: DEBATES ABOUT
THE MILITARY AND POLITICAL INVOLVEMENT IN THE
MOLDOVA-TRANSDNIESTRIA, GEORGIA-ABKHAZIA AND
TAJKISTAN CONFLICTS**

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Ph.D. Dissertation

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Abstract

The most serious foreign policy challenge that the Russian Federation faced from 1991 to 1996 was whether and how to respond to outbreaks of conflict within its neighbouring states. Unlike under the Soviet Union, there were open, diverse and complex debates about whether Russia should react to these conflicts, and if so, by what means. These foreign policy debates among the political elite and the ensuing policies form the subject of this thesis.

The thesis asks what the dominant ideas expressed in these debates about foreign policy were, and whether they were reflected in Russia's policies towards specific military conflicts in the CIS States. To answer these questions, the thesis first derives insights about the role of ideas and debates within international relations literature which are helpful for the subsequent analysis of Russian foreign policy debates. It then identifies the dominant foreign policy ideas and foreign policy orientations, traces the major stages in the debates and the policies, and compares Russia's political debates, policies and actions towards the Moldova-Transdnistria, Georgia-Abkhazia and Tajikistan conflicts.

Using interviews and both primary and secondary sources, the general finding of the thesis is that broad foreign policy ideas and orientations provided the backdrop against which debates occurred and policies were formulated or pursued. Ideas and debates were crucial factors in developing and defining an official pragmatic nationalist foreign policy orientation that crystallised in the later period. On the whole, there was congruence between the dominant ideas within the debates and the foreign policies enacted towards specific conflicts. Specific foreign policies towards the conflicts developed in response to the general debate (clash of ideas), which in turn responded to the domestic conditions and particular events in the near abroad. Military actions tended to start independently as local initiatives, and then fall in line with government policy.

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Chapter One: Introduction

1. Russia's Political Debates About Foreign Policy

In 1991, the Soviet Union disbanded into fifteen new states. As the former dominant republic in the Soviet Union, the Russian Federation was the largest and most powerful of these states. As well as accruing advantages stemming from this position, Russia also inherited many difficulties, responsibilities and challenges.

In terms of foreign affairs, Russia was suddenly faced with having to develop, almost from scratch, policies towards the fourteen newly independent states. A whole range of political, economic and military relations had to be forged and old Soviet ties either dismantled or rebuilt. Although Russia inherited many Soviet foreign policy institutions, the new government's information and expertise about how to create foreign policy concerning the fourteen states were limited. The creation of policies was further complicated by the fact that Russia was undergoing its own economic catastrophe and domestic identity crisis following the sudden collapse of both communism and empire.

The most serious foreign policy challenge that Russian faced from 1991 to 1996 was how to respond to outbreaks of conflict within its new neighbouring states. Soon after the Soviet Union broke up, many hostilities erupted, ranging from minor border skirmishes to outright war. The Russian government was confronted with urgent decisions about whether or not it should react to these conflicts, and if so, by what means. After 1991, unlike under the Soviet Union, there was an open, diverse, complex political debate about these questions. It is this foreign policy debate and the ensuing policies which form the subject of this thesis. It examines the evolution of debate and policy from the collapse of the Soviet Union in December 1991 until the Presidential elections in June 1996, a period encompassed by President Boris Yeltsin's first term in office.

Of course, the political elite and their debates did not operate in a vacuum. The participants in the foreign policy debates acted within institutional and political settings which at times constrained or enhanced their ability to influence policy. Foreign policy ideas

must be understood in terms of the political process by which they are selected. Thus, this thesis examines the interplay of debate, the adoption of a consensus view and its reflection in policy. The changing nature of the conflicts created both opportunities and constraints for new policy direction and promotion.

2. Context: The Search for a New Russian Foreign Policy in a Period of Uncertainty

After the collapse of the Soviet Union there was considerable uncertainty over Russia's identity, her new role in the post-Soviet space, and specifically, the course of action that would best further her interests in the "near abroad" states.¹ Russian leaders and the Russian public were faced with an almost paralysing degree of confusion about which policies would produce greater national security and which would best protect Russian interests. This uncertainty, combined with political and institutional instability, enhanced the importance of ideas and debate in the development of Russian foreign policy. Russian leaders could not just work on autopilot or on conventional policy lines. This was a time when politicians and policy-makers had to rethink their positions fundamentally and develop new ones from scratch.

The confusion over how to develop Russian foreign policy was not unexpected. First, Russia, itself a new state, had to develop relations with the rest of the world and with the fourteen other new states which emerged from the Soviet Union – all of which had appeared suddenly and at approximately the same time. Russia faced a new geopolitical situation. It had inherited eighty percent of the former Soviet territory and sixty percent of the Soviet population. Its economy and resources were comparatively limited, as was its military power. The Russian political elite and public faced great anxieties due to many internal problems including a severe economic crisis and the rise of crime. From 1991 to 1996, many dramatic events occurred – the 1993 coup attempt, the first Chechen war, Russia's first experiments

¹ The "near abroad" includes all of the former Soviet republics besides Russia. The term is used in opposition to the "far abroad" which includes, the rest of the world. During the period of study 1991-96 the term "near abroad" was frequently used. Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov dropped the official use of this term in 1996.

with democratisation and elections. Moreover, Russia had lost its former position as a superpower on the international stage. The threat of the Cold War was gone, but the perception of insecurity was great.

Within these radically new and uncertain internal and external contexts, and without the previous guidance of a Marxist-Leninist philosophy, Russian politicians needed and wanted to find new ways to think about foreign and security policies. There was no obvious or clear direction, especially with regard to the near abroad. The uncertainty goes a long way towards explaining why many politicians' foreign policy ideas shifted throughout this period – and why some even held contradictory and confused views. It also helps to explain why fundamental ideas were so important in helping politicians choose among the various foreign policy options available to the new Russian state. There was little time for the political elite to develop highly nuanced and knowledgeable views – and there were also pressing issues to be tackled in the domestic arena. Even by 1996 – the end of the time frame encompassed by this study – Russia's foreign policy was still at a very early stage in its evolution.

Many types of relations could hypothetically have been used to protect Russian interests in the near abroad. In fact, Russia's political elite advocated various designs which all claimed to advance Russian national interests. Because the participants in the foreign policy debate had divergent preferences over potential ways to act, there was no natural or single policy choice available. Of course, foreign policy ideas were also advocated for pragmatic reasons, especially in order for politicians to preserve power.² Foreign policy strategies are generally designed not only in relation to the external environment but also with domestic political consumption in mind. However, in the case of Russia, it was not always obvious which foreign policy choice would strengthen a politician's political bargaining power. Choices had to be made. Ideas mattered in making those choices, and they helped to shape the foreign policy agenda.

² Russian politicians used specific ideas to express dissatisfaction with the regime and to compete with rivals. Moreover, Yeltsin and his government often co-opted the ideas of the political opposition, and even the politicians themselves into the administration – especially when there was a crisis or just before elections.

3. Approach/Methodology and Sources

Specifically, this thesis asks what were the dominant ideas expressed in these debates about foreign policy and were they reflected in Russia's policies towards specific military conflicts in the CIS states? To answer this two-fold question, the thesis first identifies the broad ideas about foreign policy that helped to structure the foreign policy thinking of the Russian political elite and their narrower policy orientations towards the near abroad.

Second, the thesis outlines the major stages in the evolution of the debate and policy, outlining three broad periods of historical importance – each of which had differing results in terms of foreign policy.

Third, the thesis examines and compares the conflicts in the CIS states in which Russia was militarily involved: the separatist war between Moldova and Transdniestria; the separatist war between Georgia and Abkhazia; and the civil war in Tajikistan. In each case, Russia's key interests in the conflict are examined to discover how constraining the environment was and how much uncertainty or room for debate over foreign policy choices really existed. The first half of each case study examines Russia's key interests in the particular conflict – its security, diaspora and economic interest – and, briefly, how they were conditioned by Soviet and Tsarist history. The second half of each case study examines the debates over Russia's foreign policy options towards each particular conflict, the government's official policy position and Russia's military action on the ground.

These three steps allow us to examine the relations among the evolution of ideas in the Russian political debate, Russia's foreign policy output and Russia's military involvement in each particular conflict. The procedure allows for comparison across the three cases and reveals whether, and to what extent, the dominant ideas expressed in the political debate about foreign policy in general were reflected in Russia's policies towards some military conflicts and not others. Of course, as in all historical studies it is difficult to demonstrate a definitive relationship between ideas and action.

Although some scholars have commented on the general political debates about Russian foreign policy, this thesis is original in that it examines in detail Russia's political

debates and official rhetoric as well as its policies and military involvement in three specific conflicts on its territorial periphery. It seeks to discover whether either the debate and/or the policies concerning the specific conflicts reflected the dominant foreign policy ideas within the general foreign policy debate or whether they were irrelevant.

The principal sources used to describe the political debates are Russian newspapers and journals. These are an enormous and direct source for identifying politicians' views on foreign policy 1991 to 1996.³ Also examined are political party platforms, party pamphlets, political memoirs and books written by members of the Russian political elite. Parliamentary debates are examined only as reported in Russian media sources, since the most important of them – namely detailed committee discussions – are generally not available to the public. The thesis pays particular attention to the participants in the foreign policy debate who most prominently discussed the particular conflicts and those who represented the different foreign policy ideas and perceptions across the political spectrum. The analysis is supplemented with direct participant foreign policy views and insights derived from interviews conducted by the author. (See Appendix 1 for details).

The examination of Russia's official foreign policy position and its military actions is developed primarily from official statements and documents found in the Russian media and Russian government reports. This is supplemented by documents from international organizations such as the United Nations, as well as Russian and Western academic studies about the conflicts.⁴ This ensemble of materials provides a comprehensive account of the key

³ The newspapers examined include: Krasnaya Zvezda, the army newspaper; Nezavisimaya Gazeta (and its supplement), Nezavisimoye voyennoye obozreniye (independent military review), Izvestiya, Segodnya, Argumenty i fakty, Rossiyskaya Gazeta, Rossiyskiye Vesti, Pravda, Komskomolskaya Pravda, Den', Sovetskaya Rossiya, Moskovskiy Novosti, Moskovskiy Komsomolets, Megapolis-Express, Sovershenno Sekretno, Voennaya Mysl', Literaturnaya Gazeta, Novaya Yezhednevnyaya Gazeta, Sovetskaya Rossiya, Obshchaya Gazeta. English language newspapers in Russia: Moscow Times, New Times, Kommersant Daily. Also used are: Official Kremlin International Newsbroadcast; news dispatches from Itar-Tass, RIA and TV broadcasts from NTV and ORT. Journals examined include: International Affairs (Moscow), Obozrevatel, Mirovaya Ekonomika i Mezhdunarodnye Otnosheniya, Mezhdunarodnaya Zhizn', Diplomatichesky Vestnik (official publication of MFA), Pro et Contra, Svobodnaya Mysl', Iuridicheskaya Gazeta, Sobranie Zakonodatelstvo Rossiyskoi Federatsii.

⁴ The key monograph-length examinations of Russia's involvement in CIS conflicts include: Roy Allison, Peacekeeping in the Soviet Successor States, Chaillot Paper 18, (Paris: Institute for Security Studies, WEU, November 1994); Roy Allison and Christoph Bluth, Security Dilemmas in Russia and Eurasia (London: RIIA, 1998); Vladimir Baranovsky, Russia and Europe: The Emerging Security Agenda (New York: SIPRI and

political elite foreign policy views and the major details concerning Russia's foreign policy towards the conflicts.

4. Parameters of the Thesis

a) The Political Elite

Although foreign policy was debated among journalists, academics, diplomats, the military and the wider public, this thesis focuses almost exclusively on the Russian political elite. Here the political elite involved in the foreign policy debate is defined to include the officials involved in the presidential and governmental administration (particularly the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Defence), members of parliament (particularly those in foreign policy committees) and leaders of the key political parties. Of course, many of these foreign policy participants were either previously or simultaneously academics or diplomats. Some also switched their occupational and foreign policy positions during the period of study.⁵ The transfer from academic to political jobs and back again was relatively common. Significantly, many of those participating in the debate were actively involved in the creation of Russian foreign policy. For example, Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev both outlined his foreign policy ideas (which evolved from 1991 to 1996) and made key decisions about how Russia's foreign policy would be pursued. This thesis attempts to present a representative sample of the key participants in the debates from across the political spectrum – while concentrating on those most active in the debates and those involved in policy-making.

Oxford University Press, 1997); Pavel K. Baev, *The Russian Army in a Time of Troubles*, (London: Sage Publications, 1996); Lena Jonson and Clive Archer (eds.), *Peacekeeping and the Role of Russia in Eurasia* (Boulder, Co: Westview Press, 1996); Lena Jonson, *Keeping the Peace in the CIS: The Evolution of Russian Policy*, Discussion Paper 81 (London: RIIA, 1999); Hans-Georg Ehrhart, Anna Kreikmeyer and Andrei Zagorsky (eds.), *Crisis Management in the CIS: Wither Russia?* (Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft, 1995); and Dov Lynch, *Russian Peacekeeping Strategies in the CIS* (London: Macmillan and RIIA, 2000).

⁵ For example, Yevgeny Primakov was head of Russia's Federal Intelligence Services (FIS) before replacing Andrei Kozyrev as Foreign Minister in 1996. Sergei Stankevich went from being an academic to presidential adviser to speaking as an independent commentator. Vladimir Lukin was the Chair of the RSFSR Supreme Soviet Committee on Foreign Affairs and Foreign Economic Relations, then ambassador in Washington in 1992 and in 1993 one of the leaders of the political movement Yabloko and Chair of the Foreign Policy Commission of the First Duma.

b) Near Abroad and Case Studies

After the Soviet Union broke up, Russia no longer had a specific enemy nor was it under any immediate threat from abroad. Apart from internal threats, its greatest vulnerabilities were seen as coming from its near abroad. The newly independent former Soviet republics were the major focus of Russia's foreign policy from 1993-96, and relations with these states were among the most important external problems addressed by Russia's political elite.

Although Russian foreign policy encompassed many economic, political, diplomatic and military activities, this thesis is limited to an examination of Russia's debate and policies towards conflicts in the CIS states in particular because these conflicts offered the greatest potential external danger to the stability of the former Soviet Union. While debating how to react to these specific conflicts, Russian politicians were forced to confront a whole range of key issues at the heart of the new state's foreign policy: the future of the Russian diaspora, the role of Russia's military and Russia's economic relations with the former Soviet republics. As we shall see later, in each case there were many different reasons for Russia's involvement in any specific CIS state. The issue of Russia's military involvement in the CIS conflicts also has significance because it has often been described as the single most important example of Russian "quasi-imperialism". Whether or not this is an accurate description of Russia's debates and policies will be explored.

The particular case studies – the Moldova-Transdnistria, Georgia-Abkhazia and Tajikistan conflicts – were chosen for this thesis because they are the only cases in which Russia became active militarily in CIS conflicts.⁶ They are also helpfully representative of the three main regions of the near abroad – Central Asia, the Transcaucasus and the "European" states – and thus highlight the similarities and differences in Russian debate and policy towards each region.

⁶ The Russian military was only indirectly involved in the Nagorno-Karabagh conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Russia's military was involved in South Ossetia, and this will be very briefly considered in the Abkhazia chapter, but because the conflict was over by early 1992, there was very little debate about the issue.

c) Foreign Policy Ideas and Orientations

Although Russia's political elite was in general agreement that the near abroad conflicts threatened Russian security, three main foreign policy orientations developed, each of which represented distinct views about how Russia should react to the military conflicts in the CIS states. From 1991-1996, these general sets of ideas – “liberal westernist”, “pragmatic nationalist” and “fundamentalist nationalist” – competed for political dominance in Russia. The thesis uses this three-fold classification developed by Neil Malcolm et al. to examine the debates and to determine which foreign policy ideas influenced or dominated the debates and policies in each of the three case studies.⁷

Very briefly, liberal westernists in Russia widely interpreted the definition of security to include economic and political problems as well as military issues. They interpreted the settlement of CIS conflicts as being only one of Russia's major security interests and wanted to limit Russia's involvement where possible. The conflicts were understood as being resolvable, and solutions lay not in the use of force but in negotiations and multilateral efforts by organizations such as the United Nations (UN) or the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). In 1993, most of those who had held liberal westernist ideas switched to the pragmatic nationalist position which posited that the Russian-speaking diaspora should be rigorously defended. They proposed it should be carried out by peaceful means such as by advocating international law and human rights, but they were convinced that Russia had a major role to play.

⁷ The terms and classification used in this thesis are derived from Neil Malcolm, Alex Pravda, Roy Allison and Margot Light, Internal Factors in Russian Foreign Policy (London: Oxford University Press, 1996). Other scholars have used a variety of terms to define the different groups of views. For example, Vera Tolz refers to Westernizers, isolationists, and imperialists/unionists in “Russia: Westernizers Continue to Challenge National Patriots”, RFE/RL Research Report, 11 December 1992, pp.1-9; Renée de Nevers divides them into “internationalists, centrist post-imperialists, neocommunist and agrarians, and extreme nationalists” in Russia's Strategic Renovation, Adelphi Paper 289 (London: IISS, 1994); Judith Kullberg identifies four “ideological types”: westernizers, moderate reformers, democratic socialists and communists/nationalists in “The Ideological Roots of Elite Political Conflict in Post-Soviet Russia”, Europe-Asia Studies, vol.46, no.6 (1994), pp.929-953; Dov Lynch labels three groups: ‘radical nationalist’, ‘liberal internationalist’ and ‘centrist nationalist’ in Russian Peacekeeping Strategies in the CIS (London: Macmillan and RIIA, 2000); Karen Dawisha and Bruce Parrott use a fivefold division in Karen Dawisha and Bruce Parrott, Russia and the New States of Eurasia (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

The pragmatic nationalists position advocated Russia's active involvement in the Former Soviet Union (FSU), including forceful action, if necessary, to achieve peace in the region, and sought international approval for its role as peacekeeper in the area. Following their definition of Russian security interests as primarily geopolitical, the pragmatic nationalists advocated political, economic, and even military means to secure Russian interests and were supportive, though wary, of multilateral resolution efforts.⁸ In effect, this position eventually became official government policy.

Finally, fundamentalist nationalists believed the conflicts to be "zero-sum" and that unilateral force was necessary both to enhance conflict resolution and to protect the diaspora. Despite differences, they were not interested in integrating Russia into the world economy or building relations with the West. Instead, they proposed various measures to recreate a greater Russia. This position was never adopted by the Russian government.

d) Limitations

Of course, despite their significance in the history of political theory, the concepts of "ideas" and "debate" are somewhat slippery. Political rhetoric must always be treated with scepticism. Political ideas may be devoid of meaning. For example, in Russia as well as in the West, politicians often are considered to be "democrats" and "patriots" and all claim to represent the "real" interests of the nation. This may be especially true in Russia where democratic concepts have not had a long opportunity to grow, and where they have not become imbued with an accepted meaning as part of civil culture and civil society.⁹

Thus, it is clear that in examining political elite opinion one must not always take the content of the speeches or texts themselves at face value, but must recognize that attempts to define foreign policy are often simply a means of gaining partisan advantage and/or mobilizing popular support. This may be especially true when individuals or political groups do not have responsibility for making foreign policy, and know that they probably will not be

⁸ See Sergei Stankevich, "Derzhava", *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 28 March 1992, p.4.

⁹ This phenomenon is examined in Chapter Three where it is shown that politicians across the political spectrum adopted the vague ideas of "eurasianism", "national idea" and "great power".

faced with such responsibilities in the future. On the whole, politicians are more interested in retaining or gaining power than remaining committed to any specific idea or set of policy prescriptions. While policy issues are always framed to suit politicians' purposes, an analysis of their thinking can help us to understand why one policy is chosen over another. Moreover, changes in rhetoric are significant because they signal changes in perceptions, which, if integrated into official pronouncements and positions, may affect policy output.

e) Key Constraints on Foreign Policy

Of course, there were several limits to the development of Russian foreign policy. The parameters of Russia's foreign policy actions were set primarily by its weak economy and the poor state of its military. However, those involved in debating foreign policy did not necessarily take these constraints much into consideration – a fact that helps to explain the discrepancies between debate, official policy statements and foreign policy outcomes. Nevertheless, the constraints on foreign policy became more evident over time and they did affect foreign policy thinking – particularly mainstream foreign policy views.

The Soviet collapse left Russia much weaker than its still impressive size and resources would imply. To a large extent, Russia's economic problems explain why its government could not have pursued expensive neo-imperialist projects even if it had wanted to. However, these same economic problems were also humiliating to Russia's national pride and therefore helped to provoke an assertive foreign policy rhetoric and an anti-Western backlash inside the country.

The dire state of the Russian military severely constrained Russian policy options. Russia's military spending greatly contracted after the end of the Soviet Union. Real military spending decreased dramatically from \$146 billion to \$73 billion during the period 1992 – 1996. (See Table 1.1.)

Table 1.1 Russian Military Expenditure 1992-1996¹⁰

	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996
\$ billion	146	114	101	86	73
%GDP	10.8	8.9	8.3	7.4	6.5

However, although Russia's economy and military were suffering in the period of this study, they remained very strong in comparison to those of the other smaller states examined in this study – Moldova, Georgia and Tajikistan. Russia's economic might and the size of its population were far greater and its armed forces and defence budget comparatively much larger than these former Soviet states. Even by 1996, when Moldova, Georgia and Tajikistan had made substantial steps in building up their armies, their forces were still miniscule in comparison to Russia's. Given the enormous discrepancies in population between Russia's and the other states, as well as in GNP and armed forces, there was considerable potential, given substantial political will, for Russia to dominate these states. (See Table 1.2.)

Table 1.2 Russia, Georgia, Moldova and Tajikistan: Power Indices¹¹

	Population (millions)	GNP (\$billions)	Total Armed Forces (thousands)	Defence Budget (\$millions)
Russia	148	1,100	1,240	31,000
Georgia	5.4	3.3	33	60
Moldova	4.3	1.1	11	15
Tajikistan	6.1	1.1	7-9	70

¹⁰ These figures are from The Military Balance, 1999-2000 (London: IISS, 2000) p.110. Estimates of Russia's real military spending vary because of the lack of transparency. Estimates of ruble purchasing-power parity (PPP) with the US dollar also vary considerably.

¹¹ These figures are from 1996. Billion (bn) signifies 1,000 million. Adapted and reorganized from The Military Balance, 1997-98 (London: IISS, 1998).

5. Thesis Outline

Chapter One introduces the topic, provides the general line of argumentation and discusses the aims, justification, sources, methodology, concepts and thesis plan. The thesis asks what the dominant ideas expressed in these debates about foreign policy were, and whether or not they were reflected in Russia's policies towards specific military conflicts in the CIS states. It will be argued that the ideas manifested within the political debate about conflicts in the near abroad had an important, if varying, role in each of the three case studies.

Chapter Two examines the role of political debate and ideas in the international relations literature, in order to provide a foundation for later empirical studies of Russian foreign policy and the three case studies.

The chapter focuses on those general theories in which political debate and ideas are considered significant in order to determine how and to what extent ideas matter in foreign policy development – and how best to model these influences in the study of foreign policy. It derives insights about the role of ideas which may be helpful in the thesis's subsequent analysis of the Russian foreign policy debates. In particular, it shows how new ideas develop and the “pathways” or “mechanisms” by which ideas are thought to affect foreign policy choice. The analysis provides guidance for the more detailed specification of the approach used in the thesis while relating the thesis to ongoing theoretical discussions and controversies in the discipline. The chapter concludes by delineating the specific approach used in this thesis to explain how, and why, particular ideas broadly influenced Russian policy towards conflicts in the CIS states 1991-96.

Chapter Three and Four together provide a broad context to the particular debates about Russia's involvement in specific conflicts in the FSU. Although Russian politicians and other members of the political elite debated the details of each specific conflict they were always grounded within the general debates about foreign policy.

Chapter Three examines the dominant ideas in Russian debates about foreign policy. First, it identifies the key ideas which make up the three foreign policy orientations and the

specific political party proposals. With the end of the Soviet Union, there were many different ideas which could have been used define Russia's national identity, its geography, mission, self-perception, and economic and political direction. These underlying preferences structured the various options or ways of thinking about foreign policy. These ideas about Russia are then categorized in the thesis into the three foreign policy orientations of the political elite: fundamentalist nationalism, pragmatic nationalism, and liberal westernism.¹² Each orientation suggested a "road map" which broadly corresponded with the different policy options towards the near abroad and the conflicts in the Former Soviet Union. The specific foreign policy proposals of the key political parties are then examined within these three orientations. Finally, the rise and fall of ideas from 1991 to 1996 is outlined in order to foreshadow the detailed examination of the evolution of foreign policy orientations in Chapter Four.

Chapter Four charts the evolution of the debate concerning these foreign policy ideas from 1991-1996. After an overview of how foreign policy ideas were voiced in the domestic political process, the thesis identifies three stages during this period in which pragmatic nationalist ideas eventually become dominant. The general contours of the debate are examined in terms of the relation to both the government's foreign policy position and the key foreign and military policies towards the conflicts in the FSU during those years. Pragmatic nationalism is found to have affected foreign policy choice through the domestic political process by creating road maps which reduced uncertainty and suggested specific policies, and by the institutionalisation of these ideas into official policy concepts and doctrine.

Chapter Five, Six and Seven examine the Russian political debates and foreign policies towards Georgia's separatist conflict with Abkhazia, Moldova's separatist conflict with Transdnistria and the civil war in Tajikistan. The case studies locate the specific debates about Russian military involvement within the context of events and interests.

¹² The classification of types of foreign policy thinking and breakdown of stages from 1991-96 is provided to give an overall view of how ideas and policy changed during the period under study. Of course, ideas never fit perfectly into neat categories, and of course, there the time period was fluid, with each stage running into the next.

The case studies are structured similarly to allow for comparison. The argument that ideas and debate matter in the development of policy is contrasted with the opposing contention that the material setting (the constraints and incentives facing policy decision-makers) is the crucial determinant. Each case study, therefore, begins with an examination of Russia's key interests in the particular conflict – defined here as its security, economic and diaspora interests – and briefly, how they were conditioned by Soviet and Tsarist Russia's history. Key Tsarist and Soviet policies are explored to give some understanding of the main issues, assets and problems that Russia inherited after 1991, as well as how the regions were perceived by the Russian political elite. Any existing discrepancies between Russia's "real" interests and its perceived or officially declared interests are highlighted to show how constraining the environment was and how much uncertainty or room for debate over choices really existed.

Moving to the situation since 1991, each chapter explores the emergence and evolution of the conflicts as well as Russia's military involvement. The core of each chapter examines Russia's debates and policies towards each particular conflict and draws parallels with the overall debate about foreign policy in general. The debates and policies are studied in detail in chronological stages from 1991-1996. In each stage, the dominant foreign policy ideas within the debate are explored and broadly examined in relation to Russia's foreign policies and military action in that period. These divisions are not absolute in that each stage melded into the next, however, they are used in the thesis to demonstrate the changing contours of foreign policy thinking and the changing policy output in the conflicts.

Each of the conflicts differed in its character, roots and development as well as in the nature of Russian military involvement. The states varied in terms of size, population, political stability, presence of Russian military bases and forces, presence of Russian diaspora and, to a lesser extent, in terms of economic significance. Each state had different emotional and historic ties with Russia. The conflicts also varied in terms of their length, seriousness, type etc and in terms of their perceived and actual importance to Russia. All of these factors influenced how the Russian elite understood the conflict and therefore how they

affected the particular debate. However, it should also be borne in mind that all three cases were characterised by an initial period of high uncertainty and confusion which was gradually replaced by a more coherent policy to end the conflicts.

Chapter Eight summarizes the underlying shifts in Russian foreign policy ideas and debates and shows whether and how they significantly influenced realignments in foreign policy towards the three conflicts. The debates were one of the many variables which affected Russian foreign policy. It concludes that international relations and Russian foreign policy approaches which omit ideas and political debates may be missing an important element in the study of foreign policy development.

Chapter Two: Ideas and Political Debates in Theoretical Approaches to Foreign Policy Development

This chapter examines the role of political debate and ideas in the international relations literature. It carries this out in order to provide a foundation for later empirical studies of Russian foreign policy and three case studies.

The chapter focuses on those general theories in which political debate and ideas are considered significant in order to determine how and to what extent ideas matter in foreign policy development – and how best to model these influences in the study of foreign policy. The purpose is to derive insights about the role of ideas which may be helpful in the thesis's subsequent analysis of the Russian foreign policy debates – not to describe all the competing international relations theories.

In particular, this chapter seeks to discover what international relations theorists say about the “origin” and “transmission” of ideas (i.e. how new ideas develop) and the “pathways” or “mechanisms” by which ideas are thought to affect foreign policy choice. The analysis provides guidance for the more detailed specification of the approach used in the thesis while relating the thesis to ongoing theoretical discussions and controversies in the discipline. The chapter concludes by delineating the specific approach used in this thesis to explain whether, and how, particular ideas were broadly reflected in Russian political and military policy towards conflicts in the CIS states 1991-96.

1. The Role of Political Debates and Ideas in the Theoretical Approaches to Foreign Policy

For thousands of years philosophers and historians have grappled with the role of ideas in social and political life, and from the beginning of the discipline of social science its practitioners also have debated this fundamental question. However, not until the 1960s, in the wake of the so-called “behavioural revolution” in political science, was it widely accepted among social scientists that international behaviour could not be understood adequately in terms of rational, objective laws. In response, theories of international relations

from the late 1960s on began to focus on domestic variables, including ideas, to help explain states' foreign policy outcomes. Since then, the role of ideas in foreign policy has been extensively examined at the individual, domestic, international and transnational levels. Many of these approaches have advanced strong criticisms of the earlier prevalent rational explanations of behaviour. Today, ideas are increasingly being studied as one of the many variables that affect foreign policy in attempts to build sophisticated and comprehensive theories which integrate different levels of analysis.

Although ideas and debate have been examined at many different levels of analysis, this chapter is limited to the individual and domestic levels which helpfully highlight the origin or source of ideas and the means by which ideas influence behaviour. This limitation has been imposed because the thesis is concerned with ideas (stated beliefs) expressed by individual Russian foreign policy participants within the domestic political process, and whether or not they were reflected in Russian policy towards military conflicts in the CIS states.

2. Ideas/Political Debates and Grand Theories

Although this chapter is concerned with middle-range theories, it is helpful to first briefly identify and locate them within the grand theories which are used to organize the entire field of international relations.

The realist (or power politics) approach is a powerful, simple and elegant theory of international politics. Realism, in essence, builds its explanations on what are considered the most general and enduring features of international politics – the struggle for power and security by states within an anarchic international system – as a persuasive explanation for conflict within the international arena.¹ There is little doubt that realism offers significant

¹ See the classic Hans J. Morgenthau, Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace, 4th edition (New York: Knopf, 1967). The realist approach embraces an interrelated set of assumptions about the world: international politics is about states and their interactions; states seek power, particularly military power, because there is nothing else to guarantee their security; the relations between states are guided by an amoral calculation of whatever best serves the interests of the state; the political realm is distinct from the economic realm; and in such an amoral, power-driven world, states must always be on guard for their own “national”

insights into explaining foreign policy – in its purest form; however, its proponents do not take into consideration ideas or debate.

A major problem with realist theories is that they can easily become tautologies, truisms which are impossible to refute. Arguments can always be constructed to prove that any action is intended to enhance or preserve the power of the state. By dismissing other important variables, realist explanations tend to ignore the process by which state interests are shaped, the content of these new interests and the role of ideas or debate in the process.² To this extent, realist arguments should be seen as only part of the overall explanation of state behaviour in foreign affairs.

Only when “national interests” are clear, unambiguous and permanent can realist theory adequately explain foreign policy behaviour. In fact, the concept of “national interest” is empirically empty in that it can be defined variously in different circumstances.³ In the case of Russia during the years 1991-1996, there may have been no clear national interest. Perhaps there were conflicting interests. Moreover, the interests of self-seeking politicians do not always coincide with so-called perceived national interests. Besides objective factors, broad subjective criteria also guide policy choices. Thus, in any explanation of Russian foreign policy, the realist assumption of states as unitary and rational actors may be challenged by other perspectives which acknowledge cooperation and domestic decision-making – including ideas and political debates.

This thesis is more in line with the classical “liberal” theories of international politics which are founded on a focus on the individual (including ideas and debates about policies) and

interest.

² However, as Legro and Moravcsik explain, “Instead of challenging competing liberal, epistemic, and institutional theories, realists now regularly seek to subsume their causal mechanisms. Realism has become little more than a generic commitment to the assumption of rational state behaviour”. Jeffrey W. Legro and Andrew Moravcsik, “Is Anybody Still a Realist?”, *International Security*, vol. 24, no. 2 (Fall 1999), pp.5-55, p.53.

³ Masato Kimura and David W. Welch argue that national interests are idiosyncratic and best treated exogenously in a detailed explanation of interest-formation and interest-specification in “Specifying Interests: Japan’s Claim to the Northern Territories and its Implications for International Relations Theory”, *International Studies Quarterly*, vol.42, no.2 (June 1998), pp.213-244. They argue that states decide for themselves what their interests are - doing so for reasons that are often difficult to discern, often specific to historical, political, cultural contexts. What states prefer is an empirical question. Thus scholars should look for patterns not only in what states want but also in how they go about pursuing them.

the possibility of improvements in the condition of individual and social existence. Whereas realists interpret international relations as an endless and vicious struggle for power among states, liberals see them as the relations among individuals, societies and states engaged in co-operative activities as well as confrontational behaviour. The realist view that states act in a coherent, determined fashion in the calculated pursuit of an agreed national interest, dominated by the pursuit of power and military security, is seen as an oversimplification. Instead, liberals emphasise “the role of institutions and other linkages between nation-states that facilitate and promote co-operation, co-ordination, and non-violent modes of conflict resolution”.⁴

This thesis is broadly located within the liberal interpretation which considers Russian foreign policy towards the CIS conflicts as the result of a complex interplay between various agencies of government, pressure groups, organizations and influential individuals at both domestic and international levels. In other words, in contrast to the simplest forms of realism, other levels of analysis (individuals, groups and other domestic structures as well as events/conditions in the international system) are examined.⁵ Within a wide context, the thesis examines whether ideas and debates have a significant, if varying, role in the formation of foreign policy.

3. Ideas/Political Debates and Middle-Range Theories

Middle-range theories are used to explore empirical explanations of selected aspects of international politics. They may be realist (for example the international systemic approach and the rational actor model) or not. Middle-range theories are particularly relevant to this thesis because they relate most directly to empirical research of the role of ideas and debate in foreign policy. These theories include the international systemic approach at the broadest level, and other levels of analysis including those at the individual and domestic political level. This thesis examines the role of ideas predominantly at the individual and

⁴ Bruce Russett and Harvey Starr, *World Politics: The Menu for Choice* (San Francisco: Freeman, 1981), p.25.

⁵ At the systemic level of analysis, state behaviour is seen as a reaction to the external environment. At the state level, behaviour is in response to both the external and internal environments. The individual level examines the actions and attitudes of individual policy makers.

domestic levels of analysis because it focuses both on how ideas and perceptions define foreign policy purposes and action and how they affect the attitudes and actions of the political elite.

a) The International Systemic Approach

The international systemic approach argues that foreign policy outcomes result solely from changing external constraints (structures in the international system), not from domestic change. States are assumed to be rational, unitary actors with stable and basically similar domestic preferences and decision-making procedures. Thus, in its "pure" form, this approach examines foreign policy as a response to the international systemic level.⁶ Domestic-level factors are rarely considered, and the process through which elite preferences and state interests change and guide policy outputs is generally ignored. Instead, states are seen to recognize structural change in the international system, reorder their interests, and adapt. However, some scholars use a "soft" realist approach and do consider domestic variables. For example, William Wohlforth uses a process-oriented classical realism to explain Soviet behaviour but also employs some domestic-level causal variables and stresses the importance of perceptions.⁷

Neo-realist Kenneth Waltz compares the international system to a market, with states (like firms) engaging in activities that keep them alive and operating.⁸ Just as firms will go bankrupt if they do not pursue profit-maximizing strategies, so too will states that do not pursue self-protective and power-seeking strategies become weakened and/or disappear. Because states and not individuals are seen to be the most important units in world politics, individuals and their ideas are interpreted either as unimportant, or at most as "unexplained variances". When ideas change, it is seen to be part of a logical and inevitable process of adaptation to various international stimuli.

⁶ Kenneth Waltz, Democracy and Foreign Politics: The American and British Experience (Boston: Little, Brown, 1967).

⁷ William Wohlforth, "Realism and the End of the Cold War", International Security, vol.19, no.3 (Winter 1994-95), pp. 91-129.

⁸ Kenneth Waltz offers a lucid account of the neorealist argument in his Theory of International Politics (London: Addison-Wesley, 1979).

Russia's new position in the international system 1991-1996 obviously provided new opportunities, constraints and feedback – all of which influenced the country's foreign policies and set some of the context for decision-making and political debate.⁹ Clearly, members of the political elite reacted to the new and novel events from the external environment in their formulation of state interests and policies. To this extent, this broad approach is unchallengeable.

With the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Russia found itself in a new, geopolitically vulnerable position. By mid-1992 these circumstances included the outbreak of conflicts in the CIS states. Russia's foreign and military policies towards these conflicts, as well as towards other perceived dangers to Russian interests, were inevitably reactive. In this context, it is unsurprising that Russia would attempt to strengthen its security and retain a dominant role in the region. Realists would explain Russia's involvement in the Former Soviet Union (FSU) as the natural exploitation of a "window of opportunity" – an attempt to redress the power vacuum in the region as well as to prevent any third state from taking advantage of the new states' instability and weakness. This, of course, does not mean that Russia would automatically be successful. Kenneth Waltz aptly describes Russia's position: "States try to maintain their position in the system. For me that is an axiom. Now, there is nothing in anybody's theory, of anything, that says you'll succeed".¹⁰

Russia's new security relations with the West also helped to shape its foreign policy contours. Russia's strategic posture had changed dramatically with the dissolution of the Warsaw Treaty Organization (WTO) and the dismantlement of the stable Cold War strategic framework that followed the break up of the Soviet Union. Earlier the WTO had enjoyed almost three-fold conventional military superiority over NATO in Europe. But, by 1995, Russia's military force was only about one-third the size of NATO's and one-fifth the

⁹ Using this hypothesis, Gorbachev's foreign policy has been explained as a rational, inevitable process of adaptation to external stimuli. See Daniel Deudney and John Ikenberry, "Soviet Reform and the End of the Cold War: Explaining Large-Scale Historical Change", *Review of International Studies*, vol.17, no.3 (July 1991), pp.226-44. These authors also suggest eight sources of change for Soviet foreign policy under Gorbachev in idem, "The International Sources of Soviet Change", *International Security* vol.16, no.3 (Winter 1991/92), pp.74-118.

¹⁰ Ken Waltz in "Interview with Ken Waltz", conducted by Fred Halliday and Justin Rosenberg, *Review of International Studies*, vol.24, no.3 (July 1998), pp.371-386, p.377.

combined power of the Western states.¹¹ Moreover, the withdrawal of the Soviet military from Eastern Europe altered the geopolitical boundaries in Europe.

Russia's new geostrategic and military vulnerabilities in both the West and the FSU explain to a large extent why Russia would try to maintain at least a position of strength in its immediate geographical region. However, this thesis will argue that the actual strategic situation was more complex. As a new state Russia was trying not simply to maintain its power base, but also to define its own new position in the world, even though it was still saddled with many of the ambitions, strengths and burdens of the old Soviet Union.¹² The major problem with the international systemic approach as an explanation of Russian foreign policy is that it mistakenly treats the state as a unitary actor, and does not ground the national pursuit of power or security in the interests and incentives of individual foreign policy decision makers.¹³ This thesis attempts to resolve this deficiency by concentrating on the individual and domestic levels of analysis.

b) The Individual Level of Analysis

In contrast to those who assume that the state is a unitary actor, many foreign policy analysts open up the "black box" of the state and attempt to explain foreign policy by the way the various units relate to one another. The individual level of analysis focuses on the actions and behaviour of individual policy-makers in order to explain how they define purposes, choose among courses of action and utilize national capabilities to achieve objectives in the name of the state. This level of analysis focuses upon ideologies, motivations, ideas, perceptions, values and idiosyncrasies. Otherwise known as micro-theories of decision-making they are intended to help explain how individual decisions are taken within the broad framework of foreign policy. These are opposed to macro-theories which explain the relation between state and society.

¹¹ Dom Crawford, Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE): A Review and Update of Key Treaty Elements (Washington, DC: United States Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, December 1995).

¹² Russia's search for its national identity is examined at length in Chapter Three.

¹³ As shown above in the theoretical section on realism.

Rational actor models are not examined at this level of analysis because of their premises that decision-makers select the most effective and efficient means of achieving a given end and that specific individuals and their ideas are generally peripheral to this process.¹⁴ As President Boris Yeltsin was the politician at the apex of Russia's centralized foreign policy-making institutions between 1991 and 1996, he undoubtedly had a decisive impact upon policy outcome. However, precisely how President Yeltsin made foreign policy was often unpredicted, maybe even unpredictable, and it is difficult to show that he followed any cost or benefit analysis in his decision-making. To quote Yeltsin himself in 1994: "To make a decision is like plunging into water for me; I don't want to analyse whether it is a drawback or an advantage".¹⁵

This thesis is in line with the theories which argue that in the real world decision-makers are not simply confronted by problems; they must examine the world and identify and perceive the problems themselves.¹⁶ Moreover, the simplest rationalist explanation is challenged by empirical investigations that show that feedback from a changing environment is rarely obvious and frequently difficult to read or analyse. In fact, leaders and influential groups often disagree about the facts in the environment and what they mean. Clearly, international

¹⁴ Rational actor models assume that decisions are taken by those individuals who are supposed to take them, that the decisions are meaningful and have been rationally mapped out. Of course, rational actor models represent something of an ideal against which actual policy-making can be measured. Personal beliefs or ideas play a part in that they help leaders to have a clear sense of the various objectives and help them to arrange multiple objectives into a hierarchy of preferences. Rationalist thinking assumes self-interested actors strive to maximize their utility under certain constraints (the functionalist approach). Thus in rational actor models of foreign policy, Graham Allison's Rational Actor Model, for example, governments are assumed to be monoliths – that is, they speak with one voice, hold one view, have one set of agreed-on values and goals. Government preferences are modified in response to a broad array of international stimuli and foreign policy changes are seen to be rational, largely inevitable process of adaptation to changing external stimuli. In other words, rational actor models are within the realist approach. Graham T. Allison, *The Essence of Decision* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1971). For an overview of Allison's models see Jonathan Bendor and Thomas H. Hammond, "Rethinking Allison's Models", *American Political Science Review*, vol. 86, no.2 (June 1992), pp.301-322.

¹⁵ Yeltsin, *President Notes*, Moscow 94, p.347 in Lilia Shevtsova, *Yeltsin's Russia: Myths and Reality* (Washington D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1999), p.56.

¹⁶ Iver Neumann argues that the constraints of geopolitics cannot be taken as a wholly objective factor independent of human agency. "Threats do not exist "out there" but are socially constructed as part of political discourse." Neumann argues that people in Russia and the West have colluded in the social construction of "walls". His thesis is that the forging of Russian identity by a process of internal integration has its twin in the external differentiation of Russia from Europe. See Iver B. Neumann, *Russia and the Idea of Europe* (London: Routledge, 1996).

factors do play a role in shaping states' interests, but the challenge is to understand how they matter and under what conditions they matter.

In contrast to the rational actor model at the individual level of analysis, the approaches outlined below suggest that ideas may be important and that they may influence the direction and content of policy choices and outputs. However, they have been criticized for not assuming “bounded rationality” (when “pure” rationality is limited by contextual and cognitive factors) and for leading, therefore, to idiosyncratic narratives which cannot serve as the basis for theory.¹⁷ They also pose the problem of the relationship of agency to structure (which is also a central issue in international relations in general).¹⁸ In other words, the problem is how to understand policy in terms of both “human choice and social determination” – individuals and their ideas, as well as external factors.¹⁹

Psychologists claim that it is impossible to develop a neutral, objective or impartial image of reality. Psychological approaches to foreign policy, which became widespread in the 1960s, therefore examine how the cognitive processes of human beings influence policy choices in a non-rational fashion.²⁰ These approaches stress the importance of ideas and are concerned intellectually with the role of beliefs and values primarily in terms of individuals' interpretations of reality.²¹

Proponents of the psychological approach argue that even if one could obtain perfect information about alternatives and consequences, problems of perception would still render meaningless the notion of an ideal or perfectly rational choice among alternatives. The interpretation of information depends on the individual's belief system and images.²² The

¹⁷ “Bounded rationality” was to be a methodological compromise between an ideal model (rational choice, whereby an actor is supposed to choose between the best of the alternatives) and reality.

¹⁸ See Margot Light, “Foreign Policy Analysis”, in Margot Light and A.J.R. Groom (eds.), International Relations: A Handbook of Current Theory (London: Frances Pinter, 1994), pp.93-108, p.99.

¹⁹ Walter Carlsnaes, “The Agency-Structure Problem in Foreign Policy Analysis”, International Studies Quarterly, vol.36, no.3 (September 1992), pp.245-70.

²⁰ For a current example see Eric Singer and Valerie Hudson (eds.), Political Psychology and Foreign Policy, (Oxford: Westview Press, 1992).

²¹ Steve Smith, “Belief Systems and the Study of International Relations”, in Richard Little and Steve Smith, Belief Systems and International Relations (Oxford: British International Studies Association, 1988), pp.11-36, pp.17-27.

²² K. J. Holsti defines a belief system as “... a set of lenses through which information concerning the physical and social environment is received. It orients the individual to his environment, defining it for him and identifying for him its salient characteristics... [It also] has the function of the establishment of goals and the ordering of

possibilities and probabilities provided by the domestic and global environments affect plans, decisions and policies only as they are perceived and understood by decision-makers.²³

The psychological approach may thus provide insights into the Russian foreign policy debates by emphasizing the ideas of Russia's foreign policy participants. With the break-up of the Soviet Union and the end of communism, the members of this elite had many different ideas (or "underlying preferences") about Russia's identity which structured how Russia's foreign policy options were perceived.

Later, this thesis will identify these underlying preferences and examine whether and how they changed over time. Even though specific events put general pressure on decision-makers to be pragmatic, individual Russians still had to interpret what they perceived in the outside world. "Beliefs provide frameworks of perception which are filters of information that guide decision-makers as to what should be regarded as relevant and what should not".²⁴ What advisers advocate and what policy makers decide are significantly affected by their perceptions of their country's past and present, its role in the world and its relations with other states. Personal values and beliefs, as well as how individuals process the information they receive, are also pertinent in this process.

Research also indicates a number of circumstances in which ideas and beliefs have had a very great effect on decisions and behaviour. These include non-routine situations such as crises, ambiguous or uncertain situations, unanticipated events, and decisions made at the top of a government hierarchy free from organizational constraints.²⁵ One hypothesis from the observations is that periods of crisis or great uncertainty favour "ideational" shifts, and that the nature of the new ideas and beliefs themselves play a crucial role in determining

preferences." K. J. Holsti, "The Belief System and National Images: A Case Study", in James Rosenau, *International Politics and Foreign Policy* (New York: Free Press, 1969), pp.543-50, p.544. See also Richard Little and Steve Smith (eds.), *Belief Systems and International Relations* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988). On ideology, see Walter Carlsnaes, *Ideology and Foreign Policy: Problems of Comparative Conceptualisation* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986).

²³ An individual's perception is the process by which an individual selects, organizes and evaluates incoming information about the surrounding world. Both perception and interpretation depend heavily on the images that already exist in the mind of the individual decision-maker. Bruce Russett and Harvey Starr, *World Politics* (New York: Freeman and Company, 1996), p.249.

²⁴ Michael Clarke, "Foreign Policy Analysis: A Theoretical Guide", in Stelios Stavridis and Christopher Hill (eds.), *Domestic Sources of Foreign Policy* (London: Berg Publishers Limited, 1996), pp.19-39, p.24.

²⁵ See K. J. Holsti, *International Politics* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1988), pp.29-33.

whether or not change occurs.²⁶ Russia certainly faced many internal and external crises during the period under study – for example during the parliamentary elections of 1993 and 1995, and the outbreak of conflicts in the near abroad, as well as an enormous amount of uncertainty about the future of Russia’s foreign policy, and even Russia itself. This thesis explores whether or not conditions of crisis and uncertainty created “windows of opportunity” which allowed ideas to develop or help solve foreign policy dilemmas.

The problem with this “psychological” explanation is that “ideas do not float freely”.²⁷ It is, therefore, not satisfactory to simply outline the different foreign policy ideas or preferences.²⁸ This has been acknowledged in recent studies of “knowledge as power” which argue that new knowledge (ideas) must also be able to challenge existing evidence or interpretations, or create a consensus around new policy issues and develop new approaches to solutions.²⁹ Taking this into account, this thesis not only outlines the evolution of foreign policy ideas but also attempts to discover whether any consensus over new approaches developed among the political elite concerning Russia’s future policies. It will be argued below that in a time of great uncertainty, which included wars, economic depression, and which followed the end of communism and the break-up of empire, ideas created “road maps” which helped to guide policy and solve strategic dilemmas.

“Cognitive-content learning” theory is another approach used at the individual level whereby decision-makers rationalize and analyse their situation according to what they consciously believe about the world. In this approach, ideas are considered significant and affect elite preferences, interests and ultimately policies through a process of “learning”.³⁰

²⁶ This process has been argued in the following recent works: Sheri Berman, The Social Democratic Moment: Ideas and Politics in the Making of Interwar Europe (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998) and Kathleen McNamara, The Currency of Ideas: Monetary Politics in the European Union (Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 1998).

²⁷ Thomas Risse-Kappen, “Ideas Do Not Float Freely: Transnational coalitions, domestic structures, and the end of the Cold War”, International Organization, vol.48, no.2 (Spring 1994), pp.185-214.

²⁸ See for example Sarah Mendelson who examines the institutional and political context that shaped the ideas leading to the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1989. She argues that the change of policy was a result of the Gorbachev coalition gaining control of the political resources and placing reformist ideas squarely on the political agenda. Sarah Mendelson, “Internal Battles and External Wars”, World Politics vol.45, no.3 (April 1993), pp.327-360.

²⁹ Ernest Haas, When Knowledge is Power (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980).

³⁰ However in such approaches the source of “knowledge” is not examined nor are the broader political processes,

Advocates of the learning approach argue that leaders and elites become deeply wedded over time to organizing concepts and ideas that were dominant in the past. They argue that often new leaders coming into power act on new ideas or preferences which determine policy change.³¹ This might be assumed to be less relevant in the development of ideas in new states, however, it may be useful to understand how Russian foreign policy thinking changed in response to its perceived successes and failures in the CIS conflicts.

c) The Domestic Political Level of Analysis

This thesis is primarily but not solely located at the individual level of analysis. It is in line with many recent studies which argue that it is not only the understandings of individuals and groups that are important in influencing policy-making but also the political context and mechanisms (the operational environment) through which ideas and belief systems affect policy.³²

Such reasoning has led some international relations analysts to change their focus towards analysing the broader domestic political context in order to understand how it can inhibit or promote the adoption of particular ideas.³³ The domestic political context is seen to be a crucial determinant of foreign policy because this is where politicians' political ideas are formed and decisions are made – not from within a vacuum.³⁴ Therefore, reactions and

by which it affects policy, considered. Martin Hollis and Steve Smith develop the notion of individual "roles" which operate within structures, acting as constraints and "enablers", but also leaving room for personal qualities of judgement and skill. See Martin Hollis and Steve Smith, "Roles and Reasons in Foreign Policy Decision-Making", *British Journal of Political Science*, vol.16, no.3 (1986), pp.269-86.

³¹ This explanation was made implicit in Jerry Hough's interpretation of policies under Gorbachev. Jerry Hough, *Russia and the West: Gorbachev and the Politics of Reform* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1988). However, there is little evidence that Gorbachev came to power with a specific policy framework for foreign policy reform.

³² Examining international politics from the perspective of individual states, rather than individuals, or systems of states, state-level analysis explains the behaviour of states by reference not just to the external environment or individuals beliefs, but primarily to the domestic conditions which affect policy-making (including domestic political pressures, national ideologies, public opinion etc.) – otherwise known as the "operational environment".

³³ See Checkel who focuses on both the international and domestic institutional contexts in his examination of the "empowerment of ideas" in late Soviet and very early Russia's foreign policy. Jeffrey Checkel, *Ideas and International Political Change: Soviet/Russia Behaviour and the End of the Cold War* (New York: Yale University Press, 1997). See also Kathryn Sikkink, *Ideas and Institutions: Developmentalism in Brazil and Argentina* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1991).

³⁴ Of course, this applies predominantly to modern Western societies where the bulk of such research has taken place. There are some states in which the policy-making establishments have been more carefully isolated from

feedback from the main political actors, namely the parliament, media, public opinion and pressure groups are seen to influence politicians' ideas and understandings and thus help formulate foreign-policy decisions and outputs.³⁵

This thesis focuses upon individuals and their ideas in Russia's wide domestic environment in order to better understand the ways or "mechanisms" by which ideas have affected policy. In particular, ideas and political debate may have played an especially significant role in Russian foreign policy partly due to the unstable domestic environment and the initial lack of expertise and knowledge about the CIS states in the foreign policy-making environment. Let us now briefly examine the "political bargaining" and the "institutionalist" approaches.

i) Political Bargaining /Governmental Model

At the domestic level, foreign policy has been described as the result of "domestic political manoeuvring" – a product of the leaders' competition for office. This is relatively similar to Graham Allison's Governmental Model which stresses the social process of foreign policy-making and argues that foreign policy is not a result of intellectual choice but rather the result of various bargaining games among players in the government.³⁶

In this approach, ideas affect policy but do not in themselves have great importance. Instead, interests are interpreted as given and coming prior to any beliefs held by actors. In the extreme rationalist interpretation, ideas are simply "hooks" in which "competing elite seize upon popular ideas to propagate and to legitimate their interests, but the ideas

domestic political influences than others.

³⁵ This has been accomplished in many different ways. Andrew Moravcsik identifies three subcategories of domestic theories of foreign policy. First, "society-centred" theories stress the influence of domestic social groups through legislatures, interest groups, elections, and public opinion on foreign policy outcome. Second, "state-centred" domestic theories examine the administrative and decision-making apparatus of the state executive branch. Lastly, theories of "state-society relations" emphasize institutions that link state and society such as education and administration. Andrew Moravcsik, "Introduction: Integrating International and Domestic Theories of International Bargaining", Double-Edged Diplomacy (London: University of California Press, 1993), pp. 3-43.

³⁶ Graham Allison's foreign policy models are discussed in Graham T. Allison, The Essence of Decision (Boston: Little, Brown, 1971). For an overview of Allison's models see Jonathan Bendor and Thomas H. Hammond, "Rethinking Allison's Models", American Political Science Review, vol. 86, no.2 (June 1992), pp.301-322.

themselves do not play a causal role".³⁷ In other words, ideas are seen to be instrumentally seized on by members of the political elite and used in an attempt to advance their political positions and build winning political coalitions.³⁸ This is a form of domestic-level realism in which politics is comprised of power, interests and coalition making. In the crudest form of this argument, interests determine policies, relegating ideas to mere tools of convenience that are adopted for crass political calculation such as to appease political opposition.³⁹

Although this thesis argues that ideas are important, it agrees with the political bargaining approach that foreign policy outputs should be understood in terms of the political process in which they are selected. It is not enough to outline the foreign policy ideas of members of Russia's political elite, and to know whether a consensus over ideas developed, to understand Russia's policy. In order for ideas to affect policy they must also be placed on the political agenda, and this happens only if elements of the senior political leadership support the adoption of the ideas or interpretations. Thus, this thesis examines whether a consensus of ideas was adopted by those in power and was then translated into policies. It also examines Russia's evolving foreign policy ideas and policies to determine whether a consensus of ideas was reflected in the policies.

ii) Institutionalists

The international relations literature also shows that ideas can affect or constrain policy when they become embedded in institutions. Administrative agencies, laws, norms and operating procedures mediate between ideas and policy outputs. When ideas become

³⁷ Judith Goldstein and Robert O. Keohane, "Ideas and Foreign Policy: An Analytical Framework", in Goldstein and Keohane, *Ideas and Foreign Policy* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1993), pp.3-31, p.4. Of course, pure rationalists have a highly implausible position in suggesting that without ideas such as paganism, world religion and Marxism, that human history would have run the same course.

³⁸ In recent years, coalition-building theories have been prevalent in comparative politics and international relations literature. See for example, Peter Gourevitch, *Politics in Hard Times* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1986) and Jack Snyder, *Myths of Empire: Domestic Politics and International Ambition* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991).

³⁹ Actors' interests represent their fundamental goals. For political actors these interests are mostly concerned with increasing the odds of retaining political office, and for economic actors these interests involve maximizing income. Policy preferences are the specific policy choices that actors believe will help them become re-elected or maximize income.

institutionalised, their impact can be greatly prolonged – even when no one believes in them any more.

Institutionalists are concerned with political influence and especially the mechanisms through which ideas or debate affect international politics. "New institutionalist" arguments focus on the role of formal and informal political institutions in shaping policy. They largely exclude other influences, and are most prevalent in comparative government and political economy literatures. Liberal institutionalism focuses on the degree to which institutions play an important part in tempering the anarchical nature and unremitting power plays of international relations.⁴⁰ Similar to the political bargaining approach seen above, institutional approaches make the important point that the purveyors of new concepts and beliefs do not operate within a vacuum.

Individual decision-makers and policy-makers are, of course, embedded within government organizations or bureaucracy. However scholars debate how the institutional structure (particularly the openness of the policy-making structure) of a country may affect the adoption of ideas. Some argue that societal and group pressures have less affect on states that have more autonomous political institutions, and thus ideas already established should play a greater role in determining the interests of the institutions. In contrast, in countries where the policymaking is decentralized and fragmented, it is usually easier for new ideas to reach decision-makers but less likely that new, coherent, long-term policies will be based upon those ideas. However, these hypotheses are greatly disputed and there is little systematic evidence.⁴¹

This thesis is premised on the argument that Russia's foreign policy decision-making was relatively chaotic with "impulses felt from all sides".⁴² To assess the relative weight of

⁴⁰ Robert O. Keohane, *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in World Political Economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984). For an overview of Keohane's work see Michael Suhr, "Robert Keohane: a contemporary classic", in Iver B. Neumann and Ole Waever (eds.), *The Future of International Relations* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), pp. 90-120.

⁴¹ See, for example Snyder who makes these assertions in Jack Snyder, *Myths of Empire: Domestic Politics and International Ambition* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1991). Critics argue that this assertion elevates process over leadership to a highly questionable level and draws overly stark contrasts in the ways ideas influence policy in different political systems.

⁴² Author interview with Andrei Zagorsky, *Author's Interview*, May 28, 1999, MGIMO. He said that because of

institutions upon Russia's foreign and military policy within this context is highly complicated. Moreover, within each institution after 1991 there was a plethora of views. Nevertheless, this thesis will attempt to indicate whether the dominant foreign policy ideas of the Russian political elite were institutionalised. In other words, were they adopted by the key foreign policy-making institutions or incorporated into policy through official statements or the adoption of new concepts and doctrines?

d) Integrative Approaches

A general criticism of the majority of the approaches seen above is that they are exclusively concentrated at either the individual, domestic or international levels of analysis and therefore fail to capture the full array of factors (including ideas or debate) affecting a complex process.⁴³ There have been many attempts recently to address this criticism and to bring domestic variables back into international relations theory. Since it is extremely difficult to establish the independent influence of ideas (or other specific factors), "interactive-approaches" which stress the interaction between the individual, domestic and international levels, have gained prominence.⁴⁴

One example of the new integrative approaches is the "epistemic" approach.⁴⁵ Epistemic communities are defined as transnational networks of professionals with recognized expertise in a particular domain. These communities, analysts argue, play a key role in bringing new ideas into the political process and thus play a central role in shaping foreign policy.⁴⁶

the clash between the Ministry of Defence and Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Russia often appeared to have one foreign policy run by civilians and another by the military.

⁴³ This of course is a criticism of foreign policy analysis in general, not simply the subsection dealing with the role of ideas. Examples of important early attempts to integrate variables from the different levels, and to explicitly examine the role of ideas include Brecher's research design and William Wohlforth's model – both of which were mentioned above.

⁴⁴ See for example, Peter B. Evans, Harold K. Jacobson and Robert D. Putnam (eds.), Double-Edged Diplomacy (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

⁴⁵ See for example, Peter Gourevitch, "The Second Image Reversed: The International Sources of Domestic Politics", International Organization, vol.32, no.4 (Autumn, 1978); Thomas Risse-Kappen, Bringing Transnational Relations Back In: Non State Actors, Domestic Structures and International Institutions (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

⁴⁶ Here ideas are considered paramount and defined as "consensual knowledge", that is, a set of shared beliefs

Another example of “integrative approaches”, which stresses the interaction between domestic and international levels, and is more directly applicable to this thesis (which examines elites and debates but not those impacting from outside Russia) is the “two-level games” approach. In Robert Putnam’s “two-level games”, political leaders are seen to be “Janus-faced” – that is, as trying to achieve their goals in the domestic and international arenas simultaneously.⁴⁷ Thus, to understand their actions, both internal and external variables must be examined. The primary importance of politics, interests and power is acknowledged and the role of ideas is implicitly assumed, if not explicitly outlined.⁴⁸

Unlike the international systemic approach, in the “two-level games” the agent is no longer the state as a whole but instead (similar to the domestic-level approaches) includes central decision-makers, legislatures, and other domestic groups. This approach applied to Russian foreign policy also recognizes the inevitability of domestic conflict (bargaining) about what the “national interest” and international context requires. As Putnam put it: “A more adequate account of the domestic determinants of foreign policy and international relations must stress politics: parties, social classes, interest groups (both economic and non-economic), legislators, and even public opinion and elections, not simply executive officials and institutional arrangements”.⁴⁹ Building from Putnam's hypothesis, Helen Milner, while using rational choice theory, similarly argued that domestic politics and international

about particular cause-effect, ends-means relations held by all members of the epistemic community. Peter Haas argues that change in a state's interests is the result of actions by domestic political elite (members of a transnational epistemic community) who control key government organizations. Peter M. Haas, “Introduction: Epistemic Communities and International Policy Co-ordination”, International Organization, vol. 46, no.1 (Winter 1992), pp.1-35. The strength of the epistemic approach is that it integrates international-structural factors into its analysis. However, these analysts do not explicitly examine institutions and cannot explain the conditions under which an epistemic community comes to influence policy-making. For a recent application of the transnationalist approach to the end of the Cold War see Matthew Evangelista, Unarmed Forces. The Transnational Movement to End the Cold War (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999).

⁴⁷ “At the national level, domestic groups pursue their interests by pressuring the government to adopt favourable policies, and politicians seek power by constructing coalitions among those groups. At the international level, national governments seek to maximize their own ability to satisfy domestic pressures, while minimizing the adverse consequences of foreign developments. Robert D. Putnam, “Diplomacy and Domestic Politics”, in Peter Evans, Harold Jacobsen and Robert Putnam (eds.), Double-Edged Diplomacy (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), pp.431-468, p.437.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid. Putnam, p.435.

relations are inextricably interrelated.⁵⁰ Links between Russian foreign policy debates, domestic politics and foreign policies are highlighted in this thesis.

Very recently, there has been a flurry of new studies which specifically examine the role of ideas in international politics. In particular, there is now a significant literature on the role of ideas and the end of the Cold War.⁵¹ At the same time, the implications of this research for the systematic understanding of the role of ideas in international politics and for the revision of extant theories remains to be developed.⁵² Much of this research was presented at the "Research Workshop: The Role of Ideas and the End of the Cold War", at Brown University, 14-16 April 2000. The workshop organizers, Nina Tannenwald and William C. Wohlforth, suggested three mechanisms by which analysts may examine how ideas influence behaviour and policy. First, empirical analysts may focus on the direct effect of ideas – as independent or intervening variables. For example, they may assess the proportion of variance explained by ideas as opposed to other independent variables. Ideas are thus a residual category, which helps to explain what interests and power alone cannot accomplish. Thus, sometimes ideas matter and sometimes they do not. A second approach

⁵⁰ Milner's rational choice examination of why nations co-operate attempts to create a theory of domestic influences – which includes ideas. She argues that states are not unitary actors but are instead what Dahl calls "polyarchic"- in other words they are composed of various actors with different preferences who share power (often unequally) over decision-making. "International politics and foreign policy become part of the domestic struggle for power and the search for internal compromise" (p.11). Milner identifies three variables necessary to understand policy-making: the differences among policy preferences of domestic actors, the nature of domestic political institutions and the distribution of information. Therefore in adopting policies, political leaders are influenced by groups with conflicting interests as well as by the electoral consequences of their choices. Milner calls one of her key variables the "structure of domestic preferences" - that is the differences of policy positions of domestic actors over a particular issue. As opposed to earlier arguments about the role of preferences in which only societal or political actors were examined, here policy is seen as being determined by the strategic interaction among the actors' (political and societal) preferences and the institutional context. Helen Milner, Interests, Institutions and Information (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997). Also see Robert Dahl, Polyarchy: participation and organization (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971).

⁵¹ On ideas and the Cold War see: Jeffrey Checkel, Ideas and International Political Change: Soviet/Russia Behaviour and the End of the Cold War (New York: Yale University Press, 1997); A.D. English, The Changing Face of War: Learning From History (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1998); E. Herman, "The career of Cold War psychology", Radical History Review, no.63 (Fall 1995), pp.52-85; and Mathew Evangelista, Unarmed Forces, The Transnational Movement to End the Cold War (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999).

⁵² For the implications of this new literature on international relations theory see William C. Wohlforth (ed.), Witnesses to the End of the Cold War (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996); S. M. Walt, Revolution and War (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1996), and Richard Ned Lebow and Thomas Risse-Kappen (eds.), International Relations Theory and the End of the Cold War (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995).

holds that interests can only be conceived in the context of a framework of ideas. That framework is used to interpret the world and help people define their interests. Thus, the analyst examines how ideas shape interests which in turn influence policies. For these scholars, the question is why some ideas are adopted rather than others, why at one particular time and not at another. Finally, a third approach coming from the conference argues that the most important structures in international politics are ideational, not material. Both actors' identities and interests are constituted by ideational structures. Thus, "ideational" structures do more than merely constrain behaviour. The impact of ideas is reflected in the categories in which people think, the constitutive "rules of the game" which define roles, identities, interests and criteria of legitimacy and justification. In this philosophical level perspective, ideas provide a framework for the social world.⁵³ This thesis basically follows the second approach, and explores how ideas and debates helped to define Russian interests and foreign policies towards military conflicts in the near abroad.

4. The Role of Ideas and Debates in International Relations Theoretical Literature

The above survey of the international relations literature shows that although significant advances have been made in the field, beliefs and ideas are not subject to easy classification and analysis, and more can be accomplished on the topic. A major weakness of the "ideas literature" is that it is often descriptive as opposed to explanatory and lacks systematic analysis of the sources, processes and mechanisms by which ideas aid in the development of policies in the field of international relations. Moreover, those analysts who examine the role of ideas sometimes make the error of assuming a direct causal connection between ideas and policies. They simply assert that ideas matter and claim that it is obviously very difficult to explain why or how a particular idea had an impact while other ideas did not.

⁵³On this last point see Alexander Wendt, Social Theory of International Politics (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

Furthermore, although ideas are always present in policy debates, it is not necessarily the intrinsic characteristics of a particular idea that cause it to be chosen. Often the policy output can be explained by giving causal weight to other variables, such as material interests, and relegating ideas to a minor role. Clearly, politicians have economic and personal interests, and use ideas to strengthen their political legitimacy and support. It seems tempting to conclude, therefore, that rather than acting as a direct guide to action, "...the role that beliefs play in policy-making is much more subtle and less direct... they form one of several clusters of intervening variables that may shape and constrain decision-making".⁵⁴ To counter this argument, "ideas scholars" ought to provide evidence against the hypothesis that "material" interests are dominant. Instead, however, writers often simply conclude with plausible, but unsubstantiated, assertions that ideas are the most important factors in determining policies.

Recognition of the problem of uncertainty in history has led many scholars to focus on ideas and beliefs as well as (or instead of) the material factors that have traditionally been at the centre of international theory. If the international political world is highly uncertain, then the ideas actors have about the confusing reality may be especially important determinants of that reality. The literature also demonstrates that beliefs, attitudes and policy preferences will differ according to individuals' objective interests and according to their views of those interests. Actors often have different views on what the national interest even is.

Moreover, decision-makers are also often presented with strong incentives for misrepresenting their real intentions or for creating deliberate ambiguity. In such cases, determining what decision-makers "really" believed is extremely difficult. In fact, foreign policy decision-makers may themselves be confused over ends and means. Thus it is necessary to be careful to distinguish political rhetoric from actual policy intentions and outputs.

⁵⁴ K.J. Holsti, as quoted in Steve Smith, "Belief Systems and the Study of International Relations", in Richard Little and Steve Smith (eds.), Belief Systems and International Relations (Oxford: Basil Blackwell and British International Studies, 1988), pp.11-36, p.32.

In sum, the international relations literature has developed many important insights and some confusion about the role of ideas in foreign policy. As difficulties of explanation and measurement continue, more varied empirical studies need to be conducted. Much of the work to date is within the field of domestic politics and public policy (concentrated in the United States) and is focused primarily on elites. More attempts are needed to test empirical propositions and build theories as well as to develop richly detailed case studies which can be used to sort out the variables at work.

5. Conclusions and the Approach Used in this Thesis

The above brief analysis shows that no single theoretical approach has been able to capture the complexity of the role of ideas or political debate in international relations.⁵⁵ However, this analysis of the theoretical literature illustrates that the role of ideas and debate needs to be further studied at the empirical level. It also indicates that a fruitful examination of the role of ideas should be conducted in the following three ways. First, the various Russian foreign policy ideas ought to be outlined since the actions taken by humans depend on the substantive quality of available ideas.⁵⁶ Second, there ought to be an attempt to discover whether there was congruence between ideas and policy, and to establish, as far as possible, the role of ideas in the development of policy and action. Third, other domestic variables as well as the international context need to be considered in order to capture the full array of factors affecting the complex process of foreign policy-making.

⁵⁵ Simplification may encourage caricature and pigeonholing, but thinking theoretically means to attempt to discern particular patterns in world politics. It means trying to identify the boundaries of inquiry and explanation and to organize phenomena in order to make them intelligible. Significantly, it also means acquiring a knowledge of context and meaning.

⁵⁶ Keohane and Goldstein, helpfully distinguish three types of beliefs: worldviews, principled beliefs, and causal beliefs. "Ideas and Foreign Policy: An Analytical Framework", *Ideas and Foreign Policy* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1993) pp.3-30. Worldviews are embedded in the symbolism of a culture and deeply affect modes of thought and discourse. For examples, world religions, human rights, Stalinism etc. Principled beliefs consist of normative ideas that specify criteria for distinguishing right from wrong and just from unjust – and also have a profound impact on political action. Lastly, causal beliefs are beliefs about cause-effect relationships which derive from the shared consensus of recognized elites. They imply strategies for the attainment of goals.

Thus, this thesis does not adopt one particular theory or model but rather adopts insights derived from various approaches to understand whether and how ideas mattered in Russian foreign policy. The role of ideas may be seen in two stages: the origin and production of ideas, and the mechanisms by which ideas influence policy. First, at the individual level of analysis, one may examine the origin and/or the “transmission” of ideas (i.e. the process of how new ideas develop). The literature tells us that new ideas develop during times of crisis, when “windows of opportunity” are opened whereby new beliefs can help people solve policy dilemmas. This thesis examines whether this was the case in Russian foreign policy during the outbreaks of conflict in the near abroad. The second way in which ideas have been said to develop is through a process of “learning”. In this fashion, the foreign policy ideas of members of the political elite may have changed because of experience or “lessons learned” over time about the successes and failures of Russia’s policy or actions. This, too, is examined in the thesis.

However, most relevant to the thesis are the “pathways” or “mechanisms” by which ideas are said to affect policy options.⁵⁷ In each of the following three paths (derived from the international relations literature seen above), policy would be different in the absence of the particular idea. In the first path, a consensus over underlying preferences may guide policy. Ideas thus influence policy by serving as “focal points”, that is by developing cohesion among groups.⁵⁸ Especially when there are no objective criteria on which to base a choice, ideas can focus or shape the co-ordination that leads to the adoption of a particular policy. Second, ideas may create “road maps” by which ideas guide policy choice by framing a consensus over security problems and suggesting policy.⁵⁹ This is especially significant during a time of great uncertainty. After an idea has been selected, this pathway limits the adoption of other ideas because it suggests that they are not worthy of consideration. Third,

⁵⁷ Keohane and Goldstein suggest three “causal pathways” through which ideas hold the potential of influencing policy outcomes Judith Goldstein and Robert O. Keohane, “Ideas and Foreign Policy: An Analytical Framework”, in Goldstein and Keohane, *Ideas and Foreign Policy* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1993) pp.3-31.

⁵⁸ Geoffrey Garrett and Barry Weingast develop at great length this hypothesis that shared beliefs may act as “focal points” around which the behaviour of actors converges. Garrett and Weingast, “Ideas, Interests and Institutions: Constructing the European Community’s Internal Market”, in Judith Goldstein and Robert Keohane, *Ideas and Foreign Policy* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1993), pp.173-207.

⁵⁹ As opposed to the role of cognitive psychology in the emergence of ideas and the formation of preference.

ideas may be institutionalised and put on the political agenda thus making them significant in policy decisions.

Following these propositions, Chapter Three outlines the different ideas about Russia's identity and shows how different ideas spawned different policy prescriptions. Chapter Four explores whether a consensus developed over pragmatic nationalist ideas and whether they created a "road map" by suggesting a policy framework which limited the importance of other liberal westernist or fundamentalist nationalist ideas. It also examines whether pragmatic nationalism was put on the political agenda. In other words, was it institutionalised in official doctrines and concepts and adopted by key foreign policy-making institutions?

It must be re-emphasized here that it is difficult to separate out the role of debate and ideas from other factors, as power and political opportunism also influence stated convictions. Of course, Russian politicians often used ideas to achieve rhetorical and domestic goals without truly believing that these visions could actually be realized. However, as we shall see, in general the political elite adopted pragmatic nationalist ideas in an attempt to create and justify a policy framework that could then be employed to broadly define Russia's foreign and strategic interests. And although ideas about Russian foreign policy were often expressed more for domestic reasons than with the aim of directly influencing foreign policy, that does not at all mean that they had no influence on foreign policy.⁶⁰

The opposite argument to the proposition that ideas and debate matter in the development of policy is that the material setting (the constraints and incentives facing policy decision-makers) is the only crucial determinant. In other words, all models examining the importance of ideas depend on an implicit or explicit contrast to explanations rooted in material incentives. To counter that argument and to better understand the role of ideas, this thesis begins each of the three case study chapters with an examination of Russia's key interests – and asks how constraining the material environment was. In other words, how

⁶⁰ This is particularly true of their expression in political party manifestos and publications where the views were less likely to be directly incorporated into policies – as opposed to the views of key foreign policy participants and foreign policy decision-makers.

much room was there for debate about the fundamental direction of Russian foreign policy? Given the material setting, were there any realistic choices to be discussed? How much uncertainty was there over how Russia should react to the particular conflicts? Hypothetically, in some cases of Russian involvement in CIS conflicts there may have been a lot of uncertainty and thus ideas could have played a major role in the adoption of a particular policy option, whereas in other cases there may have been more agreement over what Russia should do and the role of ideas and debate could have had less influence.

The first half of each case study (Chapters Five, Six and Seven), therefore, examines Russia's key interests in the particular conflict – its security, economic and diaspora interests – and, briefly, how these interests were conditioned by Soviet and Imperial Russian history.⁶¹ For example, legitimate security concerns may have included preventing instability on Russia's borders and stopping the potential spill over of conflicts into Russia, including the related problems of refugees and arms smuggling. Russia also may have had a real interest in ensuring that no hostile outside power would exploit the instability in the CIS states and in protecting the ethnic Russian or Russian-speaking diaspora. However, contrary to realism in its purest form, the specific content of these interests, and the means by which they were to be achieved, were not certain. In fact, Russian interests varied towards each of the fourteen former republics. They changed over time, and their relative theoretical and practical significance was widely debated. Also, Russia's interests were often just as much a question of internal security, stability and domestic politics as they were based on "objective" realities.⁶² Thus, discrepancies between Russia's "real" interests and its perceived or officially declared interests are highlighted to show how constraining the environment was and how much uncertainty or room for debate over choices existed.

At the purely abstract level one could argue that behind any objective clash of interests lie sets of ideas which give practical content to states' definitions of their interests.

⁶¹ For the purpose of this thesis, the material setting will be defined as Russia's specific economic, diaspora and security interests.

⁶² This is explained in chapters three and four of the thesis. Other scholars make this point. See, for example, C. J. Dick, J. F. Dunn and J. B. Lough, "Potential Sources of Conflict in Post-Communist Europe", *European Security*, vol.2, no.3 (Autumn 1993), pp.386-406.

Thus there are not separate relations between two distinct things – foreign policy ideas and material interests. The way decision makers define security interests is derived from their collective historical, cultural, social, etc. understandings of their worlds.⁶³ And even when the importance of interests is acknowledged, it ought to be understood that "interest" itself is culturally constructed, and no action can take place without the benefit of meaning.

The second half of each case study examines the debates over Russia's foreign policy options towards the particular conflict in question and draws parallels with the overall debate about foreign policy in general. It attempts to determine which ideas were dominant, and highlights any "pathways" by which ideas may have affected policy. The new evidence and analyses are examined to determine whether (and if so, how) these case studies confirm or disconfirm what is known about the importance of the role of political debates and ideas in foreign policy formation.

In a system of interacting multiple causes, ideas and political debate may influence Russian foreign policy. The aim in this thesis is to discover whether or not they did in the development of Russian policy towards the near abroad during the years 1991-1996. To quote Max Weber, "Not ideas, but material and ideal interest, directly govern men's conduct. Yet frequently, "world images" that have been created by ideas have, like switchmen, determined the tracks along which action has been pushed by the dynamic of interest".⁶⁴ In other words, ideas help to order the world and how it is understood by decision-makers. By ordering the world, ideas shape policy agendas, which in turn can influence outcomes.

⁶³ Keith R. Krause (ed.), Culture and Security: Multilateralism, Arms Control and Security Building (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 1999).

⁶⁴Max Weber, "Social Psychology of the World Religions", in Hans. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (eds.), From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology, new edition, (Cornwall: T. J. Press, 1991), pp. 267-301, p.280.

Chapter Three: Foreign Policy Ideas and Their Manifestation in Key Foreign Policy Orientations

With the break-up of the Soviet Union in 1991, an increasingly open and complex political debate flourished over foreign policy principles. Under the former Soviet regime, foreign policy had generally been the preserve of a small elite core of the Communist Party.¹ With the collapse of the one-party state, a wider range of ideas and interests was vociferously articulated in the new domestic political context. The political elite began to express its diverging opinions within a burgeoning array of political parties, parliamentary and governmental institutions, as well as academic think tanks and the media. Although foreign policy-making continued to be highly personalised and focused on the interaction and rivalries among key leaders, in practice it was developed within the broad domestic political arena and was part of a larger battle over conflicting beliefs and visions mediated by various group interests.

The struggle within the political elite over which ideas would guide Russia's foreign policy had significant ramifications in the context of a state with a weak tradition of democratic political culture and ill-defined political institutions. In the realm of Russian foreign policy formulation, the political elite in parliament, government and political parties provided leadership and acted as channels through which the diverse pressures from the domestic community were brought to bear on the policy process.

The uncertainty of how to create new foreign and security policies provided the context for a broad spectrum of opinions.² Domestic political groupings with differing foreign policy orientations exerted influence upon the Russian foreign policy decision-making process. Therefore, despite many practical constraints, a wide range of approaches and alternatives in

¹ Of course, the pre-Revolutionary Russian intelligentsia had been publicly active in debating politics, although foreign policy in Tsarist Russia was made by a very narrow group. Even throughout the (especially early) Communist years, foreign policy disputes among a small section of the political elite could be discerned. Gorbachev, in effect, revived the tradition of debate. Margot Light, The Soviet Theory of International Relations (Brighton: Wheatsheaf, 1988).

² In the Soviet era, the CPSU was in charge of security policy. The USSR was perceived to be a socialist state surrounded by a hostile, capitalist world. The "Brezhnev Doctrine" promoted the idea that force was justified to maintain socialism in Eastern Europe.

terms of both conceptual and specific policy questions influenced Russian foreign policy from 1991-1996.

This chapter identifies the broad, dominant ideas about foreign policy that helped to structure and set the parameters of both the general foreign policy thinking of the Russian political elite and also the narrower, more specific, policy orientations and proposals concerning the near abroad. The first section identifies and outlines the key ideas expressed by the political elite as it sought to define a new national identity for Russia, a new state mission, self-perception, geography, politics and economics. These key ideas or underlying preferences helped to structure how Russians thought about foreign policy, providing the options for debate and policy-making.³ The second section categorizes these ideas into three basic foreign policy orientations: liberal westernism, pragmatic nationalism and fundamentalist nationalism. Each orientation suggested a “road map” or particular set of foreign policy options and policy proposals towards the near abroad. In the third section the main political groups and their specific foreign policy views are examined within these three categories. Finally, we focus particularly on the ideas which made up the pragmatic nationalist orientation during their ascendancy from 1991 to 1996 in order to foreshadow the detailed examination of the evolution of foreign policy in Chapter Four.

1. Categories of Ideas

Ideas about a country’s place in the world do not develop in a vacuum. They are tied to the specific economic, social and political realities at any given time as well as to the dominant ideology of the polity. Therefore although the ideas here are examined in isolation they are to be viewed as emerging within a nexus of economic, social and political structures within Russia and also worldwide. In the following chapters ideas will be tied to particular foreign policy participants.

³ “Everything that goes on in our country in foreign and domestic policy is the consequence of a restructuring of priorities in the consciousness and behaviour of people...” Vitaly Tretyakov, editor-in-chief of *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, in a roundtable discussion, “Growing Support for New Foreign Policy in Russia”, *International Affairs*, Moscow, vol. 42, no.5/6 (1996), pp.15-31, p.18.

a) The Quest for Russian National Identity and National Interests

Members of the Russian political elite faced many challenges in creating a foreign policy for their new state. Since foreign policy is inherently linked to perceptions of national identity, one of the basic challenges they encountered was to create a new national identity for their country. Politicians often create and manipulate images of their nation and its place in the world – and these images tend to form the basis of their thinking about foreign policy.⁴ In the case of Russia, the domestic debate over foreign policy 1991-1996 was inextricably tied to the issue of how Russian citizens defined themselves, their territory and their relationship with the outside world. In fact, the variety of foreign policy views and the emotion with which they were expressed were reflective of the fact that foreign policy choices were not simply based upon perceptions of realist or pragmatic interests but were based upon differing conceptions of the “raison d’être” of Russia.

The difficulty of how to define Russia stemmed partly from that fact that Russia was not a nation-state, but rather, as Geoffrey Hosking colourfully described it, “the bleeding hulk of an empire”.⁵ With the break-up of the Soviet Union it was no longer obvious who the Russians were or where the borders of the new Russian state should be. Under communism, people were supposedly subordinate to one uniform, collective identity. Russians, however, had perceived themselves to be the “indispensable bonding agent of the empire”.⁶ There had been a widespread perception of sharing a common fate while under a single state.⁷ When communism collapsed, people were left without any clear-cut collective or individual identities.⁸ Therefore, many analysts argue that after 1991 Russian national identity acquired

⁴ William Bloom, Personal Identity, National Identity and International Relations (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

⁵ Geoffrey Hosking and Robert Service (eds.), Russian Nationalism, Past and Present (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1998), p.5.

⁶ Gerhard Simon, “The Historical Prerequisites for Russia’s Modernization”, Aussenpolitik vol.49, 3rd quarter (1998), pp.67-85, p.75.

⁷ Pavel Baev argues this point in his exploration of Russia’s identity crisis in “Russia’s Departure from Empire: Self-Assertiveness and a New Retreat”, pp.174-196 in Ola Tunander, Pavel Baev and Victoria Ingrid Einagel (eds.), in Geopolitics in Post-Wall Europe (Oslo: International Peace Research Institute, 1997).

⁸ Of course, even a multinational empire begged obvious questions such as should Russia be based on a Tsarist or Soviet tradition? And which peoples should be included? See Dominic Lieven, “Russian, Imperial and Soviet Identities”, reprinted from the Transactions of the Royal Historical Society, 6th Series, vol.8 (London: Butler and Tanner Ltd, 1998), pp.254-269. “The adjective “Russian” in the English language is a translation of two

a dual nature: on the one hand it was based upon its own ethnic concept and on the other that of a multinational state.⁹

Moreover, without the former Imperial framework, the orphan Russia had in effect to recreate itself while altering its self-perception as the “elder brother” of the Soviet Union. This process of reinvention continues today, and has been central to the development of relations between Russia and the former Soviet republics. In other words, from the early modern period until 1991 the creation of empire was a central driving force of politics. Colonisation and the expansion of state borders went together and areas were colonised beyond the borders of the old Great Russian heartland.¹⁰

In 1991, the Russian political elite, as well as the general population, had to come to terms with the dramatic collapse of communism and its former empire. Overnight Russia had reverted back to its pre-Petrine borders. This realization was (and continues to be) a gradual process which involved forging a new post-imperial mentality based upon Russia’s new geopolitical realities and weaknesses. National interests had to be disengaged from former imperial interests and recreated based upon an understanding of Russia’s new current domestic and geopolitical context.

There were various ways in which Russia’s national identity could have been defined. Which ideas were chosen to define Russia’s identity (who Russians are, what Russia’s borders and the importance of history should be) influenced how the former Soviet states were perceived and thus the development of Russia’s foreign policy towards the near abroad. One way of defining “who the Russians are” was linguistic, so that Russia would include all “Russian-speakers” in the former Soviet states. A second way was to define Russia ethnically so that it would be composed only of those with ethnic Russian origins. A third way was to

Russian words with clearly distinct meanings. The first word, *rossiyskiy*, is traditionally associated with the Russian dynasty and state, the institutions through which it ruled and the territory over which it exercised sovereignty. By contrast, the word *russskiy* is linked to the Russian people, culture and language”. p.254

⁹ In Russia, the state had always been defined as the nation. Nationality (*narodnost*) was inextricably identified with the institutions of the state which were often seen as the expression of a collective will.

¹⁰ “Russia’s history... is the history of a country undergoing colonisation, and having the area of that colonisation and the extension of its State keep pace with one another”. Vasily O. Kluchevsky, A History of Russia, 1st publication 1904-21, translated by C. J. Hogarth, 5 vols. (London: J.M.Dent and Sons Ltd., 1931), p.209.

define it as a Slavic entity, thus including all peoples of Slavic origin. Alexander Solzhenitsyn was a firm advocate of this latter definition. He argued for the reintegration of Russia with northern Kazakhstan, Belarus and Ukraine. A fourth possibility was to give Russia a broader “Union” identity. In this fashion, Russians would be defined as an “imperial people” by their mission to create a supranational state.¹¹ Despite great differences, both Gennady Zyuganov and Vladimir Zhirinovskiy (who was also an advocate of the Slavic definition) argued for this viewpoint. Fifth, Russia could have been defined as a civic state whose members are all Russian citizens regardless of their ethnic or culture background. Galina Staravoiteva, Yeltsin’s advisor on inter-ethnic relations in 1992, for example, promoted this idea of a de-ethnicised nation. Prime Minister Gaidar and Valery Tishkov¹² (who had the civic definition incorporated in the 1993 constitution) were also early advocates of this definition.¹³

Another key distinction in the positions on identity concerned Russia’s 1991 borders. Generally, those who argued that Russia should be a civic state were in agreement that the 1991 borders of the Russian Federation should be kept intact. In contrast, those who defined Russia in terms of linguistics interpreted Russia as including the Russian Federation and also those areas of the Soviet Union inhabited by Russian-speakers. Similarly, those who rejected the linguistic definition but believed that Russia had a wider “Union” identity also did not accept the 1991 borders. Of course, it was possible to oppose the 1991 borders in principle while at the same time agreeing to them in practice.¹⁴

The broad importance given to Russia’s history (Soviet or Tsarist) also corresponded to the various ways of defining Russians and the Russian state. For example, those who defined Russia as a civic state within the Russian Federation’s borders usually believed that Russia’s history was of little importance to the future of the country and viewed the collapse

¹¹Vera Tolz, “Forging the Nation: National Identity and Nation Building in Post-Communist Russia”, Paper given at BASEES conference, Cambridge March 98. Also See Vladimir Pastukov, “Paradoksal’nye zametki v sovremennom politicheskom rezhime”, *Pro et Contra*, vol.1 (Fall 1996), pp.6-21.

¹² Valery Tishkov was Minister of Nationalities from February to October 1992 and participant in the Chechen negotiations in 1994 and 1996. See his book *Ethnicity, Nationalism and Conflict in and after the Soviet Union* (London: Sage Publications, 1997).

¹³ Of course, a civic state was not by definition opposed to an all Slavic or all-union polity.

¹⁴ As, for example, German attitudes to partition before 1989.

of the USSR as a positive event. In contrast, for example, those who perceived Russians as having a “Union” identity and who disputed the 1991 borders, generally believed that Russia’s history should play a crucial role in her future and that the collapse of the Soviet Union was a negative event.

b) Defining Russia’s Mission

The newly independent Russian state faced other fundamentally different choices in determining its broad vision of the future. It could have attempted to restore elements of the Soviet or Tsarist past and to promote future developments according to a prescribed historical or even divine “mission”. In contrast, it could have renounced any overarching mission and based its future development on a more step-by-step or ad hoc basis. A third option was for Russia to define a new and unique vision for its future. The 19th century philosopher Vladimir Solovyov had been the first to coin the term the “Russian idea” (Russkaya idea) to describe the nation’s unique historical mission.¹⁵ Later, Nikolai Berdiaev wrote about Russia’s destiny or “mission” as the “new Jerusalem”. He described the “Russian idea” as a political belief in “moral or even eschatological absolutism, secrecy, total dedication, conspiracy, martyrdom” and defined Russians as a special spiritual, organic people with a mission to transform society.¹⁶

After 1991, Russian politicians attempted to redefine the “Russian idea”. This entailed a search for a national perspective, or national self-image, which could explain in the context of Russia’s history where Russia was trying to go, and its role in the world. In other words, the “Russian idea” was not necessarily a rigid and prescribed state ideology but rather a looser set of values which would replace Marxism-Leninism and around which people could unite.¹⁷ In other

¹⁵ See Patricia Cohen, “Russian Philosophy is Given its Head”, The New York Times, March 13, 1999, pp. A15, A17.

¹⁶ Nikolai Berdiaev, The Russian Idea (London: G. Bles, 1947). Berdiaev was deported in 1922.

¹⁷ Eduard Batolov distinguishes between the search for a Russia national idea and national ideology. He writes that the national idea “discusses general and quite abstract matters, such as the place in the world to which a particular nation is ‘predestined’... the direction of its movement and the meaning of its existence. Translated into everyday language, these may be expressed as follows: Who are we? Why are we here? Where are we going?” An ideology is “a more or less rigid and closed system of views – of the world, society, the state and the person – directed at protecting the interests of a specific community”. Eduard Batalov, “Where Are We

words, it was not a political doctrine instituted by the state but a common vision for the nation based on the values its people shared.

c) Psychological Identity

The Russian elite also had the choice of defining their new state as a “normal” or “great” power. In the search for a new role for Russia, many leaders across the political spectrum argued that Russia must regain its status as a great power, although a minority rejected any such claim as harkening back to Russia’s old imperialistic ways. The popularity of the great power rhetoric was unsurprising given that Soviet Russia had gone from being one of two world superpowers to just one more supplicant “at the gates of the West”. In fact, by the 1995 elections, all of Russia’s political parties were justifying or supporting their policies on the basis of Russia’s supposed “greatness”.¹⁸ Even Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev, who had previously shunned the phrase, frequently employed in his speeches the image of Russia as “doomed to be a great power”. Russian greatness became such a dominant idea in Russian foreign policy that Russian analyst Andrei Piontkovsky concluded that Russia “has not been ruled by principles, national interests or cynical calculations but exclusively by - complexes of phantom grandeur”.¹⁹

The rhetorical emphasis on the renewal of Russian greatness was based upon a belief that Russia’s enormous territorial size and wealth of natural resources were sufficient to guarantee it significance and influence on the world stage.²⁰ There was debate, however, over how Russia should act to become a great power. This issue is examined in detail both below and in Chapter Four. However, very briefly, the pro-Westerners in the political elite generally denied that Russia was unique and instead insisted that Russia was a “normal” power whose

Heading? On a National Idea and a State Ideology”, in Russian Politics and Law, vol.35, no.5 (September-October 1997) pp.40-45, pp.41- 42.

¹⁸ The author used two collections of political party platforms to justify her argument: Election Platforms of Political Parties Participating in the Elections for State Duma (Moscow: International Republican Institute, December 6, 1995) and Russia’s Political Almanac (Moscow: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1999). (CD Rom)

¹⁹ Andrei Piontkovsky, “Season of Discontent”, Moscow Times, June 24, 1999. (Johnson List #3358)

²⁰ This was not unusual. The British, and even more so the French, were also determined to count in the world after having lost their empires.

importance in world politics would have to be achieved through working with the West and international institutions. In complete opposition, the anti-Westerners believed that Russia's greatness was defined by its opposition to the West and its rightful interest in the former Soviet states. The dominant centrist view was that Russia's greatness depended upon its power to define its own, separate interests and act on them.

d) Political and Economic Direction

How Russia was defined psychologically was intertwined with the historic question of what direction Russia's political and economic development should follow. Should Russia follow the Western economic and political path of development (i.e. a post-1945 US, liberal/capitalist definition) or go its own unique way? In the immediate aftermath of the disintegration of the Soviet Union, these simple alternatives concerning Russia's domestic policies led to different foreign policies.²¹

Extreme pro-Westerners in the Russian political elite believed that the process of liberal reform in domestic politics and economics was desirable and inseparable from the successful development of good relations with the West. They advocated Russia's integration into Western institutions such as the European Union (EU), and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). They called for the abandonment of both the myth of Western hostility and the illusions of Russia's moral and cultural superiority.²²

Anti-Westerners, on the other hand, were against marketisation and democratisation. They believed that Russia's integration into Western institutions would be a humiliating process that would allow the West a means to control Russia and to interfere in her internal affairs. The West's faith in parliaments and constitutional guarantees was seen by some as a symptom of a decaying civilisation that had replaced moral cohesion with empty legalism.

²¹ Iver Neumann traces the conflict between "Nationalists" and "Westernizers" over their approaches to Europe to writings in the Soviet and Tsarist periods. See his book Russian and the Idea of Europe: A Study in Identity and International Relations 1800-1994 (London: Routledge, 1995).

²² For example, Tatiana Parkhalina (Deputy Director, Institute of Scientific Information for Social Sciences (INION), and a self-proclaimed extreme pro-Westerner). Author's Interview with Parkhalina May 24, 1999.

Of course, it is important not to exaggerate the distinctions between these two basic orientations. The Russian elite has always held exceedingly complicated and contradictory attitudes about the West.²³ Between these two extremes, a moderate position held that Russia should pursue liberal democratic and market reforms but also take into account Russia's unique conditions. Those who held this centrist position proposed an independent path for Russia while developing a cautious alliance with the West.

e) Geographical Identity

In the search to define Russia based on geographical considerations, the political elite had the option of seeing Russia either as belonging to the West or as part of "Eurasia". The latter, the "eurasian idea", had originated with some of the émigré thinkers of the 1920s (Prince Nikolai Trubetskoi, Nikolai Berdiaev) and was related to Mackinder's theory of "Heartland" which envisioned control over the Eurasian landmass as the "pivot of world politics" in the 19th century.²⁴ Eurasianism stood not only for a particular type of culture and thinking, but for many it also provided the basis for a policy in which Russia's geographical position was understood as separate from Europe.²⁵ This interpretation of eurasianism, advocated in the 1990s by the philosophers Lev Gumilev²⁶ and Elgiz Pozdnyakov²⁷, was equal to geopolitical determinism in which the state's interests are defined in terms of control of a specific territory.

From 1991 to 1996, the eurasianist idea became increasingly attractive because it fit with the reality of the eastward movement of Russia's borders and justified a focus on the

²³ See Vladimir Shlapentokh, "Old, New and Post Liberal Attitudes Towards the West: From Love to Hate", *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, vol.31, no.3 (1998), pp.199-216.

²⁴ Sir Halford Mackinder, "The Geographical Pivot of History", *Geographical Journal*, vol.20, no.4 (April 1903), reprinted in *The Scope and Methods of Geography and the Geographical Pivot of History* (London: The Royal Geographical Society, 1951), pp.30-44, p.38.

²⁵ See Jens Fischer, *Eurasismuss: Eine Option Russischer Aussenpolitik?* (Berlin: Berlin Verlag Arno Spitz, 1998). The real question here is not whether Russia is a Eurasian country by strict definition (geography, civilisation, idea) but whether Russia chooses to define itself as Eurasian. In other words, how Russia's foreign relations develop will be decided within Russia.

²⁶ Lev N. Gumilev, *Ot Rusi do Rossii* (Moscow: Ekoproc., 1992).

²⁷ Elgiz Pozdnyakov, "Russia is a Great Power", *International Affairs*, Moscow, vol.39, no.1 (January, 1993), pp.3-13. Pozdnyakov explains that the eurasianist view holds that Russia is a geopolitical balance or bridge between Europe and Asia. He interprets the consequences of eurasianism as geopolitical determinism.

renewal of ties with the CIS states as well as Russia's Eastern neighbours.²⁸ Eurasianist ideas also flourished at this time because economic disparity between Russia and the West was increasing and security concerns and cultural differences between Russia and Europe were reinforcing the historic feeling of Russian "otherness" from Europe.²⁹ In Russia there was a sense of humiliation, dependence on and resentment of the West.³⁰ Eurasianism was, therefore, a useful alternative concept with which to guide Russia's separate foreign policies as well as to provide support and credence to a range of political orientations.

From 1991-96, members of the elite across the whole political spectrum referred to the eurasianist idea in their writings and policy prescriptions. Some politicians even used the premise that Russia was the centre of the Slav and Turkic peoples across the Eurasian continent to support their belief that Russia should ultimately reintegrate with the regions of the former Soviet republics.³¹ Others used eurasianist ideas not only to support their foreign policy goals but also to appeal to the Muslim peoples living within Russia itself.³²

Although politicians widely adopted the vague idea of eurasianism, they differed in how to implement policies based on it. Many nationalists and communists presented the eurasianist idea alongside their ideas for a strong state and spiritual regeneration.³³ For example, as will be shown below, the Communist Party stressed the need for a Russia-centred, Eurasian and geopolitical approach as the cornerstone of its foreign policy. A minority of extremists used eurasianism as a justification for potential future expansionism and an increased emphasis on military and security interests. By 1993, an increasing number of former westernizers also

²⁸ Sergei Stankevich, political advisor to Yeltsin argued for eurasianism in Nezavisimaya Gazeta, March 28, 1992, p.4.

²⁹ From 1991 to 1996, Russia was, to a limited extent, courted into joining economic and security institutes of the "New Europe" but not ones in which Russia helped to form or would exert great influence.

³⁰ Eurasianism had been popular among the White emigration. Their humiliation because of their loss of status and their situation as despised guests in the West helps to explain eurasianism's psychological attractions. As well, the fact that eurasianism in 1890-1930 had a Tsarist/conservative or Bolshevik/revolutionary thrust shows that in both cases it was against Western liberalism.

³¹ For example, Sergei Stankevich. See Aleksandr Rahr., "'Atlanticists' versus 'Eurasians' in Russian Foreign Policy", RFE/RL Research Report, vol.1, no.22 (May 29 1992), pp.17-22.

³² Roman Szporluk, "The National Question", in Timothy J. Colton and Robert Levgold (eds), After the Soviet Union from Empire to Nations (New York/London: W.W. Norton, 1992), pp.84-112.

³³ Deputy Sergei Baburin interpreted eurasianism as geographical and authoritarian as well as belief in the special character of Russia. Author's Interview with Baburin, May 22, 1999.

adopted the slogan of “Eurasia” in order to gain popular support for their liberal westernist agenda.³⁴ These “liberal eurasianists” argued that Russia should support Western ideas such as the market economy and political pluralism, but also adopt the eurasianist idea of Russia as a bridge between East and West.³⁵

2. The Key Ideas/Stated Views Underlying the Three Basic Foreign Policy Orientations Among the Political Elite 1991-1996

The fact that there were not yet well-defined Russian political groups and parties with stable membership makes it difficult to classify the members of the political elite and their foreign policy during the period 1991-96. Differences among political groups were often ambiguous, and the presumed adherents of one school of thought frequently mixed incoherent ideas and images, thereby defying classification. Moreover, convictions among the political elite often changed with shifts in the constellation of power and the unstable domestic context.³⁶

Nevertheless, the different ideas or ways of thinking about Russia seen above structured three key foreign policy orientations: liberal westernism, pragmatic nationalism and fundamentalist nationalism.³⁷ These orientations informed different foreign policy options and policies towards the former Soviet republics. Each orientation served as a “road map” by suggesting particular policies and limiting others. In this way ideas shaped foreign policy choices.

Unsurprisingly, some members of the Russian political elite were more concerned with their own personal interest³⁸ than with the interests of the state. However, there were a

³⁴ Author’s Interview with Yabloko leader Grigory Yavlinsky, July 25, 1995.

³⁵ The British elite had adopted similar geopolitical ideas post-empire – e.g. they saw Britain as being a bridge between the US and Europe.

³⁶ Of course, it is often difficult to ascertain what politicians sincerely believe. This thesis focuses rather on publicly stated views. The frustration of Russian academics in trying to analyse Russia’s foreign policy can be summarised in Russian academic Dimitry Trenin’s (Carnegie Institute) exasperated comment that “There is no Russia: only lots of players, playing many games at once”. Author’s Interview with Trenin May 25, 1999.

³⁷ As used throughout this thesis the terms liberal westernism, pragmatic nationalism and fundamentalist nationalism are borrowed from Neil Malcolm et al. Internal Factors in Russian Foreign Policy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

³⁸ Personal interest often equates to monetary interest. In an interview with the author, radical democrat Duma

number of politicians involved in thinking and writing about how to make Russian foreign policy. As is illustrated below, three disparate, basic foreign policy orientations determined the prevailing trends that guided policy. As for the general Russian public, it must be emphasised that it was overwhelmingly preoccupied with daily survival, and similar to the general public in most states, it paid little attention to the details of foreign policy debates.³⁹

The three orientations examined below are “ideal types”. Individual politicians, of course, held more nuanced views which varied in intensity and over time. In each case, the combination of ideas which composed the orientation is examined (see Table 3.1) and then the resulting foreign policy path is drawn (see Table 3.2). The three orientations therefore are examined only briefly and in isolation here because they are examined in detail within the context of their chronological evolution and their interplay with those people who gave voice to them, in Chapter Four.

a) Liberal Westernist Ideas and Foreign Policy Orientation

The typical liberal westernist foreign policy orientation was based upon the premise that Russia’s identity should be defined as a civic state in the boundaries of the Russian Federation. This orientation was founded on the idea that Russia had no usable Tsarist or Soviet history on which to base its new policies, and that the break up of the Soviet Union

deputy Konstantin Borovoi stressed personal interest, often monetary, as a primary motivating factor for Russian politicians. “You can buy deputies’ support here for everything. It’s all about money. You buy support for a proposal by paying money directly. It’s very simple here, it is a bribe country. For example, it can cost today 70 million rubles, maybe a little more, to buy support for NATO activities in Yugoslavia. In this sense Duma deputies are very pragmatic... Zhirinovsky’s position (he is like a crazy man, but at the same time very pragmatic) is to get as much money as possible from his interactions with Iraq or Milosovic or the Baltics. It is the same thing with our military institutions; they act like lobbies to get money and to survive. They use their influence with politicians in order to influence political decisions. The Chechen war was a perfect vehicle for them to get money, it was very clear, very understandable”. *Author’s Interview*, May 21, 1999. See also “Cash for questions scandal in Moscow”, *The Times*, October 27, 1999. Vladimir Trofimov, chief of staff of the Duma’s International Affairs Committee, was arrested for allegedly taking cash for asking questions and proposing Bills to parliament (\$500 per question and \$10,000 for Bills).

³⁹ Many of the author’s interviews with academics emphasised these last two points. For example, Russian academic Dimitry Trenin (Carnegie Institute) repeatedly stressed that Russia is a “country without a purpose; the people are disoriented and concentrating on survival”. *Author’s Interview* with Russian academic Dimitry Trenin, May 25, 1999. Russian academic Irina Zviagelskaya (Institute of Oriental Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences and participant in Tajik negotiations) emphasised that the foreign policy debate is constrained by three factors: a realisation that the democratisation process is not working; people are tired of talking about politics; and the enormous polarisation of wealth. *Author’s Interview* with Irina Zviagelskaya, June 8, 1999.

was a positive act. This accorded well with the parallel goals of liberal democracy, market reforms and the prioritisation of relations with the West.

Liberal westernizers denigrated the nationalist search for a unique Russian “national idea” or a separate Russian path as simply a way of justifying the recreation of an empire. They also rejected the eurasianist idea that Russia could become a bridge between Europe and Asia. Instead, for them Russia was a “normal” state, with no overarching mission, whose future was to be a modern, liberal state coexisting in a benign international environment.⁴⁰ The liberal westernizers’ worldview was one of a peaceful, non-antagonistic world with principled beliefs (ideas of how the world ought to work) of equality among nations, anti-imperialism, protection of human rights and freedoms, and respect for international law.

It follows that politicians with these views developed policy positions which relegated relations with the former Soviet republics to a secondary position vis à vis with the West. Their policies toward the near abroad were based upon the principles of equality of states, mutually advantageous co-operation and non-interference in other states’ domestic affairs. With Russian interests placed squarely in the West, the only threat to Russia was deemed to be the return of communism or its growth in other states.⁴¹

As will be clarified below, many of the early liberal westernizers’ ideas were somewhat unrealistic – the belief in the rapid marketisation of Russia, the swift development of peaceful co-operation among world states and, especially, the premise that Russian and Western interests would from now on coincide on most issues.

b) Fundamentalist Nationalist Ideas and Foreign Policy Orientation

In contrast to the liberal westernizers, fundamentalist nationalists (which included the extreme nationalists and communists) believed in an ethnic or Slavic definition of Russia. Russia’s borders were thus seen either to extend beyond the Russian Federation or to be

⁴⁰ Andrei Kozyrev, “Vneshnyaya Politika Rossii”, *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, December 13 1992, p.2.

⁴¹ The liberal westernists’ domestic political preference for a democratic state and rapid transition to market economy helped to explain their understanding of a benign international environment and their belief in diplomacy over force. Conversely their belief in a benign international environment and faith in international organizations and institutions served their domestic goals of economic marketisation and democracy.

narrowly confined to the areas populated by ethnic Russians in Russia. Despite differences, fundamentalist nationalists agreed that certain elements of Russia's history were highly significant to Russia's future; that the collapse of the Soviet Union was negative; and that the West was to blame for it. They agreed that Russia's spiritual essence and prestige had to be saved and that it ought to continue its historical, even divine, mission to create an "organic society". The typical fundamentalist nationalist worldview was one of hostile states in which Russia was losing its status as a Great Power. This view of Russia surrounded and threatened by enemies fit with the domestic policy of the fundamentalist nationalists which was anti-democratic and anti-marketisation – and was not unlike the former Soviet perception of threat which had been used to justify the centralisation of power in communist hands.

Correspondingly, the principal foreign policy proposals of the fundamentalist nationalists were not centred on trying to integrate Russia into the world economy or to build relations with the West. Instead, they wanted to recreate a greater Russia – which for example, some, envisioned as the rebirth of the Soviet Union, others as a unitary Russian state modelled upon the Tsarist Empire. Therefore, many continued to advocate in some form the restoration of the territory of the former Soviet Union. The key threats to Russia were seen as coming from the West or Turkic states, but these would be offset by Russia's close relations with the near abroad.

Despite the similarities, however, it will be shown later in this chapter that there were important differences among the fundamentalist nationalists – most prominently between Zhirinovskiy's Liberal Democratic Party of Russia and the more cohesive communists, represented from 1993 mainly by Zyuganov's Communist Party of the Russian Federation.

c) Pragmatic Nationalist Ideas and Foreign Policy Orientation

A third category of foreign policy ideas within the Russian political elite was constituted by the pragmatic nationalists. For them, Russian identity was generally defined linguistically and thus they strongly championed the defence of Russian-speakers in the near abroad. They agreed with the fundamentalist nationalists that Soviet and Russian historical

legacies ought not to be completely dismissed, that the collapse of the Soviet Union was unfortunate and that the country's former prestige must be restored. Members of the political elite in this category accepted the liberal westernist goal of liberal democracy and marketisation but wanted the process of transition to take Russian conditions into account. They were wary of one-sided relations dominated by the West. They also envisioned Russia as great power with its own interests and a mission based on its geopolitical position between East and West.

The pragmatic nationalists' views led them to advocate a "unique but non-expansionist" foreign policy which would allow Russia to regain its status as a great power but without empire. "Russian special interests in the CIS" was substituted for "Great Power interests", and military force was deemed acceptable if necessary to protect these vaguely defined interests. Pragmatic nationalists were, in essence, political realists who argued for a rational analysis of national interests and their defence. They advocated a balanced foreign policy to reflect Russia's real needs in specific circumstances. These specific interests were to be derived from "objective" factors such as geopolitics – the space Russia occupied in Eurasia, its socio-ethnic makeup, and concrete economic interests. Thus, unlike the liberal westernist position, they held more views typical of the foreign policy elite of other developed states.

The pragmatic nationalists understood the world as organised according to the principle of "Balance of Power" in which strong states protect their spheres of interests and, unlike the liberal westernists, they identified specific threats to Russia which included the treatment of the Russian diaspora and NATO expansion. Thus, their view of the international environment was more hostile than that of the liberal westernists but more ambivalent than that of the fundamentalist nationalists.⁴²

⁴² Glenn Chafetz divides political leaders' views' about international politics in three categories: Those who see the world as interdependent and highly institutionalised (the liberal view); those who see it as a "Hobbesian war of all against all" (the communists and chauvinists) and those who take a middle view (here "pragmatic nationalists"). Chafetz uses role theory to examine the sources of these theories of international politics. See Glenn Chafetz, "The Struggle for a National Identity in Post-Soviet Russia", *Political Science Quarterly*, vol.111, no.4 (1996-97), pp. 661-688, p.662.

Table 3.1 General Ideas and Stated Views Which Formed Foreign Policy Orientations

CATEGORIES OF IDEAS	LIBERAL WESTERNISM	PRAGMATIC NATIONALISM	FUNDAMENTALIST NATIONALISM
IDENTITY (WHO ARE THE RUSSIANS)	CIVIC: RUSSIANS IN RUSSIA	LINGUISTIC: RUSSIAN- SPEAKERS IN FSU	UNION: ETHNIC RUSSIANS OR SLAVS IN FSU, OR ETHNIC: ETHNIC RUSSIANS IN
HISTORY	NO USE	IMPORTANT	CRUCIAL
COLLAPSE OF USSR	POSITIVE	NEGATIVE	NEGATIVE/BLAME WEST
RUSSIA'S BORDERS	RUSSIAN FEDERATION	RUSSIA (AND PARTS OF FSU)	RUSSIA AND PARTS OF FSU/ RUSSIAN FEDERATION
WORLDVIEW	PEACEFUL, UNANTAGONISTIC	BALANCE OF POWER	HOSTILE, SURROUNDED BY ENEMIES
GEOGRAPHY	WEST	EURASIA	EURASIA
SELF PERCEPTION	"NORMAL" POWER	GREAT POWER WITH OWN INTERESTS	GREAT POWER WITH EMPIRE
MISSION (RUSSIAN IDEA)	NO MISSION	UNIQUE, GEOPOLITICAL MISSION	HISTORICAL, DIVINE MISSION
DOMESTIC POLITICS AND ECONOMICS	LIBERAL DEMOCRACY AND MARKET REFORMS MODELLED ON WEST	LIBERAL DEMOCRACY AND MARKET REFORMS, TAKING RUSSIAN CONDITIONS INTO ACCOUNT	ANTI-DEMOCRATIC AND ANTI- MARKETISATION

⁴³ The breakdown of these elite views into three foreign policy orientations called liberal westernism, pragmatic nationalism and fundamentalist nationalism is adapted from Neil Malcolm et al., *Internal Factors in Russian Foreign Policy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

Table 3.2 Russian Foreign Policy Orientations and Proposed Policies

FOREIGN POLICIES	LIBERAL WESTERNISM	PRAGMATIC NATIONALISM	FUNDAMENTALIST NATIONALISM
FOREIGN POLICY DIRECTION	WEST	OWN PATH	EXPANSIONISM OR ISOLATIONISM
THREATS	COMMUNISM	ANY WHICH THREATENS FSU INTERESTS (diaspora, NATO expansion)	WEST/PAN TURKIC
RELATIONS WITH FSU	NOT SIGNIFICANT	CRUCIAL	CRUCIAL
BROAD POLICY PROPOSALS TOWARDS FSU	SUPPORT SOVEREIGNTY, EQUALITY OF STATES, NON INTERFERENCE	PROTECT RUSSIAN INTERESTS/ SUPPORT RIGHTS OF RUSSIANS IN NEAR ABROAD	FUTURE REINCORPORATION OF CERTAIN FSU AREAS/ ISOLATIONISM

d) Foreign Policy Orientations and Views about How to React to Conflicts in CIS States

The ideas within the three key foreign policy orientations seen in Table 3.1 not only account for the different foreign policy proposals seen in Table 3.2 but also on the whole the policy responses to the outbreaks of conflict during this period. Although the political elite generally agreed that military conflicts in the CIS threatened Russian security, the three foreign policy orientations differed strongly concerning how Russia should react to such conflicts. See Table 3.3.

Very briefly, the liberal westernizers widely interpreted the definition of Russian security to include economic and political issues as well as military ones. They therefore interpreted the settlement of CIS conflicts as being only one of Russia's major security

interests and wanted to limit Russia's involvement. The CIS conflicts were understood as being resolvable. Solutions lay not in the unilateral use of military force (which would counter the goal of integrating Russia into the Western international community) but in negotiations and multilateral efforts through organizations such as the UN or OSCE. Moreover, the proponents of liberal westernism argued that accepting the need to send Russian troops into volatile regions would mean agreeing that Russia faced a hostile international environment and feared that taking such actions could boost anti-democratic forces within Russia. They held that the Russian diaspora should be protected through reinforcement of human rights and international law.

Pragmatic nationalists agreed with the liberal westernizers that Russian security was at risk due to conflicts in the near abroad. However, they interpreted the conflicts as more likely to be zero-sum – in which one party's gain in the conflict was by definition equal to the other side's loss. They considered the key threats to Russia to be those concerning Russia's interests in the near abroad, advocating Russia's active involvement in the FSU (including forceful involvement to achieve peace in the region) and a search for international approval for her role as peacekeeper. The pragmatic nationalist definition of Russian security interests as primarily geopolitical meant that they advocated political, economic, and even military means to secure the fate of the Russian diaspora and were supportive, though wary, of multilateral resolution efforts.⁴⁴ In contrast, although the fundamentalist nationalists also generally believed the conflicts to be zero-sum, security interests were seen to be primarily military and unilateral military force was generally understood to be of paramount necessity both for conflict resolution and in order to protect the diaspora. International involvement in the post-Soviet space was generally understood as undesirable.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ See Sergei Stankevich, "Derzhava", *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, March 28, 1992, p.4.

⁴⁵ Yury Glukhov, "Russian Foreign Policy Under Fire", *Pravda*, February 24, 1992, p.2.

Table 3.3 Foreign Policy Orientations and Stated Views about Conflicts

STATED VIEWS	LIBERAL WESTERNISM	PRAGMATIC NATIONALISM	FUNDAMENTALIST NATIONALISM	
			COMMUNISTS	EXTREME NATIONALISTS
RUSSIAN INTERESTS	NEW DEFINITIONS OF SECURITY (e.g. Environmental)	GEOPOLITICS	MILITARY AND ECONOMIC	MILITARY AND OTHER
MEANS TO SOLVE CONFLICTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ NEGOTIATIONS, ▪ MULTILATERAL ACTION ▪ NO MILITARY FORCE 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ NEGOTIATIONS ▪ MULTILATERAL ACTION ▪ MILITARY FORCE (IF NECESSARY) 	VARIOUS INCLUDING MILITARY FORCE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ MILITARY FORCE ▪ UNILATERAL ACTION ▪ OR NON-INVOLVEMENT
MEANS TO PROTECT DIASPORA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ HUMAN RIGHTS ▪ INTERNATIONAL LAW 	POLITICAL, ECONOMIC SANCTIONS	MILITARY AND NON-MILITARY ACTION	MILITARY FORCE

3. The Three Foreign Policy Orientations and Specific Policy Proposals of Key Political Groups

With the break-up of the Soviet Union in December 1991, political parties and the Russian parliament became increasingly significant sources of opposition activities including the articulation of various foreign policy beliefs and strategies. However, as early as the August 1991 coup, the many political movements that had been spawned under Gorbachev's "glasnost" and were united in their opposition to the communist centre, began to fragment. The loss of a common "anti-Communist" purpose gave rise to a fluid and unstable, nascent party system, with political parties, factions and groups continually appearing, splitting, dissolving and merging. By 2 February 1992, thirty-eight political organizations were registered with the Russian Ministry of Justice. By May 1993 this number had risen to 1,800.⁴⁶ However, despite the weaknesses of the new political parties, a few dominant parties

⁴⁶ The proliferation and instability of political parties may simply reflect the general confusion about political loyalties and uncertainty about the future of Russia. The rise of multiple parties may also be seen as an indicator of a deep crisis of cultural identity. In Russia this was accompanied by a legacy of cynicism, alienation and despair engendered by Leninist rule and unfamiliarity with norms of civil participation.

represented in legislative institutions increasingly influenced the political process by means of their own political, financial and informational resources.⁴⁷

On the whole, party stances on foreign policy were based more on basic ideas and beliefs than on substantive analyses of the issues. Key political leaders in the years 1991-96 adopted ideas from the three foreign policy orientations outlined above (liberal westernist, fundamentalist nationalist and pragmatic nationalist) and their choices led to the creation of specific foreign policy proposals which are explored below.⁴⁸ This section, therefore, examines key political party leaders' public expression of the "ideal-type" orientations outlined above.

At this formative stage the political parties were very weak, unstable and with limited financial resources. Nevertheless, three main political blocs congealed and developed foreign policy proposals congruent with the three key foreign policy orientations discussed above. Very simply, the radical opposition composed of the communist and nationalist forces adhered to fundamentalist nationalist views; the reformists or liberal democrats promoted liberal westernist views and the centrists presented pragmatic nationalist views.

a) Communists and Nationalists: Fundamentalist Nationalist Proponents

The left-wing Communist Party of the Russian Federation led by Gennady Zyuganov and the right-wing Liberal Democratic Party led by Vladimir Zhirinovskiy were the two largest and most influential communist and nationalist political groups during 1991-1996.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ See Micheal McFaul, Sergei Markov and Andrei Ryabov (eds.), The Formation of the Political Party System in Russia (Moscow: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1998).

⁴⁸ Although political parties did not very often focus on a set of well-defined foreign policy issues (they hardly ever do so in Western democracies either), they did simplify and focus policy options and thus provided guidance to both the public and the foreign policy decision-makers. Even when precise foreign policy options are not clearly set out by a party, it is important to understand the basic thrust of their ideas which if later expanded could promote a future policy (assuming the ideas remain unchanged). It must be continually kept in mind that ideas were deployed not as a scholastic exercise, and often not as a guide to realistic foreign policy, but largely as a political tool to gain votes and create cohesion in their respective movements. See, Ian Budge and Dennis J. Farlie, Explaining and Predicting Elections: Issue Effects and Party Strategies in Twenty-Three Democracies (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1983), p.22.

⁴⁹ There were many other smaller and more extreme parties outside the power elite. For example, extreme-right fascist group Russian National Unity (RNU) headed by Alexander Barkashov (which was created in September 1990 but did not have representation in the Duma). Another political party, the Russian Party led by Nikolai Bondarek also argued for an ethnic Russia state. Dimitry Vasiliev and the organisation Pamyat (begun in the 1980s and which lost out to other nationalist organisations in the 1990s but continued to hold demonstrations) argued for the Russian Empire to remain intact with the ethnic Russians the rulers of a Slavic nation. Alexander

Despite many differences, both were active in advocating a fundamentalist nationalist orientation, comprising a centralised, authoritarian, anti-Western, expansionist great power state with a mission to renew historical practices and ties – especially in the former Soviet states.

i) Gennady Zyuganov and The Communist Party of the Russian Federation

The Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF) was revived in Feb 1993 and began to forge a popular communist-patriotic synthesis which featured some of the old values of Marxism-Leninism alongside Russian nationalist and traditionalist ideas.⁵⁰ Its leader Gennady Zyuganov promoted a form of national socialism which argued that the class struggle had been replaced by a clash of civilizations between Russia and the West which threatened Russia's existence. This mix of ideas allowed Zyuganov to promote an alliance of communists and nationalists, "the red-brown alliance", which demanded that Russia be allowed to pursue its own unique path of development based upon spiritual values – although the content was mostly unspecified. In the words of Valery Solovey, Zyuganov's overall thinking formed "an ideological, political and propagandistic myth couched in a quasi-scholarly form".⁵¹ This myth was sometimes wrapped in extreme Russian nationalist discourse but, as shall be shown later, his actual foreign policy prescriptions were more moderate than his rhetoric.

Barkashov, "Krizis mirovoi tsivilizatsii, rol Rossii i zadachi russkogo natsionalnogo dvizhenia" (The Crisis of World Civilization, the Role of Russia and the Russia National Movement), Russkii Poryadok, no.1-2 (1995), pp.1, 2.

⁵⁰ However, Zyuganov did reject many of the ideological traditions of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), unlike hard-line Communists Viktor Anpilov and Nina Andreeva who still upheld dogmatic Leninism and Stalinism. Zyuganov supported democracy, mixed ownership and constitutional federalism.

⁵¹ Author's Interview with Solovey, June 1, 1999. Also see Joan Barth Urban and Valery D. Solovey, Russia's Communists at the Crossroads (Oxford: Westview Press, 1997). This was the first book to examine the multiple components of the post-Soviet Russian communist movement and the CPRF's organisational and programmatic development and conduct. Although the authors explore the differences among the communist political groups, they stress the fact the groups all agreed that Russia was being changed into a colonial outpost of the West which was led by the US, and that the dissolution of the USSR was an act of treason by Yeltsin and Gorbachev. p.104.

In Zyuganov's worldview, the real threat came from the West.⁵² He blamed the collapse of the Soviet Union on the West and treacherous politicians such as Gorbachev and Yeltsin. The West, led by the United States, was seen as attempting to build a "new world order" which envisioned the introduction of a global regime of political, economic, and military dictatorship. Thus, in Zyuganov's terms, those who resisted the break-up of the Soviet Union and those who now resisted Russia's subordination to the West (including its individualism, immorality, materialism and protestant egoism) were "patriots" "whose duty it was to help Russia fulfil its "special historic responsibility".⁵³ Russia was seen as uniquely positioned to stop the spread of evil, immorality and militarism from the West and spread its superior Russian (and Slavonic) culture. He depicted Russia as "the pivot and chief bulwark of the Eurasian continental block, the interests of which conflict with the hegemonic tendencies of the United States".⁵⁴

Zyuganov argued that the Soviet Union was the true historical continuation of the Russian imperial tradition and insisted upon the artificiality of the current boundaries of the Russian Federation. He advocated a doctrine which would "absorb all the valuable and positive elements that characterised the international activity of both pre-Revolutionary Russia and the USSR".⁵⁵ He envisioned Russia's future as a multinational, secular, great power with strong links to its Communist past.

It therefore is clear that with the end of communism, Zyuganov was attempting to substitute a new mission or "Russian idea" for Marxism-Leninism. He wrote that the former Union must be re-established as a "great power" state (*derzhava*) which would lead to the

⁵² Gennady Zyuganov, *Derzhava* (Moskva: Informpechat, 1994) p.40.

⁵³ See the following of Zyuganov's works: *Drama vlasti* (Moscow: Paleia, 1993) p.174; *Veriu v Rossiю* (Voronezh: "Voronezh", 1995) and *Za linei gorizonta* (Moskva: Informpechat, 1995). Zyuganov's analytical centres, Spiritual Heritage and RAU Corporation, were dominated by former Marxist-Leninists in charge of finding new definitions and theories of the nation.

⁵⁴ For his foreign policy views see Zyuganov *Pravda*, December 10, 1993, p.1, and for Zyuganov's report to the Third CPRF Congress see *Sovetskaya Rossiya*, January 24, 1995, p.1.

⁵⁵ A collection of Zyuganov's thoughts and ideas 1993-95 that were written in various newspapers and magazines while he was organising his opposition movement has been published. The book has been translated into English in full as part three "Russia and the Contemporary World: Let Russia Be Russia", in Gennady Zyuganov, Vadim Medish (ed.) *My Russia: The Political Autobiography of Gennady Zyuganov* (London: Sharpe, 1997), pp. 91-138. See especially pp.122-124.

resurrection of Moscow into the “Third Rome”.⁵⁶ He felt he had a positive mission to restore the “Union” or “Fatherland”, as well as to preserve Russia’s spiritual and cultural distinctiveness.⁵⁷

These ideas led Zyuganov to propose a new foreign policy based upon what he called “healthy pragmatism”.⁵⁸ He rejected the former excessive ideologisation of foreign policy and the old communist goal of “world revolution”. Instead, he argued that Russia should oppose as much as possible the growth of American hegemony and seek positive elements from Russia’s past. A contradictory mix of isolationism in world affairs and the development of international ties characterised Zyuganov’s general foreign policy orientation. In terms of relations with the CIS states, Zyuganov consistently argued until 1996 that the collapse of the Soviet Union was dangerously destabilising and that the voluntary restoration of the union of former Soviet peoples was an historical necessity dictated by both Russian needs and those of world security.⁵⁹ In the 1995 election platform, the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF) called “upon the governments and peoples of the illegally disintegrated Soviet Union to recreate a single unified state in good will”.⁶⁰ Zyuganov supported the need to strengthen Russia’s military (mostly for defensive purposes), an act which was strongly supported by the large numbers of former military and security officials within the party.⁶¹

⁵⁶ Zyuganov, *Derzhava* (Moskva, Informpechat, 1994), p.37, p.43.

⁵⁷ Zyuganov’s ideas were greatly influenced by both Sergei Kurginyan and Aleksandr Prokhanov. See the discussion between Kurginyan and Prokhanov in *Den*, January 1-9 1993, pp.1-2. Kurginyan’s Experimental Creative Centre in Moscow regularly produced ideological materials for Zyuganov. See Veljko. Vujacic, “Gennadiy Zyuganov and the Third Road”, *Post-Soviet Affairs*, vol.12, no.2 (April-June 1996), pp.118-154.

⁵⁸ *Author’s Interview* with Zyuganov, June 29, 1996, Duma. Zyuganov’s outline of his foreign policy platform was reported by *Intercon Daily Report on Russia*, March 27, 1996 (Lexis-Nexis).

⁵⁹ See Zyuganov’s comments in Vladimir Andean, *Izvestiya*, February 3, 1996, p.3.

⁶⁰ CPRF platform in *Election Platform of Political Parties Participating in the Elections for State Duma* (Moscow: International Republican Institute, December. 6, 1995), p.44.

⁶¹ Even by 1996, when it was clear that the old Soviet Union would not be resurrected, Zyuganov headed several attempts to pass the Duma resolution denouncing the dissolution of the Soviet Union. His reasoning behind these attempts was not that the Soviet Union should be re-created, but rather that there continued to be a real need for a political and moral assessment of the Belovezhskaya Agreements which could later promote the gradual reintegration of some of the former Soviet republics. This resolution was put before the Duma 14 times. *Author’s Interview* with Valery Solovey, June 1, 1999 and Thomas de Waal “Russian MPs vote in favour of reviving the Soviet Union”, *The Times*, March 16, 1996, p.11. For the reactions of ten of the leaders of the former Soviet states to the Duma’s passage of the resolution denouncing the Belovezhskaya agreements see *Intercon Daily Report on Russia*, March 18, 1996 (Lexis-Nexis).

Zyuganov believed that Russia had significant interests in the near abroad. In 1996 he wrote that while “restoring the destroyed geopolitical space, we should remember that everything connected with the territory of the former Soviet Union is a zone of our vital interests.”⁶² Issues which he deemed important to Russia included conflicts, crime, economic divergences, and access to transportation and communication structures.⁶³ In particular, he stressed that Russia should be concerned with the fate of the Russian diaspora in the near abroad which he saw as an integral part of the Russian nation.⁶⁴ Zyuganov verbally supported the use of Russian military force to solve particular conflicts but he did not argue that Russia should be generally involved in military adventurism in the former Soviet states. Despite his strong rhetoric, when asked about specific foreign policy options Zyuganov argued in 1996 that Russia should act only in ways that would bring the state economic and political benefit, and should avoid actions which could result in direct losses or damages to the country.⁶⁵

ii) Zhirinovskiy and the Liberal Democratic Party

The position of the ultra-nationalists, represented in the 1993 and 1995 parliaments by Vladimir Zhirinovskiy's extreme nationalist thinking, was a mixture of largely contradictory ideas which make serious analysis of its foreign policy position difficult.⁶⁶ For example, he stated that he desired both peace and imperial conquest.⁶⁷ However, Zhirinovskiy's Liberal Democratic Party was the only political party to focus on foreign policy and he consistently used great power chauvinist ideas to advocate his vision of a statist and expansionist Russia.⁶⁸

⁶² Zyuganov's outline of his foreign policy platform was reported by Intercon Daily Report on Russia, March 27, 1996 (Lexis-Nexis).

⁶³ Alexei Podberiozkin, “Vyzovy bezopasnosti Rossii” (The challenges to the securing of Russia” Svobodnaya Mysl', no.12 (1996), pp.67-69.

⁶⁴ Zyuganov quoted in Nezavisimaya Gazeta, December 15, 1995, p.2.

⁶⁵ Author's Interview with Zyuganov, June 29, 1996.

⁶⁶ Robert Service concludes his analysis of Zhirinovskiy's ideas by saying that Zhirinovskiy is “part fascist, part-communist, part liberal, part imperialist, part fantasist. He blends Russian chauvinism, Marxism-Leninism, eurasianism, European fascism, individualism, Slavophilism, multiculturalism and the contemporary consumerism. Robert Service, “Zhirinovskii: Ideas in Search of an Audience” in Geoffrey Hosking and Robert Service (eds.), Russian Nationalism Past and Present (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998) pp.179-197, p.196.

⁶⁷ Zhirinovskiy election speech on Red Square, June 20, 1996.

⁶⁸ Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, Rossiyskaya Gazeta, December 3, 1993, p.1. Also Author's Interview with Alexei

Zhirinovskiy's foreign policies included many of the same general ideas expressed by Zyuganov.⁶⁹ For example, Zhirinovskiy asserted that the break-up of the Soviet Union was unacceptable, that the United States was at fault and that Russia should now continue its historical mission – and once again what this mission was was unclear. Also similar to Zyuganov, Zhirinovskiy used the idea that Russia's statehood and culture were under threat from the West. However, for Zhirinovskiy, pan-Turkism was depicted as an even greater enemy than the West. With this hostile worldview, Zhirinovskiy like Zyuganov drew up his plans to “save Russia”.

Based upon his ideas, Zhirinovskiy's minimalist foreign policy goal was to restore the territory of the Russian Empire of the Tsars and the USSR. This was to be accomplished through reincorporating the former republics into some new kind of “Russia”⁷⁰, by ending overseas aid, halting military conversion, continuing the sales of arms, and assisting Russians in the near abroad.⁷¹ Specifically he contended that the conflicts in the CIS states were a direct result of the lack of a forceful Russian military presence and the rise of Islamic extremism, both of which should be reversed. Aimed at the Russians in the near abroad he proposed “the defence of Russians throughout the territory of Russia and the former USSR”.⁷²

Thus, a significant difference between Zhirinovskiy and Zyuganov was that Zhirinovskiy advocated Russian involvement by any means (including military force) in order to pacify the region. Also unlike Zyuganov, his ambition to reassert Russian power did not

Mitrofonov, Zhirinovskiy's number two, June 20, 1995. Mitrofonov was also the Chairman of the State Duma's Committee on Geopolitics.

⁶⁹ Besides their penchant for conspiracy theories, both men have proclaimed their nostalgia for Stalinism, their hostility to liberalism and parliamentarism and their fondness for xenophobic rhetoric. However, despite their common hostility to liberal capitalism the two parties have distinct positions and appeal to different sections of the electorate. The LDPR stands for market economy, the CPRF for mixed economy. Zyuganov's support tends to come from elderly pensioners and blue-collar workers, Zhirinovskiy's from unemployed urban youth. (In contrast “reformist” support has been strongest in Moscow and among entrepreneurs and intellectuals).

⁷⁰ See A. Orlov interview with Zhirinovskiy in Sovetskaya Rossiya, October 2, 1991, p.2.

⁷¹ See the LDPR political programme in “Chto me predlagaem: Predvybornaia programma LDPR”, Iuridicheskaya Gazeta, nos.40-41 (1993) pp.4-5. The LDPR had two newspapers, Pravda Zhirinovskoga (Zhirinovskiy's Truth) and Sokal Zhirinovskoga (Zhirinovskiy's Falcon)

⁷² Author's Interview with Aleksei Mitrofonov, June 20, 1995.

stop at the borders of the former Soviet Union but continued southward into Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan and beyond. In his 1993 book, The Last Thrust South, he audaciously wrote that

It [Russia] is the Eurasian continent... It is the Arctic Ocean washing our northern border, it is the Pacific Ocean in the Far East. It is the Atlantic by way of the Black and Baltic Seas. And in the long run, it is the Indian Ocean, where we fulfil our final "southern dash."⁷³

Uniquely, Zhirinovskiy tied Russian survival and prosperity to territorial expansion. He described Russia as a humiliated, poor and oppressed country and stated that his goal was to recreate Russia as a great power. He saw the reincorporation of Russia's southern neighbours as necessary for Russia's future peace and prosperity.

Of course, Zhirinovskiy's foreign policy proposals were often unrealistic and aimed mainly at gaining media attention. His strong showing in the 1993 parliamentary elections was more a vote against the government than for his Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR). However, the evident emotion behind his foreign policy proposals attracted wide support and helps to explain why other political parties copied, to a limited degree, his assertive style and more aggressive focus on foreign policy.

b) The Centrists: The Pragmatic Nationalist Orientation

The centrist political parties described themselves as a third way between Yeltsin's regime and the communist-nationalist patriotic coalition. In terms of foreign policy, the most prominent and influential centrists were in the political movement Yabloko and the individual politician and General Aleksandr Lebed. Both adopted a pragmatic nationalist orientation. The political movement Yabloko was the main centrist group to advocate an alternative foreign policy. General Lebed was not the leader of a political group until after the period under study – however his views are discussed here because of his popularity within the military, his key role in the near abroad conflicts and, later, his role in decision-

⁷³ Zhirinovskii, Poslednii Brosok Na Iug (Moskva: TOO "Pisatel", 1993), pp.93-94.

making positions in domestic politics and foreign policy. Most particularly, Lebed's views significantly influenced Russian thinking about foreign policy towards the near abroad.⁷⁴

i) Yabloko

Between 1991 and 1993, the key centrist political party was the political movement Civic Union (which consisted of many political groups such as Social Democratic organisations, Democratic Party of Russia, Renewal, and the People's Party of Free Russia). After 1993, however, the parties within the Civic Union split and the new groups went in different directions. For example, former Vice President Alexander Rutskoi's People's Party of Free Russia became more conservative. Meanwhile, the Yabloko⁷⁵ political movement (founded in 1993) moved closer to that of the increasingly centrist government.

Yabloko stood for radical marketisation and democratisation. Thus, unlike the old Civic Union, it was against state intervention in the economy. Vladimir Lukin (Chairman of the Duma's Foreign Affairs Committee) wrote that the search for a "Russian Idea" was necessary for Russia to find a national purpose and sense of identity – although he warned of the possibility of aggression that could develop from this search.⁷⁶

The members of the electoral block Yabloko have been termed "civilised patriots" for their alternative foreign policy position.⁷⁷ Yabloko was the most foreign policy oriented of the centrist political groups and its reasonable, pragmatic policies may have helped it convince the government to adopt some of its foreign policy positions.⁷⁸ Yabloko called for a

⁷⁴ For an analysis of the military in parliament see Françoise Dose, "The Military in Parliament, 1989-95", *Russian Politics and Law*, vol.35, no.5 (September-October 1997), pp.77-88.

⁷⁵ Yavlinsky, Boldyrev, Lukin (hence the acronym YABLOKO) were the leaders of the 1993 and 1995 Yabloko electoral bloc.

⁷⁶ See Lukin's views on the West in Lukin and Anatoly Utlin, *Rossiia i Zapad: Obshchnost ili Otchzheniye?* (Russia and the West: Community or Estrangement?) (Moscow: SAMPO, 1995).

⁷⁷ Duma deputy Konstantin Borovoi used this term. *Author's Interview* with Borovoi, May 21, 1999.

⁷⁸ Yabloko member Aleksei Arbatov argued that "The revival of Russia's military political domination in post-Soviet space at any price, just as any policy of revival in the past, is fraught with immense costs and setbacks". He proposed "a comprehensive economic integration with Ukraine, Belarus and Kazakhstan in the first place... that will ensure co-operation among ex-Soviet republics on a new basis... Thus, realism, the clearness of purpose and predictability are urgently essential today for remedying the critical situation in the sphere of security and in the foreign policy of Russia". Aleksei Arbatov, "Russia's New Role in World Politics" *New Times*, November 1995, pp.46-49.

balanced strategy based upon Russia's geostrategic interests and criticized one-sided Western ties, arguing that Russia's foreign policy should be conducted in terms of a strong defence of Russia's national interests.⁷⁹ Lukin envisaged Russia as a great power, with special interests in the near abroad and with ties to both the East and West. Lukin also argued for the need to settle and prevent armed conflicts in the CIS, to protect the Russian-speaking population, and to create (preferably by stimulating natural integrative processes) a confederal system encompassing the former Soviet republics.⁸⁰

Yabloko's foreign policy priorities consisted of the political settlement of armed conflicts around Russia and the creation of a defence alliance among CIS states, although Yabloko members such as Anatoly Adamishin warned of the possibility of Russian isolation as a result of such actions.⁸¹ Yabloko was the only key political party which was clearly and vocally against the use of force (as demonstrated by its unique stance against Russia's early involvement in the first Chechen war). It also supported the development of relations with NATO, although it was against placing Russian troops under NATO control.

In early 1995, the Kremlin attempted to co-opt the popular policies of the centrist parties, and two new parties with executive links were created in time for the elections. Both of these parties, the centre-right Our Home is Russia led by the Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin and (the less successful) centre-left party led by the speaker of the Duma, Ivan Rybkin, expressed pragmatic nationalist foreign policy views.⁸² Our Home is Russia, which

⁷⁹ *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, September 10, 1992, p.2.

⁸⁰ Vladimir Lukin, *Segodnya*, September 2, 1993, p.3.

⁸¹ *Author's Interview with Anatoly Adamishin*, June 9 1999.

⁸² The election program of the Ivan Rybkin block stated that "A Russian external policy must be weighted and unbiased: it must be neither Western nor Eastern – it should be Russian". It stated that "...the major direction of Russian foreign policy initiatives should be the Commonwealth of Independent States. The mutual interlacing of destinies of peoples who have lived together on the territory of our common Motherland for hundred of years is the major fact determining our position in respect to the near abroad. The peoples of the former USSR enjoy sovereignty in choosing their historic destiny. No objections by the West may deprive them of their right to co-operation and to voluntary unification". The block's policy proposals included the establishment of military co-operation in the CIS, the organisation of common protection of boundaries and collective security and "activities" to ensure "the destiny and well-being of 25 million Russians residing beyond the Motherland".

In comparison, the 1995 election platform of Our Home is Russia made little reference to foreign policy but did call for increased economic integration with the CIS states, to "ensure the rights and freedoms of our compatriots in the former USSR countries, and to increase Russia's credibility in international affairs". See *Election Platforms of Political Parties Participating in Elections for State Duma* (Moscow: International Republican Institute, December. 6, 1995).

was closely linked to the gas industry, argued particularly for economic integration with the former Soviet states within the framework of the CIS.⁸³

ii) Alexandr Lebed

A vocal and influential opponent of the government's foreign policy, General Alexandr Lebed⁸⁴ also premised his foreign policy thinking on the idea that Russia was a "great state", deserving of respect and patriotism, but inexcusably weakened by ill-conceived policies of Gorbachev and Yeltsin. He used "statist" (gosudarstvennik) and "eurasianist" ideas to create a vision which John B. Dunlop has described as a harmonious union of Russians and non-Russians together "within a single political entity".⁸⁵ Lebed judged the break-up of the Soviet Union to be a geopolitical catastrophe, and predicted that future (gradual and voluntary) reintegration of many of the CIS states was inevitable.

Lebed envisioned Russia as a bridge between East and West and the leader of the post-Soviet space. He often argued that Russia should not act in any way to jeopardise peace with the Muslim world.⁸⁶ He wrote that:

Russia, and it alone, is able to organise anew this spiritual place... The peoples of the former USSR already understand that until recently they lived in a great country and now survive in petty states without any help or love from a prince beyond the ocean. Precisely together with Russia they will occupy a worthy place in the world...⁸⁷

⁸³ Economic and defence groupings backed various political parties but they are not explored here because they did not become well defined until after 1996. Parties with economic backing included Konstantin Borovoi's 1992 Economic Freedom Party, Arkady Volsky's party and Grigory Yavlinsky's Entrepreneurs for New Russia (before Yabloko was created in spring 1993).

⁸⁴ Lebed was an officer in Afghanistan in 1981-82. In 1998 he was a commander of the Tula Paratroop Division. He was commander of this elite division in Baku (Nov. 88), Tbilisi (April 1989), Baku (Jan. 90), and was commander of Russia's 14th Army from June 92-June 95 in Transdnistria. Lebed won 15% the first Russian presidential ballot in June 96 and was then co-opted by Yeltsin to join his cabinet. From June 18 to October 17 1996 he was Secretary of Russian Security Council and aide to the President for national security affairs.

⁸⁵ John B. Dunlop, "Alexandr Lebed and Russian Foreign Policy", *SAIS Review*, vol.17, no.1 (Winter-Spring 1997), pp.47-72, p.50.

⁸⁶ Unlike many of the present day Russian nationalists, Lebed has expressed respect for Muslims. He was against the Chechen war largely because he saw it as pitting Russian against the entire Muslim world.

⁸⁷ In Jamestown Foundation Prism (jf-monitor@andrew.cais.com) no.19, May 1995.

As an army man, Lebed promoted the renewal of the military and the development of a new defensive doctrine which he believed to be both a positive and necessary link to Tsarist Russian history.⁸⁸ Until the Chechen war, Lebed was part of a powerful military clique which included fellow commanders Defence Minister Pavel Grachev, Deputy Defence Ministers Boris Gromov and Georgy Kondratyev and Colonel-General Viktor Sorokin.⁸⁹ In the early years after the break-up of the Soviet Union, these members of the Russian high command openly promoted an activist military role in the CIS states (some analysts believe that they continued this policy under the guise of “peacekeeping”) in order to settle ethnic conflicts on Russia’s terms and to support Russians in the near abroad.⁹⁰

However, although Lebed advocated reintegration (especially military) among the former Soviet states, he stressed that this process should be voluntary and not “neo-imperialist” and thus should be pursued through a mixture of “carrots and sticks”.⁹¹ He considered reintegration to be necessary for the economic development of Russia and the CIS states and also for the protection of the Russian minorities abroad – made even more urgent, in his opinion, by NATO’s aggressive expansionism.⁹²

⁸⁸However, there were divisions in military thinking. The Chechen events brought out divisions at the top of the Russian military command. Outright opposition by commanders such as Lebed created a precedent that military commanders could no longer be assumed to be in favour of the use of armed force. After that, it became more difficult to interpret Russian engagement in the CIS as being directed by Russian military commanders. Author’s Interview with Col. Gen. Nikolaev, Head of Russia’s Border Guards, June 8, 1999.

⁸⁹ Biographies of these generals can be found in Moscow News, no.14 (1993). Kondratyev was made responsible for Russian peacekeeping in the CIS until his dismissal early in 1995. Sorokin was head of the task force of Russian troops in Abkhazia during the period November 1992 - March 1993.

⁹⁰ Col. General Nikolaev (Head of Border Guards) at first supported a policy based on force to integrate the CIS into one military and economic unit and recreate the Soviet borders (minus the Baltic states). He later attempted to establish a unified CIS border command for guarding the external borders of the CIS, while leaving open borders among the states.” Author’s Interview with Col. Gen. Nikolaev, June 8, 1999.

⁹¹ As will be seen in the Moldova case study chapter, when Lebed assumed command of the 14th Army in Transdniestria initially he widely disseminated his views that Transdniestria was “part of Russia”. However, he was soon at odds with the corrupt leadership of Transdniestria (and thus was attacked by Russian nationalists). Once established in Transdniestria, he supported a rational, negotiated settlement to the conflict – although he was not adverse to strong-arm tactics if necessary. “I understood that in such situations you have to take sudden and harsh measures. It is a guarantee that blood will not flow for long”. As an army commander, he could not exert formal influence on foreign policy beyond Moldova but gained great popularity among mid-ranking Russian officers and his views on policies in the CIS became widely known.

⁹² This was the focus of his 1996 election statement. By 1996 Lebed was defining himself as a pragmatist with much “common sense” (zdraviy smysl). He viewed America as Russia’s key rival and NATO expansion as a new type of war in which the US is trying to gain new spheres of influence. Thus, he proposed that Russia should continue to concentrate on internal economic and military reforms and should slowly reconstruct its traditional alliances. See his 1996 Campaign Statement: Aleksandr Lebed, Mir i Poryadok (Moskva:

Lebed argued for the rights of the Russians in the near abroad states⁹³, a stand which became a significant and uniting factor in Russian foreign policy thinking. In the 1995 parliamentary elections, Lebed ran as the Vice Chairman of a new political organisation, the Congress of Russian Communities (KRO)⁹⁴ which used a somewhat nebulous patriotism to emphasise the need to build a strong state, improve the welfare and quality of life, and defend the interests of Russians. The KRO platform promised to restore Russia's prestige and status although it denounced aggressive nationalism.⁹⁵

We would ensure the status of Russia as a great world power. Foreign policy should be aimed at the implementation of vital national interests of Russia... economic and political integration is one of our priorities. We would build up the defence capability of the country. We would stop the tormenting of the Russian Army and its involvement in political disputes.⁹⁶

Thus, at first, Lebed criticized the government for its lack of force in dealing with the conflicts and later he championed the rights of the Russian diaspora. Then in 1996, holding a more central role in government foreign policy making, and faced with the fact that force was not resolving the Chechen conflict, he pragmatically promoted the popular position of using negotiation rather than force to end the Chechen war. The evolution of Lebed's foreign policy views (1991-1996) and those other members of the political elite is outlined and explained in detail in Chapter Four.

Moskovskogo in-ta stali i splavov, 1996).

⁹³There are many references to this in his autobiography: *Za Derzhavu obidno* (Moskva: Gregori Peidzh, 1995).

⁹⁴ The KRO was established by Yuri Skokov (who had uneasy relations with Lebed) and Dmitry Rogozin.

⁹⁵ When the party failed to clear the 5% barrier, and before the 1996 presidential election approached, Lebed announced that he would form a "Third Force" with Grigory Yavlinsky and eye surgeon Svyatoslav Fedorov. When this failed, and he then won over 15% of the popular vote in the first round of the presidential elections, Lebed reached an agreement with Yeltsin in which he would pledge his support for Yeltsin and in return be made Security Council Chief. Lebed then worked on the Chechnya negotiations until he was fired from the position after negotiating an end to Chechen war.

⁹⁶ "Congress of Russian Communities 1995 Election Platform" in *Election Platforms of Political Parties Participating in the Elections for State Duma* (Moscow: International Republican Institute, December. 6, 1995).

c) Reformists: The Liberal Westernist Orientation

Reformist parties are only briefly mentioned here because their views are examined in great length in Chapter Four where we study the evolution of the political debates. The key reformist party, Democratic Russia, which became Russia's Choice in 1993, comprised the reformist members of the government and, at least in the early years, generally supported the foreign policies of their member Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev. They advocated a liberal westernist orientation: close relations with the West and international institutions, respect for the sovereignty of the CIS states, and support for political negotiation of conflicts over the use of force. In terms of the CIS states, they generally supported minimal and gradual economic reintegration. For example, Sergei Glazyev, who helped to write the foreign policy program of the Democratic Party of Russia, called for the restoration of Russia's political and economic influence in the world and also linked economic recovery with Russian interests and integration in the near abroad.⁹⁷ In 1995, Russia's Choice focused its priorities of on three well-known concentric circles – the CIS, the West and the East. It supported cooperation with America and Western Europe; and neutrality over NATO expansion.

By 1993, the reformist parties split over the issue of whether or not to defend the Russian diaspora in the CIS states (whose cause was eventually adopted by Gaidar's Russia's Choice) and over whether or not to support the use of force in Chechnya 1994-96.⁹⁸

4. The Rise and Fall of Ideas or Underlying Preferences

In 1991 and 1992, there were different choices in terms of how to define Russia's national identity, geography, mission, self-perception and domestic political and economic direction. By 1993 those choices narrowed as many of the pragmatic nationalist ideas came to structure the debate within which Russian foreign policy was made towards the near abroad. Russia became widely seen to have a unique, geopolitical mission, to be

⁹⁷ Mikhail Berger, *Izvestiya*, April 3, 1993, p.2.

⁹⁸ Konstantin Borovoi explains his falling out with Kozyrev as because he did not support his Chechen policy. Author's Interview with Borovoi, May 21, 1999.

geographically part of Eurasia, a great power with its own pragmatic interests. Gradually a consensus developed that Russia should move in the direction of liberal democratic and market economic reforms while taking Russian interests into account. In principle, if not practice, the Russian political elite believed that Russia should have the right to protect Russians in the near abroad.

During these years, the worldviews of the most of the political leaders remained relatively consistent, simplistic and wrapped in bombastic rhetoric. Pragmatic and fundamentalist nationalists mourned the loss of connections with the past and blamed their opponents for this loss. They also outlined simplified myths about the world which explained the main threats to Russian security. To varying degrees most of key leaders across the political spectrum adopted great power rhetoric and the concepts of a Russian idea and eurasianism to validate their own political agenda. This helps to explain the similarity in how they defined Russian interests concerning the CIS states even when they advocated different means of pursuit.

The political leaders generally agreed that relations with the former Soviet states should be restored, but were vague about the means and time frame which should be followed. Although they used similar assertive discourse, the rhetoric was never followed up with official policies demanding the immediate restoration of Russian sovereignty over the former Soviet republics. Instead, despite the overall strong assertion of Russian interests, there developed a widespread assumption that Russia had neither the economic means nor the political will to follow old Soviet policies or even new neo-imperial ones.

Because of the sudden disintegration of the Soviet Union, it is not surprising that the idea of Russia's reunion with the former Soviet republics promised simple, if unrealistic, solutions to Russia's foreign policy questions and was, at least initially, rhetorically adopted (from its most extreme to most diluted versions) by many members of the Russian elite across the country's political spectrum. Russia was still a multi-ethnic community – which helps to explain its inherent interest in the near abroad. Moreover, the fact that Russia had

been a contiguous land empire made it much more difficult for modern Russia to abandon ties to its ex-empire than had been the case, for example, with Britain in Asia or Africa.⁹⁹

The entrenchment of imperialist ideas (belief in the creation of empire¹⁰⁰) in the Russian and Soviet past also helps somewhat to explain the popularity of slogans of national revival and other messianic components which were used by several political groupings to enhance their own legitimacy and expand their public support.¹⁰¹ The more moderate version of nationalism flourished across the Russian political spectrum and its appeal can be seen in the extent to which it informed both the debate and, to a lesser degree, policy towards the CIS states.¹⁰²

A key reason for the success of pragmatic nationalist ideas was that buying into Western liberal policies and principles did not lead to the anticipated rapid economic recovery. If the Russian economy had strengthened, it would have bolstered the positions of those who argued that the way to ensure Russian power and prestige was through alliance with the West. Instead, the idea of Russia defining its own, unique interests and following reforms which would take Russian conditions into account became increasingly popular, along with a generally critical stance towards what was widely seen as an arrogant West. This was

⁹⁹ See Dominic Lieven, Empires, Russia and her Neighbours (London: John Murray, 2000).

¹⁰⁰ The term empire refers to a relationship of dominance and subjugation between an imperial centre and its periphery. In an empire “one state controls the effective political sovereignty of another political society”. The term imperialism also involves the exercise of power as a means of control. The difference is that the term ‘imperialism’ describes a process, and ‘empire’ describes a product of that process. An appreciation of empire – both Russian and Soviet – helps to understand contemporary nationalism in Russia. The definitions come from: Michael Doyle, Empires (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986), p.45.

¹⁰¹ It must be emphasised that extremist foreign policy views, such as recreating the Soviet Union, were just that – extremist, and from 1991-96, a decreasing number actively supported them. See Yevgeny Kozhokin (Director of the Institute of Strategic Studies, Moscow), Obshchaya Gazeta, no.52 (December 28, 1995) p.3.

¹⁰² Many used moderate nationalist ideas in order to gain electoral support – even though there was generally little or no intention of acting upon them. Alexandr Motyl argues that “The discourses that sustained empire not only survived intact but also acquired enhanced plausibility as a result of the suddenness and comprehensiveness of collapse. Above all, imperial discourses were a balm on the ravaged psyches and cultures of metropolitan populations... Imperial discourses also offered a simple, if perhaps simplistic, political solution to post-imperial disarray. Re-conquering lost territories, reacquiring lost resources, re-establishing lost bases, and reclaiming abandoned brethren did indeed make some economic, military, and national sense. Finally, neo-imperialism served as a discursive substitute for absent or weak institutions. Members of the elite could forge a consensus of sorts by accepting an imperial language that established minimal rules of the game for all political actors. Aleksandr Motyl, “After Empire: competing discourses and inter-state conflict in post-imperial Eastern Europe”, in Barnett Rubin and Jack Snyder (eds.), Post-Soviet Political Order (London: Routledge, 1998), pp.14-33, p.24.

encouraged by the general disenchantment with Western liberal ideology seen through the “grey-coloured glasses” of corruption and poverty, as well as disappointment with the lack of Western economic assistance. The role of Western powers in overseeing “marketisation” created a widespread belief that Russia was threatened by enemies inside and abroad. Moreover, the West’s actions were beginning to be seen as undermining Russia’s role in the near abroad states.

Thus, although Russian politicians generally remained aware that the well-being of Russia depended upon good relations with the West, from 1991-96 even former pro-Westernizers became progressively more in favour of state intervention and social justice, and more wary of Western economic and political models. At the same time, the perception of the West as a rival was rehabilitated into political and foreign policy discourse.

By the 1993 parliamentary elections, the perceptions of both threat from the West and fear of rejection by the West united various groups across the political spectrum. The result often seemed to be a schizophrenic foreign policy towards the West that was not always driven by clear-cut national interests. For example, Russia blamed the West for Russian failures while at the same time asking for increased aid. However, more significant to this thesis is the fact that Russia’s differentiation from the West had as its counterpart an increase in more aggressive rhetoric along with a strong assertion of (ill-defined) interests in CIS states.

Several of the pragmatic nationalist ideas were relatively vague and had little meaning. Although there developed a consensus that Russia must outline a “mission” for its future, there was no agreement on its content. Russian politician Sergei Baburin credited himself as the “patriot” who resurrected the term “Russian idea” to emphasise the unique nature of the Russian nation. Russia’s history and culture, he explained, should condition its future development.¹⁰³ However the term was sufficiently vague that from 1991 to 1996 it

¹⁰³ Baburin argued that he was responsible for making the concept of a “Russian idea” acceptable and useful for the widely adopted “moderate nationalist”(eurasianist) view of Russia as a bridge between East and West. Author’s Interview with Duma Deputy Sergei Baburin, May 21, 1999. See also Sergei Baburin, Rossiyski put. Stanovlenie rossiskoi geopolitiki kanuna XX1 veka (Moscow: ANKO, 1995). He believed in a supraethnos of Russian people in which other groups would politically, if not culturally, merge. In other words, he described a Russia defined in more than ethnic terms.

was widely adopted and used in many different ways. For example, extreme nationalists used the concept as a base from which to advocate a more isolationist policy and separate Russian development. The extreme communists used it early on to support their policy that Russia should be revived as an empire (paradoxically on the basis of consent). Even Yeltsin himself sponsored a search for a new “Russian idea”.¹⁰⁴ By 1996 there had not yet developed any definitive elite (or popular) consensus over fundamental issues, from what Russia is and who Russians are to where they belong in the world.¹⁰⁵ However, as Russians slowly came to terms with the recent past, a consensus did seem to be forming that Russia’s historical and cultural heritage, however controversial, should not be completely abandoned but that elements should be capitalized on in the search for the most efficient way to modernize the country.

The increasingly widespread use of the concept “the Russian idea” in political discourse, and the new search for its modern definition, worried those who feared that a belief in Russia’s exceptionalism could develop into a dangerous messianism. The danger they surmised was that the attraction of the idea that Russia has a divine mission could (given the right circumstances) legitimise many aggressive actions while soothing psychological and socio-economic wounds. What is remarkable is that this has not occurred.

Similarly, the idea of Russian “greatness” was broad enough that it became widely accepted and eventually a majority of the political elite adopted “great power” rhetoric to support policies which would strengthen Russia and re-balance its relationship with the United States. One of the few areas of agreement was that close relations with the CIS states was necessary, if not sufficient, to ensure Russia’s status as a great power.¹⁰⁶ However, a

¹⁰⁴See, *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, July 30, 1996. This paper sponsored a search for a new “Russian national idea”. Previously, however, it had printed many articles about Russia’s historic search for this same “national idea”. See for example, September 10, 1993, p.3.

¹⁰⁵ See Russian academic Konstantin Pleshakov’s (Institute of USA and Canada) article which examines the history of “Russia’s Mission” and the current search. Pleshakov, “Russia’s Mission: The Third Epoch”, in *International Affairs*, Moscow, vol.39, no.1 (January, 1993) pp.17-26. “Of course the empire is gone. But its space – geopolitical, political, military, economic, cultural and intellectual – is not... The common post-Soviet space is a reality, and Russia’s borders within it are relative”, p.20.

¹⁰⁶ Of course, the idea of Russia as a Great Power motivating foreign policy has historic roots. In Tsarist times it was widely believed that “Whatever their actual cost to the metropolis, the non-Russian territories could certify Russia’s status as a great power. Far from being an irrational factor, as Joseph Schumpeter suggested,

minority of the members of the Russian elite continued to be adamantly against the use of “great power” rhetoric.¹⁰⁷

5. Conclusions

This chapter identified the dominant ideas that structured and set the parameters of the Russian foreign policy debate 1991-96. When the new post-Soviet era began, there were several different options concerning how to define Russia and shape its future development in terms of national identity, geography, mission, self-perception, and economic and political direction. As the political elite addressed these options, their general ideas, or underlying preferences, coalesced and helped to structure the debates about foreign policy.

In order to show how these ideas helped to guide foreign policy choice, we categorised three key foreign policy orientations of the political elite: fundamentalist nationalist, pragmatic nationalist and liberal westernist. The ideas underlying these three orientations (based on different categories of ideas), provided “road maps”, framed foreign policy issues and therefore helped to support policy proposals. They guided the three key foreign policy options and policies towards the near abroad states and the conflicts that arose there.

The specific foreign policy proposals of key political party leaders fit into the three foreign policy orientations – with the nationalists and communists adhering to the fundamentalist nationalist views, the centrists to pragmatic nationalist views and the reformist or liberal democrats to liberal westernist views. However, by 1993, pragmatic nationalist ideas were becoming dominant and the rhetoric of Russian foreign policy was moving in a centrist direction.

imperialism – in Russia at least – endowed the state with an identity, a name, a place in the consort of nations, and a *raison d'être* that it would otherwise have lacked.” S. Frederick Starr, “Tsarist Government: The Imperial Dimension” in Jeremy Azrael (ed.), *Soviet Nationality Policies and Practices* (New York: Praeger, 1978), pp.3-38, p.30.

¹⁰⁷See Hannes Adomeit, “Russia as a ‘Great Power’ in world affairs: images and reality”, *International Affairs*, vol.71, no.1 (January 1995), pp.35-68.

To conclude, the simplified typologies examined above summarise the patterns of ideas or stated views which existed throughout the period. These patterns are crucial to understand the distinctive development and evolution of Russian foreign policy thinking in these years. The next chapter examines in detail the rise and fall of foreign policy orientations and their proponents and situates them in the domestic political context. It outlines nuanced shifts in debates in relation to the government's position and foreign policies.

Chapter Four: Russian Domestic Politics and the Evolution in Debates About Foreign and Military Policy Towards the CIS States, 1991-1996

The last chapter identified and analysed the key Russian ideas or stated views that made up the main tendencies of foreign policy thinking between 1991 and 1996. This chapter traces the evolution of these ideas through three stages of the policy debate during that period. It then examines the government's key foreign and military policies towards the near abroad. The chapter searches for broad relations between the debates and policies in order to analyse whether the ideas may have impacted on policy choices.

The chapter begins with a brief overview of the domestic political context in which these foreign policy ideas were voiced. It then traces the evolution of debate and foreign policy choices among members of the political elite in three distinct phases: the Atlanticist period (August 1991-March 1992), the period in which there was a battle of ideas (March 1992-November 1993) and the period in which a consensus was achieved (Nov 1993-June 1996).

1. Overview of the Domestic Political Context

"I tell Yeltsin and I tell you, a Prime Minister must have elementary power, not just ideas".¹

The key foreign policy ideas and orientations examined in the last chapter did not exist independently from the political context. In fact, the changing domestic political scene from 1991 to 1996 helps to explain the government's adoption or dismissal of certain ideas. Boris Yeltsin's political struggles, first with Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev in 1991 and then with parliament culminating in its dissolution in 1993 laid the groundwork for the Russian government's early adoption of a liberal westernist foreign policy orientation and its evolution towards pragmatic nationalism. During these times of crises, and specifically in the parliamentary elections in 1993 and 1995, members of the political elite and their foreign policy ideas significantly guided foreign policy choice.

¹Arkady Volsky quoted in "Industrial Czar Puts Russia's Leader on the Spot", Financial Times, October 29, 1992.

a) The Break-Up of the USSR and the Rebirth of Russia

Boris Yeltsin's struggle with Mikhail Gorbachev in 1991 gave impetus to Yeltsin's early adoption of a radical liberal westernist foreign policy position. On 12 June 1991, Yeltsin became President of Russia when for the first time in history Russia chose its president in a popular vote. As head of the Russian Republic, Yeltsin declared Russian sovereignty on 21 June 1991 – well before the Soviet Union officially came to an end on 31 December 1991. During this half-year period the Soviet “centre” and the Russian Republic were essentially at odds as both claimed sovereignty over the same territory.

In mid-August 1991, conservative plotters attempted to take power in order to preserve the USSR and its political system. Although they were ready to accept some changes, they were worried that the Gorbachev reforms were going too far.² The coup failed for many reasons: it was unorganised; Yeltsin and his Russian leadership immediately condemned the coup; and the army refused to attack the people who took to the streets to block the tanks. Subsequently, on 24 August, Gorbachev resigned as General Secretary of the Communist Party, but remained Soviet president. Thus, the goal of the August coup, which was to halt the disintegration of the Soviet Union, led instead to the collapse of the Communist Party and accelerated the disintegration of the Soviet Union. The failed coup prompted the leaders of the other Soviet republics to transform their declarations of sovereignty into declarations of independence and greatly increased the power of Yeltsin and the Russian government vis à vis the Soviet “centre.”³

This dramatic domestic political context meant that the period after Russia declared independence in June 1991 was one of great confusion and uncertainty as Russia's interests and policies were in the process of being separated from those of the Soviet state. After the failed coup, Russian politicians hotly debated the course that their country should take.⁴

² Since December 1991, newspapers had forecast a struggle for power. “Democratic Russia came into being aimed at destroying the Soviet state but has not been able to create a national statehood for the Russian Republic's inhabitants”. Konstantin Medvedev, Nezavisimaya Gazeta, December 7, 1991, p.2.

³ A. Latynina, Literaturnaya Gazeta, no.34 (August 28), 1991, p.7.

⁴ In February 1992 talks began on the formation of a new Union Treaty which would delimit the power between the Union and the republics. “On the Building of a New Union Treaty”, Official Kremlin International News Broadcast, February 22, 1991. (Nexis-Lexis)

Representatives of the Communist bureaucracy and the military-industrial complex joined USSR President Gorbachev in demanding that the Soviet Union be preserved as a federation of sovereign states. This point of view was also supported at the time by some of the leading Russian democrats such as Grigory Yavlinsky.

Yeltsin, however, in response to the August coup events, and partly in an effort to differentiate himself from Gorbachev, radicalised his economic, political and foreign policy goals. As opposed to his earlier and more moderate stance of pursuing change within the framework of the Soviet Union, Yeltsin began to support a policy of dismantling the old Soviet state and creating in its place the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). Supported by the Russian Republic's first Deputy Chairman, Gennady Burbulis, and economist and Deputy Chairman Yegor Gaidar, Yeltsin believed that Russia should separate itself economically from the former Soviet republics in order to pursue its own radical market reforms.⁵ The idea of an economic union with former Soviet republics was rejected on the grounds that such an agreement would serve only the interests of the republics by allowing them to restructure their economies at the expense of Russia.⁶

The liberal westernist orientation contributed greatly to the death of the Soviet Union. On 7 and 8 December, the Russian, Belarussian and Ukrainian leaders (representatives of the original republics that signed the Union Treaty of December 1922 which had created the USSR) declared the end of the Soviet Union, announced the creation of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and invited the other republics to join. On 21 December the five Central Asian republics, along with Moldova, Armenia and Azerbaijan joined the CIS and were granted the status of co-founders. Of the former Soviet republics, this left just Georgia (which later joined) and the three Baltic states outside the organisation.⁷ Gorbachev resigned as President of the USSR on 25 December 1991. After having acted to end the Soviet Union, Yeltsin, now President of the Russian Federation, had little choice but to pursue a policy of

⁵ Interview with Burbulis, *Izvestiya*, October 26, 1991, p.1. See also Aleksandr Rahr, "Power Struggle in the White House", *Report on the USSR*, October 25, 1991, pp. 18-21.

⁶ Vladimir Batov, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, December 24, 1991, p.1; *Agence France Press*, December 24, 1991.

⁷ In 1992 Azerbaijan and Moldova withdrew and then re-joined the CIS in April 1994. Georgia joined the CIS in December 1993.

non-involvement in the former republics and to forge close relations with the West. It is clear that this tumultuous domestic political context, and in particular Yeltsin's power struggle with Gorbachev, contributed greatly to Yeltsin's early adoption of a liberal westernist position.

b) The Struggle between President and Parliament and the Elections of 1993 and 1995

After 1991, the political groups which had been united against communism began to break apart. Conflicting views were aired even over whether or not the Soviet Union should or should not have been destroyed. However, almost immediately, the political process was dominated by Yeltsin's power struggle with parliament. Russia was still operating under the old Soviet constitution (with many amendments) which did not mark a clear division in the balance of powers between the legislative and executive branches of government. Encouraged by its Chairman, Ruslan Khasbulatov and Vice-President Aleksandr Rutskoi, parliament consistently blocked presidential initiatives.⁸ Hostility mounted between the two institutions until a deadlock was reached and Yeltsin forcibly acted to end the impasse by disbanding parliament in August 1993.

In the hopes of muting dissent, Yeltsin called for new parliamentary elections and the acceptance of a new presidential constitution. However, although parliament's power was significantly reduced by the new 1993 constitution it was not turned into a pro-Yeltsin institution. After the December 1993 election it remained dominated by those who opposed Yeltsin's radical reforms and the government's early liberal westernist foreign policy.⁹ Although the new electoral rules marginalized many of the most extremist groups, a fundamentalist nationalist foreign policy orientation was well represented by the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR) and the Communist Party (CPRF). In the 1995 parliamentary elections, the LDPR did less well than in 1993, however the CPRF made great gains and once again the pro-reform parties remained divided.

⁸ BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, September 20, 1993, SU/1798/B.

⁹ Wendy Slater, "Russia: The Return of Authoritarian Government?", in Special Issue "1993: The Year in Review", RFE/RL Research Report, January 7, 1994, pp.22-31.

Therefore, because of the new political scene after 1993 and despite its comparatively weak powers, parliament began to play a more constructively critical role. The Yeltsin government's move away from a liberal westernist foreign policy was encouraged by the success of the communists and nationalists which made it necessary for the government to adopt many of the ideas supported by its increasingly powerful opponents – for example, the rhetoric of coming to the defence of Russia's diaspora in the near abroad. The weak regime was forced to make concessions to the opposition – especially symbolic ones. Moreover, there were political profits to be gained by adopting popular foreign policy rhetoric at a time when attempts to repair the economy were not producing the miracles that had been hoped for.

The conservative success in the December 1993 parliamentary elections also lent momentum to a loose consensus on social and political stability among reformist, centrist and even some conservative elements. One outcome was the signing of the Civic Accord in April 1994. This pact outlined various areas of responsibility and power sharing, including a commitment by the President and parliament to stimulate integration of the CIS and an agreement that allowed the opportunity for political parties to participate in the creation of a national security concept.¹⁰ In other words, Yeltsin's government adopted a more conciliatory position towards parliament and the government developed a working relationship with its parliamentary leadership. With Yeltsin reacting to the waning popular support for the liberals and the continued attacks by the communists and nationalists, the government incorporated new members and became more centrist. This situation continued until 1996.

¹⁰ Rossiskiye Vesti, April 29, 1994, p.2

2. The Evolution of Debates and Policies Towards the CIS States

a) Stage One: The Atlanticist Period (August 1991-March 1992)

Upon independence in December 1991, Russia's foreign policy orientation was characterized by a one-sided domination of liberal westernist ideas as evidenced in official government statements and policy output. The dominant ideas in the foreign policy debates envisaged Russia as a Western, capitalist-oriented, non-expansionist (in fact, pro-national self-determination) state in a peaceful world ruled by the equality of states and diplomacy. The government's position reflected these ideas, as did its policies, which were focused primarily on developing close relations with the West, including military withdrawal, the acceptance of the defeat of communism and neglect of the former Soviet states.

Stage one was a very short period in which liberal westernist ideas were not yet seriously challenged either by events or other ways of thinking. The political opposition had not yet had time to organize, to develop its ideas, or transform them into popular, publicly articulated foreign policy positions. As for the "reformers" who held complete political power in government, they had little opportunity to institutionalise the liberal westernist ideas. In other words, no new foreign policy doctrine was developed and few substantial changes were made to the old Soviet foreign policy institutions to force them to implement new radical ideas or policies. As Russian academic Tatiana Parkhalina maintained, having good ideas that are then poorly realized has often been the case in Russian history. For example, Stalin's official policies were based on such "good" ideas such as democracy, equality and law, and Gorbachev's policies were based upon ideas about the rule of law, the need to protect the environment etc.¹¹ Of course, the institutionalisation of liberal westernism might have been impossible given the fact that the newly independent Russia had only a skeletal foreign policy staff with limited powers and its leadership was preoccupied with the repercussions of the dramatic events of the fall of the USSR.

¹¹ Author Interview with Tatiana Parkhalina (Deputy Director Institute of Scientific Information for Social Sciences (INION)), May 24, 1999.

i) The Liberal Westernist View and the Government's Liberal Westernist Foreign Policy Position

Even before the collapse of the Soviet Union, reformist politicians dominated the Russian Republic's government and espoused the Western-oriented, pro-market principles first elaborated under Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev's "New Thinking". They considered military power, geopolitical expansionism and empire building to be outmoded and costly. Instead, at the time it was generally believed that status and power would be determined by economic efficiency, the effectiveness of the political system and the state's ability to adapt to technological progress. Many speeches and articles were written giving credence to non-interventionist views (rooted in the democratic principles of international relations) which could guide the development of Russia's nascent foreign policy.

This ideological tone in foreign policy was reflective of the new domestic political context. After the August coup attempt, Yeltsin supported policies which were even more radically opposed to the old tenets of the Soviet state. This applied to the actions that Yeltsin took to end the Soviet Union as well as his support for radical economic reform. The liberal capitalist model was espoused by politicians such as acting Prime Minister (and later leader of "Russia's Choice" party) Yegor Gaidar and Anatoly Chubais who conceived of Russia's economic interests as being centred on the West.¹² Politicians such as these urged Russians to abandon the old Soviet belief of a hostile West, to reject the idea of Russian moral and cultural superiority, and instead to join the new global economy and benefit from Western investors and international financial institutions.¹³

After the Soviet Union collapsed in December 1991, Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev, the principal architect of Russia's new foreign policy, advocated Western humanitarian, non-expansionist ideas alongside a distinct focus on relations with the United States. The newly independent states were not considered an immediate priority, although Kozyrev proposed that Russia establish long-term military and economic integration through

¹² See Gaidar and Chubais' views in: Lyubov Tsukanova, Rossiiskiy Vestnik, November 14, 1992, p.1. Marina Shakina, Novoye Vremya, no.33 (August 1993), pp.12-15; Vasily Kononenko, Izvestiya, November 30, 1993, p.1; Ivan Zasursky and Igor Nekrasov, Nezavisimaya Gazeta, October 21, 1993, p.2.

¹³ See Gaidar's autobiography, Days of Defeat and Victory (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2000).

the institutions of the CIS.¹⁴ Others, sympathetic to the liberal westernist orientation, agreed that the focus should be on the CIS but argued that it should be more of a temporary institution which would allow the peaceful disintegration of the former USSR. These general ideas were backed by the media, which was largely in the hands of reformers who promoted similar policies. Russia's liberal newspapers would later unanimously agree that "A policy of good will serves our interests far better than a policy based upon force."¹⁵

The argument was that Russia should shed its imperial mentality and instead concentrate on the domestic economic reforms necessary for the development of beneficial future relations in the post-Soviet region. Yeltsin himself explained that "Russia is no longer the main power centre of an enormous communist empire. Thoughts of painting the planet red have been discarded. We have rejected the notion that we are surrounded by covert or overt enemies and that the most important thing in the world is the struggle to win".¹⁶ Instead, he argued that "The influence of imperial thinking is strong. But I think that after a little while we will all understand that a policy of goodwill serves our interests far better than a policy based on force".¹⁷

Both Kozyrev and Yeltsin also consistently referred to international norms (such as the protection of human rights) when discussing how to deal with the post-Soviet republics – especially in the Western arena. This dramatic reversal of traditional Soviet thinking, much of it expressed for Western approval and financial aid, meant that even NATO membership was entertained as a long-term Russian goal, and that the (then popular) proposal to unite the Slavic states of Belarus and Ukraine was summarily dismissed.¹⁸

ii) Early Pragmatic Nationalist and Fundamentalist Nationalist Views

In the last few months that the Soviet Union existed, many members of the political elite understandably called for various measures to preserve the Soviet state. For example,

¹⁴ Gennady Shipitko, *Izvestiya*, January 2, 1992, p.2.

¹⁵ See for example, Dmitry Furman, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, July 3, 1992, p.2.

¹⁶ Nikolai Burbyga (interview with Boris Yeltsin), *Izvestiya*, February 22, 1992, p.1.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Diplomatichesky Vestnik*, no.1 (January 15, 1992) p.13.

member of the Presidential Council Andrannik Migranyan, whose views later changed, called for the restoration of the Romanov dynasty within the borders of the old Russian Republic (RSFSR).¹⁹ Faced with an extremely weak central Soviet state, Aleksandr Prokhanov, a leader of “Russian Patriotic Movement” and editor of the newspaper Den, called for the renewal of Russian nationalism and a strong state system based upon a united USSR.²⁰ “We are now free to form our own ideology...” and must ... “ban interethnic squabbling” by means of force if necessary and “preserve the USSR”. “If the choice is between freedom and the idea of the state, then we will renounce personal freedom”.²¹

However, in the immediate aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union, most of the opposition to the new government remained silent – with the exception of a small minority which dissented over Russia’s one-sided emphasis upon the West and the creation of the Commonwealth of Independent States. Criticisms were voiced over the aims of the CIS and the lack of mechanisms for coordinating its actions. “It is not the successor of the USSR... What is it then – complete independence?”²²

Nevertheless, alternative ideas about the direction of Russian foreign policy were expressed, even though they were not actively debated and did not dominate the thinking of the key decision-makers. For example, one of the most prominent of the early critics, presidential advisor Sergei Stankevich, was already at this stage advocating pragmatic nationalist views. Stankevich argued for a “modified eurasianism entailing a balance of Western and Eastern orientations”.²³ He wrote that Russia had an historic mission in unifying Orthodoxy and Islam²⁴ and that Russian policy towards the CIS states should be based upon how Russians living in those states are treated. Sergei Baburin, later a proponent of fundamentalist nationalist views, criticized the abandonment of force which had earlier allowed the loss of Soviet power in Europe and even, he argued, led to the end of the Soviet

¹⁹ Andrannik Migranyan, Nezavisimaya Gazeta, November 14, 1991, p.5.

²⁰ O. Pshenichny, Interview with Prokhanov, Komsomolskaya Pravda, September 3, 1991, p.4.

²¹ These were Prokhanov’s party goals in August 91 and were preserved after the disintegration of the Soviet Union in December 1991. Nezavisimaya Gazeta, August 15, 1991.

²² Anatoly Karpychev, Pravda, January 3, 1992, p.1.

²³ Sergei Stankevich, Nezavisimaya Gazeta, March 28 1992, p.4.

²⁴ Sergei Stankevich, Nezavisimaya Gazeta, March 28, 1992, p.4.

Union itself.²⁵ Of course, Gorbachev's failure to use force to maintain the Soviet Union's territorial integrity was remarkable by historic standards and was the rationale behind Baburin's (and others') early support of a policy to use strength to re-unite Russia with the former Soviet states.

From early 1992, the Communist Party emphasized the importance to Russia of retaining close relations with the former Soviet republics and the need to keep the West and international organizations from encroaching on Russia's interests.²⁶ Central Asia was perceived as the new centre of the "Islamic world" and Solzhenitsyn's idea of creating a Slavic Union was criticized.²⁷ The communists also attacked the government for lacking a clear policy direction in its relations with the Moslem world, and for losing out to Turkey and Iran in Central Asia. "Since Belovezhskaya Pushcha, the East has become an even more delicate and important matter for Russia".²⁸

However, during this very short and chaotic period, alternative foreign policy views were unpopular and their advocates lacked sufficient access to power to have the new government take their views seriously into account. Communism had been discredited and the growth of the Russian nationalist movement impeded. This stunted the early widespread proliferation of these ideas. At first, the growth of the Russian nationalist movement was impeded because many of the ideas that could have served as the basis for building a mass Russian national movement had been used within the framework of communist rhetoric, and therefore were compromised. This applied, for example, to the promotion of ideas such as Russia's messianic role with respect to the rest of the world, the need for a special, unique path of socialist development, criticism of individualism, promotion of collective forms of life and economic activity and hostility to the West.

Another factor impeding the growth of Russian nationalism was that under the Soviet Union much of what had been special and unique in Russian culture and spiritual life had

²⁵ Author's Interview with Sergei Baburin, May 21, 1999.

²⁶ Yury Glukhov, Pravda, February 24, 1992.

²⁷ Aleksandr Frolov, Sovetskaya Rossiya, January 14, 1992, p.2.

²⁸ R. Zaripov, Komsomolskaya Pravda, May 20, 1992, p.1. The Belovezhskaya Accords were written by the leaders of the three Slavic republics (Russia, Ukraine and Belarus) at the Belovezhskaya Pushcha nature reserve in western Belarus. They declared the end of the Soviet Union and announced the formation of the CIS.

been banished from Russian philosophy, history and culture. Perhaps the most significant explanation of all for why nationalist ideas were not widely adopted was simply that the Russian Federation was multiethnic, so that society was fragmented in a way that created a key obstacle to the development of a strong Russian nationalist movement.

Thus, initially liberal westernism seemed to provide the only clear alternative or path in Russia's whole-hearted rejection of its Soviet past. It was, moreover, widely believed that Russians should adopt the ideas and model of the prosperous Western states in order to become rich and successful.²⁹ In contrast, the pragmatic nationalist idea that Russia's own interests and conditions should determine policy had not yet gained popularity in the wave of popular euphoria which accompanied the end of the Soviet Union.

iii) Russian Foreign Policy Towards the CIS States

Foreign policy during this period developed broadly in accordance with liberal westernist ideas and, in fact, constituted a continuation and broadening of Gorbachev's "New Thinking". Foreign policy was primarily focused towards the West with wide political cooperation pursued in the United Nations' Security Council as well as full participation in international economic institutions. Yeltsin, who had supported the independence movements in the former Soviet republics and played a key role in the disintegration of the Soviet state³⁰, was left with no real choice but to allow the new states to "live and let live".

There was no historical precedent for a Russian foreign policy towards the other successor states and little knowledge about them on which to base foreign policy. For example, there was not yet even a section in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) to deal with the CIS states. According to the First Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs during this period, Shelov-Kovedyaev, in January 1991 there were only approximately ten people (including himself) working in the MFA in charge of the near abroad.³¹ Thus, no explicit,

²⁹ "Press Conference by Yegor Gaidar", Official Kremlin International News Broadcast, June 2, 1993. Also, Anatoly Chubais during Talk and Questions at Moscow Institute of Social and Political Studies, May 3, 1995. (Lexis-Nexis)

³⁰ Yeltsin instigated and signed the Belovezhskaya agreement which ended the Soviet Union.

³¹ Aleksandr Gagua interview with Shelov-Kovedyaev in Nezavisimaya Gazeta, July 30, 1992, pp.1,5.

coherent policy was pursued; the sovereignty of the newly independent states was respected but that was all. Russia itself joined international organizations which promoted peace and human rights.³²

Yeltsin began his presidency by continuing the policy of strategic retreat which had marked the end of the Gorbachev era.³³ He supported the continuation of troop withdrawals from Eastern Europe and agreed to early troop withdrawals from the Baltic states and Azerbaijan. The new Russian government clearly believed that Gorbachev's policy of military retreat from Afghanistan and Eastern Europe was advantageous after the Soviet "mistake" of overextension. Yegor Gaidar encouraged this policy by showing that Russia lacked the finances to be actively involved in foreign states, and argued against the adoption of a burden which would cripple Russia's own modernization process.³⁴ Consequently, in early 1992, with policy concentrated in the "far abroad", little effort was made to restore old Soviet ties in the CIS states and many of the former Soviet republics' leaders legitimately felt abandoned.³⁵ Russia's leaders believed that the new states did not need to be courted and because they would not be able to survive on their own or to resist the gravitational pull of Russia's economic and military influence. It was believed that this would be complemented by the development of democracy and economic reforms in the near abroad which would promote Russia's economic interests and guarantee the rights of ethnic Russians and Russian-speakers.

b) Stage Two: The Battle of Ideas and The Ascent of Pragmatic Nationalism (March 1992-November 1993)

The second stage in the evolution of the debates over foreign policy lasted from the outbreak of the Moldova conflict in March 1992 to the adoption of the Military Doctrine in

³² Stanislav Kondrashov, *Izvestiya*, January 15, 1992, p.2.

³³ Under Gorbachev, the Soviet military began to retreat from Afghanistan and Eastern Europe.

³⁴ "Press Conference by Yegor Gaidar", *Official Kremlin International Broadcast*, June 2, 1993. (Lexis-Nexis)

³⁵ Russian academic Irina Zviagelskaya said that she personally has talked to many of members of the political elite in the CIS states who commonly expressed the view that Russia neglected their states and therefore forced them to seek new ties elsewhere. She went on to say that only when the CIS states are economically dependent upon Russia does Russia attempt to pursue close relations with them. *Author's Interview* with Zviagelskaya, June 8, 1999.

November 1993. The debates became increasingly complex and divisive as a wider and more developed range of alternative ideas was expressed. Liberal westernist ideas gradually lost their monopoly and pragmatic nationalist ideas became ascendant.

For convenience, we divide this stage in Russian foreign policy into four sections. The first part examines the debate about foreign policy in general and the shift in government position during the spring and summer of 1992 (during the outbreak of conflicts in the CIS). The second section focuses on the debates about concepts and the development of the government's official positions (mid 1992-November 1993). Section three provides a brief examination of policies enacted in this period, while section four looks specifically at policy toward the CIS states.

i) The Debates over Foreign Policy

By mid 1992, liberal westernist views were already beginning to lose their monopoly in political debates. The government's former position that Russia should rapidly integrate into European/Atlantic political and economic values was being widely and severely questioned. Partly in order to distinguish themselves from each other, the members of the Russian political elite began to actively articulate distinct ideas about what Russia's role ought to be and grand strategies about how to achieve it. In April and May 1992 at the Sixth Congress of People's Deputies the political opposition loudly attacked Yeltsin's government over a whole range of issues.³⁶ Almost unanimously, they rejected the one-sided Westernist foreign policy and proposed various measures to strengthen Russia's position and forge relations in other directions. They adopted pragmatic nationalist ideas including those explored in Chapter Three - eurasianism, the "Russian idea", "Russia as a Great Power", a Russian linguistic national identity (in theory if not practice), and a pragmatic definition of Russian national interests. These ideas were developed, adopted or manipulated by politicians in order to legitimise their policies. This led to a broad consensus over the direction of Russian foreign policy, if not the means by which it could be pursued.

³⁶ "Verbatim report of April 6, 1992, Sixth Congress of Russian People's Deputies", in Rossiyskaya Gazeta, April 8, 1992, pp.3-6.

The concepts of “national revival” and “Russia’s uniqueness” were repeatedly introduced into the political debate by deputies in the Russian parliament and parliamentary committees. Advocates of these ideas included disillusioned “democrats”, former communists (who now advocated nationalism instead of a return of the Communist Party) and members of the military-industrial complex. The ideas provided a strong basis from which to attack Yeltsin and Kozyrev’s supposed “democratic” departure in Russian foreign policy.

The eruption of conflicts in the CIS states in the spring of 1992 focused discussions on Russia’s near abroad. Sergei Karaganov, Deputy Director of the Institute of Europe at the Russian Academy of Sciences, Chair of the Council on Foreign and Defence Policy and a prominent early exponent of pragmatic nationalism, argued that conflicts within Russia’s southern neighbours were Russia’s greatest threat.³⁷ The country’s survival, he said, depended firstly upon stability in the south and only then upon a (limited) partnership with the West. Karaganov termed his alternative to the liberal westernist approach an “enlightened post-imperial integrationist course”. The liberal westernist orientation, in contrast, held that Russia should focus on relations with the West and then stability in the CIS would follow. Of course, in proposing liberal democracy and market reforms which would take Russia’s specific conditions into account, the pragmatic nationalists (similar to the fundamentalist nationalists) did not need to court the West as much as the liberal westernists did (either for aid or markets for Russian goods). They could afford to be less enthusiastic about the West and to concentrate instead on Russia’s more immediate neighbours. Pragmatic nationalists also did not believe that the liberal westernists’ more radical economic policy was viable.³⁸

By the spring of 1992, the standard pragmatic nationalist orientation was commonly being used to criticize the government. Deputy Yevgeny Ambartsumov, member of parliament and Chairman of the Supreme Soviet Committee on International Affairs and Foreign Economic Relations, succinctly expressed the general discontent with government policies: “We have a right to expect greater firmness from our foreign minister when defending Russia’s interests in

³⁷ Sergei Karaganov, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, August 19, 1992, p.2.

³⁸ Press Conference with Vladimir Lukin, Chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee of the State Duma, *Official Kremlin International News Broadcast*, July 8, 1994.

the CIS countries and the interests of Russians who have become foreigners against their will".³⁹ Ambartsumov argued that Russia must base its foreign policy on a doctrine that declares the geopolitical space of the former Soviet Union to be a sphere of vital interests. Moreover, "Russia must also strive to secure from the international community the role of political and military guarantor of stability throughout the territory of the former USSR".⁴⁰ Similarly, another vocal proponent of "pragmatic nationalist" views, Andrannik Migranyan, proposed that Russia establish a "natural sphere of influence" over the near abroad.⁴¹

Perhaps the most influential member of the political elite, due to his position as presidential adviser, was Sergei Stankevich who continued to introduce eurasianist ideas (the belief that Russia has a "special" place as a bridge between East and West) into the foreign policy debate.⁴² Stankevich argued that Russia must develop a sense of a mission while abandoning the messianism of the past. He specifically advocated the reconciliation of Orthodoxy with Islam and the development of Russian policy in the near abroad states based upon the treatment of their Russian minorities in those states.⁴³

In July 1992, the Russian parliament conducted a heated three-day debate in which the MFA was criticized for not protecting the Russian diaspora in the near abroad, and discussions began over whether to create a separate ministry of CIS.⁴⁴ Many in the political opposition were worried that in the absence of a concrete policy, Russian military units in the CIS states were being left without guidance and also (more controversially) warned that the spread of Islamic fundamentalism in the south would be unchecked. Ruslan Khasbulatov, Chairman of the Supreme Soviet, proposed the transformation of the CIS into a new "Euro-Asian Union" to bring the CIS states closer together.⁴⁵

³⁹ Vitaliy Buzuev (interview with Ambartsumov), *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, April 13, 1992, p.2.

⁴⁰ Yevgeny Ambartsumov, *Izvestiya*, August 8, 1992.

⁴¹ Andrannik Migranyan, *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, August 4, 1992.

⁴² Sergei Stankevich, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, March 28, 1992, p.4.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Author's Interview* with Anatoly Adamishin (Deputy Foreign Minister) June 9, 1999. Also Leszek Buszynski, "Russia and the West: Towards Renewed Geopolitical Rivalry?", *Survival*, vol.37, no.3 (Autumn 1995), pp.104-126, p.107.

⁴⁵ "The consequences of the break-up of a single state, single economic and political space and a single human community, regardless of the causes, are tragic. The scale of this catastrophe is enormous, from breaking the lives of millions of peoples to upsetting the geopolitical balance of forces in the world to a critically dangerous

The fundamentalist nationalists, meanwhile, provided colour, rhetoric and often unrealistic policy proposals to “save Russia”. For example, extreme-right fascist group Russian National Unity (RNU) headed by Alexander Barkashov (which was created in September 1990 but did not have representation in parliament) argued that Russia must save civilization – prevent the disintegration of Russia, unite under one ideology built on historical realities and develop a rigid organisation of the strongest and most active Russians. Another political party, the Russian Party led by Nikolai Bondarek also argued for an ethnic Russia state. Dimitry Vasiliev and the organisation Pamyat (begun in the 1980s and which lost out to other nationalist organisations in the 1990s but continued to hold demonstrations) argued for the recreation of the Russian Empire and for ethnic Russians to rule a Slavic nation.⁴⁶

Between March 1992 and November 1993, many members of the political elite with liberal westernist ideas abandoned them and adopted more nuanced and moderately nationalist views.⁴⁷ Pragmatic nationalist views, which were popular and more balanced than fundamentalist nationalist ideas, began to proliferate. They provided pragmatic direction (if not solutions) for dealing with Russia’s shifting external and internal realities.

Of course, many of the key ideas advocated by liberal westernists since 1991 (such as support for state sovereignty, equality of nations, human rights, international law and multilateral negotiations) were shared by pragmatic nationalists and became firmly accepted principles (if not always practices) in Russian foreign policy. However, Kozyrev’s team had had little time or opportunity to fully develop or institutionalise its original liberal westernist foreign policy agenda, and was unable to delineate an explicit definition of Russian national interests.⁴⁸ With the end of the Soviet Union, the democrats had lost the enemy whose defeat

degree”. Ruslan Khasbulatov on Ostankino Channel 1 TV, September 17, 1993 as reported by BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, September 20, 1993, SU/1798/B.

⁴⁶ Alexander Barkashov, “Krizis mirovoi tsivilizatsii, rol Rossii i zadachi russkogo natsionalnogo dvizhenia” (The Crisis of World Civilization, the Role of Russia and the Russia National Movement), Russ kii Poryadok, no.1-2 (1995), pp.1,2.

⁴⁷ This point is also made in Neil Malcolm et al., Internal Factors in Russian Foreign Policy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

⁴⁸ In 1991 and 1992 Yeltsin failed to call parliamentary elections or to adopt a new constitution. This was a missed opportunity to build institutional support for his liberal ideas – both domestically and in terms of foreign policy. The absence of an agreed-upon legal framework to balance relations between the executive and the legislature led to a struggle for power which provoked the October 1993 confrontation between the president

had been their chief rallying point and they did not manage to replace it. Unlike the various nationalist and communist groups, they failed to develop their own visions or myths which promised to alleviate the psychological and economic pain now prevalent across the country. Of course, those democrats in power were the architects of the strategies which caused the pain, and therefore myth-making was not easy for them. The liberal economic policy, strongly supported by the West, had failed to achieve its proclaimed goals in spite of its enormous expense to the population. Adhering to Western principles had devastated people's lives, and Russia in many respects had become a Western dependency. The Russian government's critics could plausibly have argued that the break-up of the USSR (and Yeltsin's government) was partly responsible for the situation because it had destroyed a previously single "market" and integrated economic system.

There was also an increasing aversion at this time among the political elite to "universal values" and norms and to the requirements of international law.⁴⁹ An anti-western mood surfaced among the public, and growing economic and social problems made the Russian leadership vulnerable to more aggressive tendencies in the parliament, military and security institutions. The fact that Russia's new foreign policy and the current economic hardships were associated with Yeltsin's government greatly discredited the liberal westernist orientation which – especially after Yeltsin's use of force against parliament in 1993 – also became associated with the loss of national power. The reformists had assumed that there would be an immediate and significant improvement of Russian living standards upon which they could capitalize.⁵⁰ Instead, they faced an economic catastrophe.

It must be emphasized that this was a very short period of extraordinarily turbulent changes. The foreign policy debate had barely begun, the ideas were underdeveloped and untested, and thus it is even questionable how far Kozyrev himself had been prepared to embrace and act upon the early liberal westernist orientation. Meanwhile the liberal

and the parliament.

⁴⁹ Author's Interview with Grigory Yavlinsky, June 20, 1995. Also see Alexei Arbatov, "Russia's New Role in World Politics", New Times, November 1995. Arbatov was a State Duma member from Yabloko and an academic at the Institute of World Economy and International Relations.

⁵⁰ Stanislav Kondrashov, Izvestiya, January 15, 1992, p.2.

westernist belief that democracy and markets would become easily rooted within the newly independent states was proved wrong. Also, trends towards military, economic and civil disintegration within the FSU continued.

ii) The Formation of the Foreign Policy Concept and the Military Doctrine

By mid-1992, the foreign policy debate centred on creating guidelines for Russian foreign policy. This conceptual debate led to various new proposals and eventually to the government's 1993 adoption of the Foreign Policy Concept and the Military Doctrine.⁵¹ At this time, government documents provided only vague, defensive guidelines for Russian foreign and security policy. The major multilateral document, the 15 May 1992 Tashkent agreement on collective security,⁵² was significant in that it legalized Russian military presence within many CIS states and authorized the joint use of military force to repel aggression.⁵³ It was basically a defensive document, as was the 1992 law "On Defence" which declared Russia's mission to be the repulsion of external aggression.⁵⁴ Together with the more assertive 1993 documents examined below, they signalled the beginning of a new pragmatic nationalist policy and the institutionalisation of a more balanced foreign policy orientation taking into account Russia's interests at the time.⁵⁵ Whether or not actual foreign policy output followed these guidelines will be clarified below.

⁵¹ Another way to judge the shift in official foreign policy is to examine Yeltsin's annual State of Nation messages to the Russian parliament.

⁵² The original members were Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgystan, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. In 1993, Azerbaijan, Moldova and Turkmenistan joined. The CIS Collective Security treaty did not enter into force until April 20 1994. On April 2, 1999, 6 countries (Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgystan, Russia and Tajikistan) signed a protocol to extend the treaty for another 5 years. Ivan Novikov, "Duma ratifies CIS Collective Security Treaty Protocol", *Itar Tass*, November 5, 1999.

⁵³ See Andrei Zagorsky analysis of the Tashkent Treaty in "Regional structures of security policy within the CIS", in Roy Allison and Christoph Bluth (eds.), *Security Dilemmas in Russia and Eurasia* (London: RIIA, 1998), pp.281-300

⁵⁴ The text of the law "On Defence" was published in *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, October 9, 1992, p.1. This law was not replaced until mid 1996. (The 1996 law moved most of the powers of the defence of the republic out of the hands of the parliament and into those of the president) In 1992, a law "On Security" was also passed. It vaguely outlined the official definition of key interests as "the sum total of necessities, the fulfilment of which reliably secures the existence of and the opportunities for a progressive development of an individual person, of the society and of the state". See *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, May 6, 1992, p.1.

⁵⁵ At the time, Russia did not even have a peacekeeping law. Even when one was acquired in June 1995, it only provided a general framework for the provision of personnel for such operations. The bill on "the procedure for provision of military and civilian personnel of the Russian Federation for participation in operations to maintain

From mid 1992 to mid 1993, members of the Russian political and foreign policy elite debated and drafted three main foreign policy Concepts – one of which became official. The draft Concepts all attempted to broadly delineate Russia's new interests within its post-1991 geopolitical and strategic situation. They were all premised on the rejection of former communist ideological goals and gave priority to domestic concerns (political, social and economic) over external goals. With priority firmly placed upon domestic development, the preservation of the territorial integrity of the Russian Federation was deemed essential. The abandonment of the old Soviet quest to be a global superpower meant that Russia's most vital security interests were now widely understood to be stability, peace and the development of close relations with her neighbours and historical subjects – in other words, the former Soviet states. Simply because the USSR had been a land empire, any disturbances or chaos in its former “colonies” would be a very serious threat.

During the debate, a wide-ranging consensus developed that Russia should have a strategic role in the near abroad states and that this role should be both officially acknowledged and encouraged. The first institution to officially propose this strategy was the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA). In response to severe criticism for its earlier supposed lack of policy, the MFA issued a draft document in early 1992 outlining its “Concept of Foreign Policy”. Deputy Foreign Minister, Fyodor Shelov-Kovedyaev, one of the first to place priority on the issue of security on Russian borders and regional conflicts in the CIS, argued against the use of the “power approach”. Instead, he supported the maintenance of the status quo and advocated gradual and consistent diplomatic actions towards the CIS states.⁵⁶ This draft was then shuffled between the MFA and parliament's foreign affairs committee, whose head Yevgeny Ambartsumov, along with his advisor Andranik Migranyan, argued that the whole post-Soviet area should be included in Russia's sphere of vital interests. The

or restore international peace and security and other peacekeeping activities” was only approved by the Federal Assembly and signed into law in June 1995. *Sobranie Zakonodatelstva Rossiyskoi Federatsii*, no.26 (June 26, 1995). When passed, the bill provided the general framework to allow “military and civilian personnel of the Russian Federation for participation in operations to maintain or restore international peace and security and other peacekeeping activities”.

⁵⁶ “Shelov-Kovedyaev Comments on Policy Criticism”, Interview by Aleksandr Gagaa, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, July 30, 1992, pp.1,5.

Concept, described below, was finally approved by parliament in October 1992, and was published in January 1993 but was never officially adopted.⁵⁷

The final version of the MFA draft Concept was nevertheless the first concrete sign of a shift from the original official liberal westernist policy. It outlined various dimensions of Russia's foreign and security policy but focused primarily on cooperation and integration with the CIS states. It stated that Russia should aim to develop relations on a bilateral level as the precondition for the emergence of a credible multilateral structure. Russia's most important foreign policy tasks vis a vis the CIS states were listed as the need to curtail and regulate armed conflicts around Russia, to prevent them from spreading to Russian territory, and to protect the human and minority rights of Russians and the Russian-speaking population in the near abroad. The Concept also recognized the use of force as legitimate in "extreme cases".⁵⁸

The MFA draft Concept was strongly influenced by another Concept, which was being proposed at the same time by a group of members of the political, academic and military elite, headed by Sergei Karaganov. This Council of Foreign and Defence Policy included Karaganov, Vladimir Lukin (Russian Ambassador in Washington in 1992; 1993 co-Chair of Yabloko, and Chairman of the Foreign Policy Commission of the first Duma), Sergei Stankevich, Konstantin Zatulin (Chairman of Duma CIS Affairs Committee), Grigory Yavlinsky and Yevgeny Ambartsumov. Their "Strategy for Russia" Concept also stated that Russia's main priority should be to preserve its territorial integrity, focus on the near abroad states and maintain the potential use of force.⁵⁹

Meanwhile, Yeltsin gave up on waiting for the MFA and the parliament to come to an agreement concerning the MFA draft Concept. Instead, he turned to the more hard-line Russian Security Council. It produced its own version, "Basic Principles of a Foreign Policy

⁵⁷ See *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, October 21, 1992 for a description of the original Foreign Policy Concept. The final product was published in *Diplomatichesky Vestnik* (an official publication of the MFA) as a special supplement in January 1993.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ This Concept was outlined in August 1992 by the Council on Foreign and Defence but was not adopted. The Council on Foreign and Defence Policy drafted the "Strategy for Russia" which was published in "Strategiya dlya Rossii", *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 19 August, 1992.

Concept of the Russian Federation”.⁶⁰ In April 1993, under the coordination of Yury Skokov (then the head of the Security Council), the Interdepartmental Foreign Policy Commission, a committee made up of representatives of the main foreign policy institutions, drafted the document. The members included Deputy Ambartsumov, Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev and Defence Minister Pavel Grachev. Not only were the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Defence represented, but also in attendance were the intelligence services, defence council and parliamentary committees on foreign affairs, foreign economic relations, and defence and security. It was this Russian Security Council’s draft Concept which was finally endorsed by this wide range of experts and President Yeltsin.⁶¹

Compared to previous proposals, the Security Council’s Concept was explicit in terms of stating the means by which Russia would protect itself from potential threats. These threats included attempts to destroy the integrity of Russia, disintegration among CIS states, violation of human rights and freedoms of Russian-speakers, and military conflicts in neighbouring states. The proposed means to protect Russia from these threats included the creation of a collective system of defence, the strengthening of the external borders of the CIS, the maintenance of Russia’s military bases in the CIS states, the creation of an integral system of military security, and the ability to retain Russia’s unique status as the sole nuclear power in the region. The document also clearly emphasized in a somewhat assertive language that Russia would remain a great power because of its ability to influence international relations.⁶² The foreign policy results, as shall be seen, however, were only somewhat reflective of these proposed strategies.

Russia’s Military Doctrine was similar to the Foreign Policy Concept, and also drafted by the Security Council. It was not adopted until November 1993 – even though Russia’s armed forces had been created in May 1992. The Military Doctrine, too, was written in a somewhat assertive tone portraying Russia as an emerging great power facing multiple threats and with a

⁶⁰ A summary of the draft (*Osnovnye polozhenia kontseptzii vneshnei politiki Rossiiskoy Federatzii*) was written by Vladislav Chernov, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, April 29, 1993, pp.1,3. (Chernov is head of the department for strategic security at the Russian Security Council).

⁶¹ Overview by Olga Lazebnikova, “The West and the Debates in the Political and Academic Circles of Russia on its Foreign Policy in Europe”, *Reports of the Institute of Europe*, no.16 (Moscow 1995).

⁶² Of course, rhetoric aside, Russia was a great power only in nuclear terms.

special emphasis upon the importance of maintaining a sphere of influence in the former Soviet states (as opposed to the former emphasis on the West).

The Military Doctrine asserted Russia's right to intervene in the CIS – while stressing that this should only be done in accordance with appropriate international documents and on the basis of mutual agreement. Oleg Lobov, Secretary of the Russian Security Council explained that after the Security Council began to work on the Military Doctrine in April 1993 “events in Moldova, Tajikistan and Georgia”... “necessitated certain modifications in the doctrine”.⁶³ The final draft allowed for the legal use of armed forces in peacekeeping operations within the former Soviet republics and recognized that force was legitimate if used in response to the “suppression of the rights, freedoms and legitimate interests of Russian-speaking citizens in foreign states”.⁶⁴ Moreover, under the new doctrine, Russian forces could be deployed outside the country to safeguard the security of either the Russian Federation or any of the other former Soviet republics. Thus, the doctrine indicated the desire to maintain a strong offensive capability given the fact that the borders between Russia and its highly unstable neighbouring former Soviet states were highly permeable. In 1994, Defence Minister Pavel Grachev confirmed this when he stated that the Russian military's foremost task was to carry out peacekeeping operations.⁶⁵

The new doctrine listed the main military threats to the Russian Federation and provided guidance for the use of force to counter those threats. The primary threats were seen as coming from existing and potential local wars and armed conflicts in other post-Soviet states, especially those in immediate proximity to the Russian Federation. The other threats included the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, the oppression of Russian citizens abroad, separatist (i.e. non-Russian) nationalism within Russia, and the enlargement of military blocs and alliances which impinged upon Russian security interests. The latter were not specified and thus left open to interpretation. The formal draft also proposed the creation

⁶³ See Vasily Kononenko's interview with Oleg Lobov (Secretary of the Russian Security Council) in *Izvestiya*, November 4, 1993, pp.1-2.

⁶⁴ A description of this document was published in *Rossiskiy Vesti*, November 18, 1993. See Charles J. Dick, “The Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation”, *Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, vol.7, no.3 (September 1994), pp.481-506.

⁶⁵ Pavel Grachev, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, June 9, 1994, pp.1, 5.

of Russian mobile and peacekeeping forces rather than the maintenance of a large-scale standing forces.

When it was first adopted, the 1993 Military Doctrine was generally viewed as highly aggressive because it potentially justified future military dominance over the CIS states. However, in fact, rather than setting a new plan of action, the doctrine formally legitimised and justified the role that the Russian armed forces had already played in the former Soviet region while implying that the government would continue to support such actions. Over time, many Russian politicians and academics have come to understand the doctrine more as a political statement than a concrete set of guidelines for the Russian military.⁶⁶ In interviews with the author, Russian academics Dimitry Trenin and Andrei Zagorsky maintained that foreign policy Concepts are always strictly theoretical and have no application. Irina Zviagelskaya also stated that the Concepts had no actual impact but were important steps towards defining Russia's national interests. In other words, since context and threats continually change, it is not surprising that the official articulation of a Concept often does not keep up.⁶⁷

Officially, however, the military assigned great significance to the Military Doctrine. According to Russian Col. Rimarchuk, for example, "the 1993 Military Doctrine was crucial to military policy. We followed its provisions explicitly. The military never acts and never has acted on its own".⁶⁸ A contrasting, and likely more realistic, appraisal from the military was that the doctrine's premises were false and that the consequences were extremely negative for Russia. Col. General Andrei Nikolaev (Head of Russia's Border Guards) told the author in an interview that the

⁶⁶ Sergei Karaganov, "New Military Doctrine Guarantees Russian Security", *RIA Novostia*, February 21, 2000. At the time of the first doctrine in 1993, *Izvestiya's* military commentator Victor Litovkin wrote that the doctrine was "devoid of declarative political statements". *Izvestiya*, November 3, 1993, pp.1-2.

⁶⁷ Tatiana Parkhalina, for example, argued in 1999 that "Today Russia is defined in geopolitical terms and should be defined in socio-economic dimensions first". This shows, however, that she does believe the articulation of a concept to be important. *Author's Interviews* with Trenin, Zagorsky, Zviagelskaya and Parkhalina: May 24, May 25, May 28, June 8, 1999.

⁶⁸ Col. Rimarchuk also denied that there have been any independent initiatives by the Russian army in the CIS states. *Author's Interview* with Rimarchuk, June 2, 1999.

... consequences of the 1993 Military Doctrine so far are that Russia's military powers have decreased by ten times from the Soviet period while the level of security threats have by no means decreased, but maybe increased. The war doctrine was built on false premises such as 'peaceloving NATO' and the absence of enemies of Russia.⁶⁹

In other words, retrospectively, the doctrine was perceived as not being sufficiently realistic about Russia's role in the world because it was based on key liberal westernist ideas which were unrealistically optimistic.

Despite controversies over the effect of the Military Doctrine, from its inception it was envisaged as a developing document and its significance here lies in its indication of a shift away from dominance of liberal westernist views. Subsequent to its adoption, the doctrine was cited by politicians in debates about what to do in the CIS and to justify Russia's use of force to maintain control both within its borders (in Chechnya) and in the FSU. The case-study chapters address the question of how great the gap was between the conceptual framework and Russia's military actions.

iii) The Abandonment of the Government's Early Liberal Westernist Foreign Policy Position

Foreign Minister Kozyrev signalled a shift in foreign policy intentions in October 1992 when he was forced to defend his ministry's policies in a speech to the Russian Supreme Soviet.⁷⁰ While continuing to oppose the adoption of what he termed a one-sided eurasianist foreign policy in the speech, he agreed with his opponents that Russia should focus on the near abroad and develop a "peacekeeping" role in the former Soviet republics. Kozyrev emphasized that Russia did not have the moral right to remain indifferent to requests for help and advocated force in special circumstances. "Unless we find the political will and real resources – troops and hardware, to put it bluntly – for peacekeeping in the former Soviet zone, this vacuum will be filled by others...".⁷¹ Moreover, he argued (in contrast to earlier statements) that this was a reasonable policy since Russian troops were

⁶⁹ Author's Interview with Col. Gen. Andrei Nikolaev, June 8, 1999.

⁷⁰ Address by Andrei Kozyrev Before the Russian Supreme Soviet, Russian Television Network, October 22, 1992.

⁷¹ Andrei Kozyrev on Russia's Peacekeeping Role in the CIS, Nezavisimaya Gazeta, September 1993, p.1.

already stationed in the near abroad, and since Russia was already being drawn into these conflicts.⁷²

The point to be emphasized here is that Kozyrev now openly interpreted the use of military force in the near abroad as a positive strategy. It is also possible that Kozyrev moved towards this “harder” position for pragmatic reasons and to maintain close relations with Yeltsin. In an interview with the author, Duma deputy Konstantin Borovoi reasoned that Kozyrev tried but failed to make Yeltsin’s position “softer, more realistic”. Thus, “Kozyrev’s increasingly hard-line position was not his own real position but was based on his wish to have influence over Yeltsin’s policy in the future”.⁷³ This is an interesting conjecture, but this thesis, however, is concerned only with Kozyrev’s publicly stated views and not with discerning his private or “real intentions”.

Under pressure from sections of the political elite and aware that it had few options, the government adopted pragmatic nationalist ideas. These ideas suggested responses (at least rhetorically) to problems emerging from the developing military conflicts: they included the reality of the 25 million Russian-speaking diaspora; the difficulty of Russian military withdrawal from the former Soviet republics; economic dependency in the region; the dangers and consequences of the lack of frontier controls; and political instability in the region. The government was under pressure to take urgent action to centralise policy because local Russian commanders were making their own policy to deal with the conflicts. Yeltsin and the MFA therefore advocated the defence of Russian interests in the former Soviet Union in order to outline Russia’s interests and acknowledge the need to reassert Russian primacy in the area.⁷⁴

The emerging conflicts in the CIS states demonstrated that the government’s early policy of strategic retreat from the near abroad was not as simple or logical as had first been surmised. When stranded Russian troops came under fire, it became obvious that a more defined and realistic policy had to be outlined by the government. The half-hearted adoption of liberal

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Author’s Interview with Borovoi, May 21, 1999. Other Russian scholars and Duma deputies are sceptical over whether Kozyrev’s early liberal westernist intentions were genuine.

⁷⁴“Speech by Yuri Yarov”, Official Kremlin International News Broadcast, December 11, 1992. (Lexis-Nexis)

westernist principles was not useful. It was not surprising therefore that new and more pragmatic foreign policy ideas which took Russia's specific interests into account were adopted. Pragmatic nationalist and fundamentalist nationalist policy positions were validated by the continual development of conflicts along Russia's periphery - problems which the liberal westernists had neglected. These new government ideas paralleled those of the Russian military commanders who did not subscribe to a policy of disengagement.⁷⁵ The result was that the pragmatic nationalist foreign policy orientation was institutionalised in the adoption of the Foreign Policy Concept and Military Doctrine as described above.

iv) Russian Foreign Policy Towards the CIS States

While members of the elite debated the contents of the Russian foreign policy concept and military doctrine, Russian foreign policy output generally developed without structured guidelines. The government had verbally begun to adopt the pragmatic nationalist orientation but its policies were being carried out in a piecemeal and ad hoc fashion. Seemingly paradoxical policies were adopted, some of which made Russia's separation from the former Soviet states official, while others reasserted Russian interests in the region. This was reflective of the general confusion in foreign policy thinking, the uncertainty about external events, and the fact that much of the policy was being carried out "on the ground" by Russian military commanders. The specific policies and ad hoc nature of policy-making also reflected the fact that Russia had divergent interests in different regions of the former Soviet Union – interests which had not yet even been defined. However, the general policy contours were broadly in line with the prescriptions of pragmatic nationalism that had been made official in the April 1993 Foreign Policy Concept. The Military Doctrine was not signed until November 1993 – the end of this stage – and thus its results could not yet be perceived.

The policies which signalled Russia's retreat from empire included Yeltsin's May 1992 decree to create the armed forces of the Russian Federation, establish a Russian Defence Ministry and the National Security Council, and the abandonment of policies to establish

⁷⁵ Author's Interview with Col. General Andrei Nikolaev (Commander of the Border Troops and Deputy Minister of Security) June 8, 1999.

collective CIS armed forces. The CIS collective security agreement was signed in May 1992, but Russia's attempt to develop a form of collective security in the CIS was blocked by the diverging interests of its members – which helps to explain the growing support over the period for Russia's new Military Doctrine. Another multilateral initiative, to retain a ruble zone among some of the CIS states, was abandoned in 1993. Thus, the Russian leadership was not willing to pay the price of reintegration – even when in principle the preservation of a common currency made considerable sense.⁷⁶

c) Stage Three: Achieving Consensus (November 1993 - June 1996)

i) Foreign Policy Debates

The third stage in Russian foreign policy, from the adoption of the November 1993 Military Doctrine to the June 1996 Presidential elections, was characterised by the almost complete disappearance of liberal westernist ideas from the foreign policy debates and the (now not as widespread or influential) continuation of fundamentalist nationalist ideas. Nostalgia for the past and yearning for great power status were exploited by members of the elite across the political spectrum. At this stage, the previously general and then conceptual debate became increasingly concerned with the more practical and specific issues arising from Russia's involvement in the near abroad.

During this period, the few remaining liberal westernizers abandoned their one-sided emphasis on relations with the West. Instead, they called for long-term voluntary re-integration with particular CIS states, increased involvement in settling CIS conflicts, and were generally more openly nostalgic about the end of the Soviet Union. For example, Duma deputy, Mikhail Mitiokov from Democratic Choice of Russia, argued for integration in the CIS which “must be the result of natural economic and political integration. I like General De Gaulle's idea of a

⁷⁶ “Press Conference given by Vice Premier Alexander Shokhin, on developments in the CIS”, Official Kremlin International News Broadcast, December 21, 1993. Yevgeny Yasin explained the government's position: “if the republics introduce national currencies, this will help to restore cooperation more quickly. Such an arrangement for the CIS financial space would be a better idea than attempts to preserve both the ruble zone and economic stability in Russia”. Interview by Marina Shakina, Novoye Vremya, no.33, August 1993, pp.12-15.

Single Europe”.⁷⁷ Even Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin admitted to feeling nostalgic for the USSR and expressed hope that the Union would be resurrected on the basis of “normal, civilized, market principles” but “without encroaching on anyone else’s sovereignty”.⁷⁸ Anatoly Chubais, too, backed up this sentiment arguing that reintegration with some of the former Soviet states “should proceed voluntarily but the costs for Russia will be considerable”.⁷⁹ Similarly, Gavril Popov, former mayor for Moscow and leader of the political organization “Russia’s Movement for Democratic Reforms” stated that “The division of the republics of the FSU is a temporary situation, a temporary internal division. We must stop subsidizing the other states where Russian minorities are oppressed”.⁸⁰

According to one of the few remaining “extreme Westernizers”, Russian academic Tatiana Parkhalina, by mid-1993 all political groups agreed that Russia had special interests in the near abroad but each defined them in a unique way. The only consensus was that Russia should maintain both the ability to influence the CIS political elite and the ability of Russian economic and industrial groups to “manipulate” resources in the FSU.⁸¹ There also seems to have been a consensus in terms of military practice in that it was agreed that “special interests” meant the right to deploy or maintain troops and to use force when necessary in any part of the CIS considered necessary to Russian interests.⁸²

However near the end of this period, in early 1996, some liberal westernist ideas were again at the forefront of the political debate. For example, there was a gradual acceptance of a civic definition of Russia, and also of a geographical definition of Russia as the Russian Federation. Support for isolationism and the abandonment of force were frequently vocalized. However, anti-western rhetoric was still strong and foreign policy debate

⁷⁷ Author’s Interview with Mikhail Mitiokov, former professor of law and at the time member of Democratic Choice of Russia (Gaidar’s party) and head of the constitutional assembly, June 28, 1995.

⁷⁸ Viktor Chernomyrdin quoted in Vladimir Abarinov, Segodnya, May 30, 1995, p.3.

⁷⁹ Author’s Interview with Anatoly Chubais, July 11, 1995. Chubais discussed the problem of non-payments of debts from the former republics and the proposal to use inter-republic credits and strict controls over exports from CIS countries and shipments from Russia as leverage in dealing with this problem. Ivan Zasursky and Igor Nekrasov, Nezavisimaya Gazeta, October 21, 1993, p.2.

⁸⁰ Author’s Interview with Gavril Popov, July 15, 1995.

⁸¹ Author’s Interview with Tatiana Parkhalina, May 24, 1999.

⁸² Aleksandr Krylovich and Georgiy Shemelev, "Andrei Kozyrev Addresses Russian Ambassadors to CIS states", Itar-Tass, January 20, 1994.

continued to centre on the near abroad. The government position reflected these ideas and aimed to define and limit Russian interests in the CIS, to solve conflicts on her borders and to follow a unique pro-Russia policy in a multipolar world.

Extreme fundamentalist nationalist ideas continued to exist in this stage, but they were generally less strident and not as commonly expressed. Several political groups, including the Communist Party and the Liberal Democratic Party, whose views were outlined in Chapter Three, continued to state that Russia should, and eventually would, re-unite with the “artificial and generally ungrateful” former Soviet states and thereby secure Russia’s deserved status as a great power. They argued that force was necessary in order to protect Russian interests, that their view was validated by the conflicts in the CIS states, and they also continued to blame the West for all of Russia’s problems (as did many other politicians by this stage).

Communist Duma deputy Mikhail Astafiyev’s comments were typical of the extreme (and implausible) fundamentalist nationalist views: “The Russian people were divided and their country disintegrated. Therefore they have the right to re-unite like Germany. Our position is first to re-unite all ethnic Russians, then other countries can join voluntarily. We believe in peaceful coexistence with other countries but also in the need to protect the historical rights of Russia”.⁸³ Astafiyev shared the commonly held view that Russia was being unjustly treated and that its “help” was not being reciprocated: “Those states who do not join us should not be protected by our military bases. They can join a military alliance with NATO instead”. Astafiyev’s boss, Aleksandr Rutskoi, blamed the West for not “helping Russia in its quest for peace” and argued that “The hesitation of the UN to take peacemaking action in the areas of the FSU shows that it is not ready for the mandate. This is a cruel lesson for Russia.”⁸⁴

During these years, several other fundamentalist nationalist political organizations, with very little or no political power but active in the political debate over foreign policy, also called for the re-creation of some type of “Union”. For example, the “All-Army Officers Assembly”

⁸³ Mikhail Grigoriyevich Astafiyev was then Rutskoi’s deputy in charge of international relations and foreign policy. He was a member of “All Russia’s Right Center” which was part of the “Motherland Political Movement” and one of the founders of the movement joining the left and right opposition force (the Red Brown alliance). *Author’s Interview* with Astafiyev, June 25, 1995.

⁸⁴ Aleksandr Rutskoi also emphasized the increase of terrorism, import and export of weapons, illegal trade and its implication on foreign policy. *Author’s Interview* with Rutskoi, June 28, 1995.

held meetings for 400 officers (from Army circles as well as the Federal Counterintelligence Service and the Ministry for Internal Affairs) to fight Yeltsin's "anti-popular regime" which "brought down the great power and is now breaking down the Armed Forces and the military-industrial complex". It claimed to support "Great-power patriotic education" and "social protection", with a maximalist goal of the revival of the Soviet Union.⁸⁵ These organizations participated vigorously in public debates but their following had greatly diminished and their influence on policy was negligible.

A general isolationist mood also crept into the debate across the entire political spectrum as the costs and difficulties of Russia's involvement in the CIS states were seriously calculated. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, increasingly vocal during these years, advocated complete military withdrawal from the Transcaucasus and Central Asia. His ideas typified one version of nationalist isolationist thinking. "The Muslim world is growing. This will be the great phenomenon of the 21st century. We must not meddle with it". However, he went on to advocate the creation of a "single state alliance" with the Slavic states of Belarus, Ukraine and Kazakhstan: "...our supreme and paramount goal is to preserve our people... to preserve their physical existence, their culture and their territory".⁸⁶ In terms of the Ukrainians and Belarussians, Solzhenitsyn wrote, "We are kindred peoples that should be together". "As for Kazakhstan, on no account must we flee. In Kazakhstan, Kazakhs make up barely 40% of the population. The other 60% are non Kazakhs".⁸⁷

Similarly, military opinion, though divided, became increasingly wary of increasing Russian commitments in the CIS States.⁸⁸ To quote Russia's First Deputy Chief of Staff, Col.

⁸⁵ Participating in the founding of the All-Army Assembly were Aleksandr Sterligov, leader of the Russian National Assembly; Pyotr Romanov, Deputy to the Council of the Federation and Viktor Ilyukhin, head of the Duma's defence committee. Lt. Colonel Stanislav Terekhov was vice chairman of the newly created organization. Viktor Khamrayev, *Segodnya*, February 21, 1995, p.3.

⁸⁶ Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, "Give the People Power", *Pravda*, November 2, 1995 (an article promoting local self-government as the solution to Russia's problems), pp.1, 4. See also Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, Translated by Yermolai Solzhenitsyn, *The Russian Question in the Late 20th Century* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1995).

⁸⁷ Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, "Give the People Power", *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ See Pavel Baev's analysis Russian military thinking in Baev, "Russian Military Thinking and the Near Abroad", *Jane's Intelligence Review*, vol. 6, no.12 (December 1994), pp.531-533. See also Andreas Heinemann-Grueder, "The Russian Military and the Crisis of the State", *Aussenpolitik*, vol.45, no.1 (1994), pp.79-89.

General Boris Pyankov “We are certainly not prepared to unite our armed forces today – that would mean to scare the world and our present NATO partners”. He also berated the other CIS states for not sharing the peacekeeping burden. “The fact is that we aren’t trampling anyone under our boots, but mainly putting Russian heads in the line of fire....”.⁸⁹ He called the Staff for Coordinating Military Cooperation Among the Commonwealth States an “institution of hope” of becoming the centre of a new politico-military bloc, perhaps parallel to NATO.⁹⁰

Meanwhile, once the pragmatic nationalist ideas had become more influential, their earlier centrist proponents began to slightly change their tone. Many now emphasized their reservations and warnings about the costs of pursuing unification or developing closer involvement with the post-Soviet states – although all the while continuing to advocate Russian commitment to peace in the region. Russian academic and foreign policy expert Aleksei Arbatov, for example, warned that an imperial idealism was replacing the pro-Western idealism and the communist idealism of the past. He interpreted this trend as dangerous and argued that Russian troops should be withdrawn from areas where mutual interests did not exist.⁹¹ He and Vladimir Lukin, Chairman of State Duma’s Committee on International Affairs, agreed that these interests lay in the prevention of conflicts and border protection (because of narcotics, arms dealing, and poorly paid border guards) both in Central Asia and the Transcaucasus.⁹²

Pragmatic nationalist Andrannik Migranyan blamed Yeltsin’s pursuit of a market-based economy as the main objective factor hindering post-Soviet unification because he believed that integration would put those reforms at risk. He warned that it was dangerous to refuse “our neighbours’ desire for unification” because it will strengthen the position of extremist political groups in Russia.⁹³ In Migranyan’s 1994 report “Russia and the near

⁸⁹ Boris Pyankov, First Deputy Chief of Staff, “Military Cooperation From the Viewpoint of the Coordinating Staff”, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, June 4, 1995, p.3.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ Aleksei Arbatov, “Imperial Infantilism and Russia’s National Interests”, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, June 24, 1995, pp.1-2.

⁹² Mikhail Karopov interview with Vladimir Lukin, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, March 14, 1995, pp.1-2.

⁹³ Andrannik Migranyan, “Who is Getting Aside Integration”, *Moskovskiye novosti*, no.30 (July 24-31, 1995) p.5.

abroad”⁹⁴ he credited himself with having developed the main idea in the 1993 Foreign Policy Concept – that Russia’s vital interests are located in the former republics of the Soviet Union. He also argued that Russian intervention to secure its special interests in the region – by military means if necessary – should be legitimised.

A pragmatic nationalist political group which influenced the debate, if not the actual policy, was led by Arkady Volsky (a founder of the club “Forum for New Accord”) and united moderate communists and socialist parties from all the former Soviet republics. In June 1995, at a Forum meeting they argued that it was time to stop talking about “clever ideas” and to put them into action. Volsky suggested that Russian abandon the phrase “former Soviet Union” and speak only of the “future Union”.⁹⁵ Unsuccessfully, the Forum argued for the creation of a “Eurasian Community” and appealed for nation-wide referendums on the subject. Forum member Nikolai Ryzhkov favoured the creation of an administrative structure which could organize and unite the supporters of the new community.⁹⁶

Generally, however, pragmatic nationalists now advocated policies based on a “moderate national idea and isolationism”.⁹⁷ Russia’s borders were typically accepted as those of the Russian Federation although differences in visions still existed. Vitaly Tretyakov, editor-in-chief of Nezavisimaya Gazeta, for example, continued to argue as late as 1996 that “It is obvious to me that the Russian Empire, the Soviet Union and present-day Russia are one and the same... For me this signifies one state”.⁹⁸

During these years another of the key ideas of the pragmatic nationalist orientation, the defence of the Russian and Russian-speaking diasporas, became widely accepted in

⁹⁴ Andrannik Migranyan, “Russia and the Near Abroad” Nezavisimaya Gazeta, January 12, and January 18, 1994. Yevgeny Ambartsumov, Chair of the International Affairs Committee, also claimed responsibility for the same ideas.

⁹⁵ Other members of the club included Nikolai Ryzhkov and Igor Smirnov “Eurasianism: Arkady Volsky Proposes that the Former USSR Be Considered the Future One”, Segodnya, June 21, 1995, p.2.

⁹⁶ Ibid. Later Volsky came to lead a coalition which favoured an independent Russian policy to preserve the industrial potential of the state and the international influence of Russia as a great power. Arkady Volsky headed the All-Russian Renewal Union, which represented industrial interests in the Civic Union. It exercised considerable influence until the spring of 1993. In the spring of 1995 Volsky helped to establish the United Industrial Party

⁹⁷ Dmitry Baluev, “Moderation in the National Idea”, International Affairs, Moscow, vol.42, no.5/6 (1996), pp.103-115.

⁹⁸ Tretyakov in a roundtable discussion “Growing Support for New Foreign Policy in Russia”, International Affairs, Moscow, vol. 42, no. 5/6 (1996), pp. 15-31, p. 26

rhetoric if not practice. The Congress of Russian Communities (KRO), for example, was formed in order to protect the rights of, and to reinforce ties with, the Russian-speaking diasporas in the CIS. KRO was established by Dmitry Rogozin in 1993 and then led by Yury Skokov. Besides their vocal defence of the diasporas, the Congress's concrete actions consisted of applying political influence. For example, on 18 May 1995, the KRO successfully sent an appeal to Kazakhstan's President Nursultan Nazarbayev in defence of Boris Suprunyuk, head of Northern Kazakhstan's Russian community who was arrested in what they called a "policy of genocide against the non-Kazakhs and of general disdain for human rights".⁹⁹ Outside the Congress, various means were debated about how the Russian government could provide various forms of aid for Russian-speakers wishing to return to Russia. Aleksei Arbatov, for example, proposed a state-sponsored re-immigration program for Russian-speakers. The expense, he argued, was certain to be great but it was absolutely necessary. According to him, such a program would immediately reduce tensions both in the attitudes of Russian-speakers abroad and in Russia's relations with its neighbouring states. Arbatov argued that the Russian military presence could not solve this problem but "by demonstrating that concern for Russian-speakers is a genuine motive for Russia's policy, not a pretext to exert pressure and interfere, Moscow would have the right to call to account the regimes that violate their rights. For that purpose, there are international organizations, political and economic sanctions, and a wide array of instruments of international law".¹⁰⁰

The widespread expression of various means to protect the diaspora succeeded in changing the rhetoric of the debate and contributed to an increasingly assertive foreign policy tone and political context. This developed on the basis of an increasing media focus that raised general awareness about the geopolitical reality of a 25 million plus diaspora, whose rights in several incidents were being challenged. The Russian political elite used this reality to develop and attempt to popularise the perception or myth that these Russian communities longed to secede and to return to their "homeland". Although this issue of abandoned

⁹⁹ Viktor Khamrayev, "For now, Kazakhstan Political Prisoner is Free", *Segodnya*, May 31, 1995, p.2.

¹⁰⁰ Aleksei Arbatov, "Imperial Infantilism and Russia's National Interests", *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, June 24, 1995, pp.1-2.

brethren failed to spawn concrete policies or policy outcomes it did influence a more assertive foreign policy thinking.¹⁰¹

ii) The Russian Government's Foreign Policy Position

After the adoption of the Foreign Policy Concept and Military Doctrine in mid-1993, Foreign Minister Kozyrev attempted to give credit to the government by introducing the term "Yeltsin's Doctrine" to describe what he now called Russia's "special" security interests in the near abroad.¹⁰² In a speech in 1994, Kozyrev claimed that the "states of the CIS and Baltics constitute the area of concentration of Russia's vital interests. This is also the area from which the main threats to these interests emanate... I think that raising the question about complete withdrawal and removal of any Russian military presence in the countries of the near abroad is just an extreme, if not extremist, suggestion comparable to the idea of sending (Russian) tanks to all the former republics to establish there some imperial order...".¹⁰³ The government's commitment to force as a realistic option to secure goals also seemed to be strengthened by Yeltsin's decision in mid-1993 to use the military in his stand off with the parliament and later in the Chechen war of 1994-96. In terms of the issue of the protection of the Russian diaspora, generally government documents ignored this specific issue. The government position was that Russia had the right to protect Russians abroad but the basic premise was that the diasporas should be integrated into their countries of residence.

In 1995, Kozyrev adopted his opponents' language and pragmatic nationalist ideas to criticize the State Duma for failing to pass a law on peacekeeping operations.¹⁰⁴ Later,

¹⁰¹ Neil Melvin and Charles King (eds.), Nations Abroad, Diaspora Politics and International Relations in the Former Soviet Union (Oxford: Westview Press, 1998); Neil Melvin, Russians Beyond Russia: The Politics of National Identity (London: RIIA, 1995).

¹⁰² Izvestiya, March 4 1993, p.4. Also see V. Portnikov, "Andrei Kozyrev defines priorities", Nezavisimaya Gazeta, February 23, 1994, p.4.

¹⁰³ Kozyrev's 1994 speech to the CIS and Baltic ambassadors. In A. Pushkov, "Kozyrev has started the game at the alien field", Moskovskiye Novosti, no.4., January 23-30, 1994, p. A13.

¹⁰⁴ Andrei Kozyrev's speech to the summer meeting of the Russian Foreign Policy Council was titled "Ways to Further Integration in the CIS and Russian Interests", in "Russian Interests in the CIS", International Affairs, Moscow, vol.40, no.5 (October 11, 1994), pp. 11-30, p.15.

speaking to the Federation Council, he forcefully emphasized that Russia had no imperial ambitions but hoped to “gather together the former Soviet republics.” He asked politicians to support Russia’s peacekeeping actions and the establishment of military bases. He also said that Russia is “making every effort to combat the drive for some CIS states to join NATO.”¹⁰⁵ At the time, the official Russian attitude towards NATO was becoming increasingly negative. NATO was accused of being wedded to the “stereotypes of bloc thinking” and Russia was indecisive about the extent to which it would participate in the Partnership for Peace (PFP) program.¹⁰⁶

When asked to explain the shift in his position, Kozyrev said that he was conducting the “President’s policy” and it was evolving along the “general line”.¹⁰⁷ As he himself explained, “That line is hardening and becoming tougher and less flexible – and with it, so is Kozyrev”.¹⁰⁸ This statement is significant because it clearly shows that Kozyrev acknowledged that his policy position was changing because of a shift in the political debate.¹⁰⁹

Yevgeny Primakov, then the Director of Russia’s Foreign Intelligence Service (FIS), admitted that Russia’s foreign policy had “undergone a change in the direction of a more independent course that assigns primary importance to its own vitally important national interests.” He emphasized that these changes in policy should not be interpreted as a “challenge to the United States”. However, he recognized the “vitally irreversible” sovereignty of the new states and denied that Russia was using economic and other advantages to “lay its hands on” them.¹¹⁰ He cited favourable economic realities as conducive to the creation of a common economic space in the CIS. These included the former

¹⁰⁵ Yelena Tregubova, “Andrei Kozyrev: Russia has no Imperial Ambitions but...”, Segodnya, July 7, 1995, p.1.

¹⁰⁶ Russia had signed the Partnership Framework Document on 22 June 1994 but delayed in signing the associated Individual Partnership Programme. Andrei Kozyrev, “A Strategy for Partnership”, International Affairs, vol.40, no.1 (July 5, 1994), pp.1-11.

¹⁰⁷ Leonid Velekhov, Segodnya, April 3, 1995, p.3.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Krasnaya Zvezda, April 15, 1995, p.2.

¹¹⁰ Primakov presented a non-classified report “Russia and the CIS: Does the West’s Position Need Adjustment?” at the MFA press center. It was published in Rossiyskaya Gazeta, September 22, 1995, pp.1,6.

cooperation in production and technological spheres, the need for reciprocal trade, the lack of foreign financial and industrial capital due to high instability and commercial risk, the worldwide tendency to expand economic integration (e.g. NAFTA or European Union) and finally, the need to lessen inter-state tensions with regard to the 25 million Russian diaspora.¹¹¹

Primakov argued that the geopolitical realities of the region (including the increase in number of states possessing or capable of possessing nuclear weapons) were impelling the CIS states to create a common defence space to ensure their security. “The conflict zone embracing central Europe and part of the “periphery” of the former USSR is expanding”.¹¹² Primakov maintained that the causes of these conflicts were: the CIS states border highly-armed states; the desire of Afghanistan, Iran and Turkey to extend their influence into the region; “Islamic extremism” and finally, the conflict situations result in “disproportionate reactions”.

Yeltsin was worried about the decrease in trade with the CIS states. In 1995, in a speech to the parliament, he noted that “At present, the CIS countries account for only 20 percent of Russia’s total foreign trade turnover, as against 56 percent in 1991. The Commonwealth states’ growing insolvency with respect to Russia, especially when it comes to paying for energy deliveries, is cause for concern”.¹¹³

In May 1996, the Council on Foreign and Defence Policy published a paper on Russia’s relations with the CIS states which reaffirmed Russia’s strategic priority to be first, domestic stability and second, the near abroad.¹¹⁴ The official search to define Russia and its interests based on pragmatic nationalist ideas continued even after Yeltsin’s re-election in June 1996 with his officially sponsored campaign to search for a new “Russian national idea” which could encourage the development of state patriotism.¹¹⁵

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Yeltsin’s message to the Federal Assembly, Rossiskiye Vesti, February 17, 1995, pp.1, 3-7.

¹¹⁴ Sergei Karaganov and Vitaly Tretiakov, Nezavisimaya Gazeta, May 23, 1996.

¹¹⁵ Rossiyskaya Gazeta, July 30, 1996. This paper sponsored a search for a new “Russian national idea”. However previously it also had printed many articles about Russia’s historic search for this same “national idea”. See for example, September 10, 1993, p.3.

The newly re-elected Yeltsin brought with him a new government of young reformers primarily concerned with solving Russia's economic problems. As a consequence of these new priorities, Russia's foreign policy became more pragmatic – for example in its search for political as opposed to military solutions for CIS conflicts. In 1996, the appointment of Primakov as Russia's new Foreign Minister seemed to have both reflected and encouraged the consolidation of the foreign policy consensus among the political elite. After Primakov's appointment, Russian interests were confidently acknowledged to be tied to its security, economic and psychological relations with the FSU. Primakov consistently argued that Russia was the dominant state in the region and that therefore Russia must be acknowledged as a necessary partner for political, economic and military activity in Eurasia.¹¹⁶

The worldview expounded (if not actually believed) by the new Russian government was that of an unstable, multi-polar world with Russia being America's equal partner. Government officials defined Russia's objective foreign policy interests as – a need to develop close relations with the CIS states seen as vital to Russian interests; to promote peace in the region; to continue to develop relations with the US; and to create new links in Asia and the Middle East. Apparently, Primakov argued, in a closed Duma session on foreign policy in 1996, that the West would respect Russia only if it developed its own separate position on foreign policy issues – otherwise, he claimed, the West would not pay attention.¹¹⁷

iii) Russian Foreign Policy Towards the CIS States

Russian foreign policies toward the CIS states during the period from late 1993 to 1996 paralleled the general conceptual shift in the foreign policy guidelines of 1993. Although the government's statements were often much more aggressive than its actual decisions, policies generally followed the contours of pragmatic nationalism. Russia actively attempted to consolidate its status as regional "great power". Interests were defined geopolitically; the military was used to safeguard Russia's integrity and keep peace in the

¹¹⁶ Yevgeny Primakov, *Izvestiya*, March 6, 1996, p.3.

¹¹⁷ Author's Interview with Borovoi, May 29, 1999.

CIS; and steps were taken to discourage CIS disintegration (even though few successful actions were taken to increase integration). There were also attempts to develop the policies proposed in the Military Doctrine of 1993, though not all were successful. Russian troops continued to patrol the borders of the CIS (although their numbers were not increased); military bases were maintained; and Russia retained its unique status of sole nuclear power in the region. Unsuccessful efforts were made to create a collective system of defence.¹¹⁸

In spite of these policy initiatives, there was no single, comprehensive or coherent policy towards the near abroad as a whole over this three-year period, and Russian policies varied by region and issue.¹¹⁹ The result was a foreign policy of “selective engagement”. Over these years, the increasingly isolationist mood of the political elite and public, and the growing awareness that Russia lacked adequate resources, spawned policies which, in many cases, were calculated to avoid costly commitments. Thus, despite policy statements claiming that CIS military and economic integration and diaspora protection would be vigorously pursued, they had limited results. The one area where Russia did forcefully pursue its interests was in military involvement in former Soviet republics conflicts.¹²⁰ However, as will be seen in the thesis case-studies, the results were mixed.

During this period, Russia was keen to reassure the successor states that it had broken with its older, imperial traditions. However, the government also came to view the CIS as an institutional structure that could secure Russia’s interests in the former Soviet space. Yeltsin called for increased integration.¹²¹ Several policies to that effect were signed. Russia initiated the development of the CIS Economic Union, promoted military co-operation through the CIS Collective Security Treaty, and in 1994 for the first time created a Ministry for Co-operation with the CIS States. However, Russia’s attempts to develop the CIS into a coherent

¹¹⁸ For an excellent overview of Russia’s foreign policies see: Margot Light, “Post-Soviet Russian Foreign Policy: The First Decade”, in Archie Brown (ed.), *Contemporary Russian Politics: A Reader* (Oxford: OUP, 2001), pp.419-428.

¹¹⁹ The Transcaucasus, for example, were seen as a foothold in an area of strategic importance whereas the Central Asian states (except for Tajikistan) were deemed to be less strategically important. These distinctions will be seen in the following case study chapters.

¹²⁰ Russia’s peacekeeping role in Moldova, Georgia and Abkhazia is examined at great length in Dov Lynch, *Russian Peacekeeping Strategies in the CIS* (London: Macmillan Press and RIIA, 2000).

¹²¹ Yeltsin’s speech to the Federal Assembly, *Rossiyskiye Vesti*, February 17, 1995, pp.1,3-5.

and viable multilateral organisation, which could regulate the relations in the former Soviet space around a Russian centre, largely failed. CIS integration was hampered by many circumstances: a differentiated membership in which each state signed various agreements; the lack of any enforcement mechanism; and the sensitivities of the states concerning any action that might infringe upon their national sovereignty.

By mid-1994, CIS membership had increased to encompass all the former Soviet republics except the Baltic states. There was, however, no consensus with respect to its form or powers.¹²² On the other hand, bilateral links increased and bilateralism allowed Russia to pursue a differentiated approach to the CIS states based on Russia's interests and the interests of each specific state.

The theoretical concepts of 1993 identified peace in the CIS states as one of Russia's greatest interests. Russian policies adhered to this principle as Russia was politically and militarily involved in helping the CIS states where conflicts arose. However, Russia withdrew from the Baltic states where there were no conflicts. Russian troops left Lithuania in September 1993, and Latvia and Estonia by the end of August 1994. Russian policies during this stage also continued to be oriented towards preserving friendly relations with the West (which is consistent with pragmatic nationalist ideas).¹²³

Throughout the period, Russian actions to protect the Russian-speaking diasporas in CIS countries were less aggressive than its rhetoric. No concrete actions were taken towards those regions that held the largest percentages of Russian-speakers: the Baltic states, northern

¹²² In January 1993, a CIS Charter was adopted which set out the basic aims of the CIS and outlined the basic mechanisms of interaction. After that, attempts at political and economic integration were taken, but with varying levels of success. For example, in May 1993 the CIS Heads of State set up a CIS Executive Secretariat and CIS Coordinating Consultative Committee. There were also various CIS councils which met regularly. In September 1993, nine CIS members signed a treaty to create an Economic Union and in October 1994 an Interstate Economic Commission was created to oversee the creation of the Economic Union. In January 1995, Belarus, Russia and Kazakhstan signed an agreement to create a customs union. Kyrgyzstan joined in 1996. See Mark Webber, *The International Politics of Russia and the Successor States*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996).

¹²³ For example, Russia acted to prevent the proliferation of the Soviet Union's huge arsenal of nuclear weapons. In January 1994, it signed the Trilateral Agreement allowing the transfer of Ukrainian strategic warheads to Russia and thus opened the way to the ratification and implementation of the severe cuts in strategic nuclear weapons that would begin in the START II Agreement. Cuts were also made in the size of the Russian armed forces. *Rossiyskiye Vesti*, May 19, 1993, p.7.

Kazakhstan and the Crimea. There was general political pressure (and threats of stronger tactics) to give special treatment to the Russian-speaking diasporas, but the only concrete results were that Turkmenistan granted its tiny Russia population the right to dual citizenship, and Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan made Russian the official language of the state. Similarly, despite the rhetoric and declarations about re-imposing Russian control over the Black Sea Fleet in the Crimea, no action was taken. In fact, the Russian government neither encouraged nor helped the Russian diaspora of Crimean separatists in Ukraine – even though the loss of this territory was the most bitter of the many it endured in 1991.

In terms of economic integration, a proliferation of bilateral policies was put in place outside the framework of the CIS. Across the entire region Russia's trade with CIS states declined in the years immediately after the break up of the USSR, however exports to the CIS states slowly began to increase after 1994. In 1994, Russia's exported \$14.5 billion to the CIS states which rose to 17.6 billion in 1996. Russia's trade with the far abroad also continued to grow – from \$53 billion in 1994 to \$71 billion in 1996.¹²⁴ Some analysts have argued that Russia's finance and economic ministers were responsible for the decline in economic relations with the near abroad because of their continuous interventions. Henry Hale, for example, argued that Russian ministers were not prepared to give the subsidies necessary for reintegration. "Indeed they have operated from behind the scenes to stymie every major Russian effort to reunify the near abroad".¹²⁵

Nevertheless, despite inconsistencies and failures, and despite the differences among its issue and area-specific policies, Russia did develop a kind of sphere of influence throughout the former Soviet Union. The most pro-Moscow of these states was Belarus, and the two states signed an agreement on monetary union in April 1994 – although it was not put into place at this stage. Ukraine, on the other hand, continually frustrated Russian aspirations to create a Slavic core within the FSU, and refused to help develop or join a

¹²⁴ "Russia in Figures", Handbook, (Moscow: State Committee of the Russian Federation on Statistics (Goskomstat)), 1999. (www.gks.ru)

¹²⁵ Henry E. Hale, "The Rise of Russian Anti-Imperialism", Orbis, vol.43, no.1 (Winter 1999), pp.111-126, p.113.

security system. Other CIS states were also reluctant to share any financial or peacekeeping burdens.¹²⁶

When Primakov became Foreign Minister in 1996, Russian foreign policy became increasingly centred on pragmatic concerns such as oil and financial interests. Many policies were initiated which seemed to signal further attempts to use the multilateral CIS to develop Russian re-integration in the near abroad. Collective security was once more at the top of the agenda, and in January, at the CIS Heads of State summit, plans for a united air defence system were approved as well as rules for dealing with conflicts in the CIS. In October 1996, the Council of CIS Foreign Ministers agreed to draft documents protecting CIS external borders that had failed to pass at the Council of CIS Heads of State in February 1995.¹²⁷ Then in April 1996, a bilateral agreement was signed between Russia and Belarus creating a Community of Sovereign States. The success of these particular policies was unknown by the end of the period under study. However, on the whole, Russia's policies followed broad pragmatic nationalist lines even though specific outputs were varied.

3. Conclusions

The evolution from liberal westernism to pragmatic nationalism between 1991 and 1996 needs to be understood in the context of Yeltsin's struggles first with Gorbachev and then with parliament. During these years, pragmatic nationalist ideas became influential because they were adopted by key elements within the foreign policy making institutions such as parliament, the MFA, the MoD and the military.

Our examination of the evolution of the Russian political debate and foreign policy towards the CIS shows that by 1993 the articulated foreign policy views of members of the political elite were converging as a result of the widespread adoption of similar pragmatic nationalist ideas. Pragmatic nationalism acted as a "road map" to help frame or structure foreign policy options. From 1991 to 1996, the narrowing of stated views towards a

¹²⁶ Col. Gennady Miranovich, *Krasnaya Zvezda*, July 20, 1995, p.1.

¹²⁷ Sergei Parkomenko and Natalya Gorodetskaya, *Segodnya*, February 11, 1995, p.1.

geopolitical emphasis upon traditional ties and close relations with the near abroad and the endorsement of the use of military force if necessary to protect Russian interests led to a narrowing range of acceptable policy choices. Consequently members of the political elite began to advocate similar foreign policies. The government responded to this broad consensus over foreign policy principles (which was in line with changes in Russia's internal and external context) by outlining a new Foreign policy Concept and Military Doctrine. The formal adoption of these principles represented a conceptual shift in foreign policy thinking. While there had been no official or coherent overall policy towards the CIS states, government policies towards the near abroad began to be designed to retain Russian influence in the region.

Nevertheless, despite agreement on broad principles, vigorous disputes remained in terms of specific policy options and how those positions should be translated into action. The consensus was over ends not means. Moreover, the actual policy outputs did not always reflect the government's positions. Thus, Russian foreign policy was more consistent in its overall conceptual framework or ideas than it was in its specific economic, military and political policies – which is typical of most states.

In summary, this chapter has shown which foreign policy ideas were being discussed during the period 1991-1996 and which ones were incorporated into policy. Three key stages were identified in which the general debate and policy orientations shifted. In the Atlanticist Period (August 1991-March 1992) debate and policy was characterized by the domination of liberal westernist ideas. Alternatives for action were seen in stark black and white terms, with foreign policy framed as either having to follow the old Soviet ways or to copy the West. In the second period (March 1992-November 1993) multiple ideas were entertained with pragmatic nationalism becoming more prominent in the foreign policy debate. By the end of this period, pragmatic nationalist ideas were institutionalised in the Foreign Policy Concept and Military Doctrine which together provided a broad and flexible framework for actual policy.

It must be emphasized that the Foreign Policy Concept and the Military Doctrine were officially adopted after Russia's military involvement in the conflicts had already begun. However, as was made clear above, a broad consensus over the main terms, such as the use of military force to keep peace in the FSU, was achieved well before the official adoption of these ideas. Thus debate and the policies influenced each other and were mutually reinforcing. Both moreover predated the official articulation of the government position. Retrospectively, it seems that the early liberal westernist foreign policy orientation was dropped by the spring of 1992 both because of the domestic political context (political elite debate and pressure, wounds to the national psyche, failure of economic reforms etc) and because it was failing to provide a direction for appropriate policies.

During the third period, (November 1993-June 1996), debate and government rhetoric were dominated by pragmatic nationalism while the policy output was mixed. Members of the political elite continued to agree that Russia should remain involved in its "natural sphere of influence", the near abroad, and that doing so would help Russia secure its role as a "great power". However, these views were also tempered by isolationist thinking and warnings about the negative consequences and costs should Russia become aggressively involved in a search for dominance in the CIS states. Scepticism about the use of military force in conflicts was also widely aired. Policies were developed which fit both the consensus of ideas and the broader external context. However, although the near abroad was widely proclaimed to be an area of great importance, different visions of Russia's territory remained and disagreements continued. In analyst Ilya Prizel's term, a state of "continued paralysis"¹²⁸ developed. Despite the apparent consensus on the foreign and military policy guidelines adopted in 1993, the questions of what Russia is, and what its specific policies should be, had not been settled. Perhaps as significant, was the elite recognition of a gap between self-image and reality - in other words between Russia's past role as a great power and its present powerlessness.

During this period, government officials stated that special interests in the CIS states were to be pursued – using military force if necessary – especially to end conflicts and

¹²⁸ Ilya Prizel, National Identity and Foreign Policy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) p.299.

defend the rights of Russians in the near abroad. Official policy statements announced that Russia would retain or even increase its military bases abroad and would defend the external borders of the CIS. However, actual policy output continued to be mixed and specific policy outputs did not always follow the new guidelines. Once again what Russia did not do was at least as important as what it did. Nevertheless, very generally, the broad contours of foreign policy continued to follow pragmatic nationalist prescriptions. Policies were focused upon particular interests in the near abroad, and specific actions and their success varied depending on the particular case.

Foreign policy throughout the three stages was not based on a unifying idea like socialism, but rather on how the political elite conceived Russia and its role in the world, the actions of a government seeking political legitimacy, and external events in international relations, particularly in the near abroad. Pragmatic nationalist ideas affected foreign policy choices in the domestic political process by creating conceptual "road maps" which helped to dictate foreign policy and through their institutionalisation in government statements, official doctrine, and sometimes action. We now turn to our three case-studies to find out whether in these three key areas of the near abroad there was a similar relationship between ideas and policy that would confirm the importance of studying ideas and debate as one of the important factors in understanding foreign policy. The case studies examine whether or not the debates and policies about Russia's political and military involvement in these specific conflicts in the near abroad followed the same general contours and were dominated by the same foreign policy orientations as debates and policies over foreign policy in general as seen in this chapter.

Chapter Five: The Russian Political Debates Concerning Russian Political and Military Involvement in the Moldova-Transdnistria Conflict

Moldova's separatist war with its Transdnistria region was the first conflict in the former Soviet space in which Russia became militarily active. The Moldova-Transdnistria war began in March 1992, and Russia played a leading role in the dispute from its inception through the cease-fire in July 1992 and on to the search for a final political settlement in 1996. This chapter examines the evolution of the Russian political debates concerning Russia's policy towards the Moldova-Transdnistria conflict. Very broadly, the debates over specific policy followed the same general contours as the debates over foreign policy as a whole. Shifts in the general thinking about foreign policy influenced Russia's policy towards the conflict and, vice versa, the development of the conflict and Russia's role in it influenced the overall debates concerning foreign policy. This chapter provides a chronological analysis of three stages in Russia's debates and policies towards the conflict. Within each stage, we identify the dominant foreign policy ideas in the debates and examine whether they were reflected in Russia's policies and military action.

To set the overall context of the debates this chapter begins with a brief historical overview of the transition from separatism to war in Transdnistria with particular attention to Soviet and then Russian involvement. It next identifies and examines Russia's key interests in the conflict, carefully specifying the material incentives facing Russia's decision-makers and explaining the extent to which the interests were legacies of Tsarist Russian and Soviet history. The purpose of examining the facts about Russia's material interests is to discover how much room there was for the debates to influence the various policy options. Did Russian policy-makers have concrete foreign policy alternatives? In this regard it is helpful to distinguish where possible between Russia's "material" and "perceived" interests. Of course, interests are never completely objective, but instead are defined and defended by political leaders. Therefore, the chapter attempts to gauge whether or not there was a gap between real interests and how these interests were perceived (or manipulated) – that is, whether the declared interests of the members of the political elite were based upon objective

reality or whether they were simply slogans manipulated by Russian politicians for domestic or even international purposes.

1. From Separatism to War in Transdnistria

The growth of separatism in the Transdnistrian region of Moldova (Transdnistria), partly in response to Moldova's threat of unification with Romania, led to the Moldova-Transdnistria war. The political status of Transdnistria was therefore an integral part of the Russian political debate concerning Moldova 1991-1996. The background and evolution of the separatist movement, the ensuing war and the evolution of Soviet and then Russian involvement in the conflict after 1991 will be clarified briefly before proceeding to a detailed examination of Russian interests, debates and policies.

Even before it declared independence in August 1991, Moldova faced challenges from Transdnistrian separatists.¹ The movement began in 1989 as a spontaneous reaction to Moldovan policy. On 31 August of that year, Moldova passed a law that made Romanian the state language and replaced Cyrillic with Latin letters for the transcription of Romanian. Many of the Russians and other ethnic groups in Moldova felt threatened and feared that the pan-Romanian movement led by the Moldovan Popular Front might eventually achieve unification with Romania.² As a protest against this possibility, Russian and Ukrainian workers went on strike. On 3 September 1990, leaders of Transdnistria proclaimed the "Trans-Dniester Soviet Socialist Republic" to be a separate part of the USSR.³ What had

¹ There was also a Gagauz separatist movement. The Gagauz are Orthodox Turkic peoples who live in Southern Moldova.

² However, the language requirement was only imposed on those in leadership positions or in regular contact with the public. Moreover, with independence, Moldova was generally accommodating towards its ethnic minorities. It did not impose stricter language laws on them and, most significantly, it adopted a citizenship law in which all people currently resident in Moldova could become citizens if they wished. Jeff Chinn and Steven D. Roper, "Ethnic Mobilization and Reactive Nationalism: The Case of Moldova", in *Nationalities Papers*, vol. 23, no.2 (1995), pp.291-325, p.298.

³ On the left bank of the Dniester river, the "Trans-Dniester Soviet Socialist Republic" included the Kamen, Dubossar, Rybnitsa, Grigoropol and Slabodzey districts and the towns of Tiraspol, Rybnitsa and Dubossary, and on the right bank the town of Bendery.

begun as a protest in 1989 led to a revolt in 1990, and subsequently developed into a full fledged separatist movement by 1991.

Earlier, in the spring parliamentary elections of 1990, the Moldovan Communists lost to the Popular Front, a largely Romanian dominated coalition. The Communist party retained solid support only in the Transdnestrian and Gagauz areas where voters considered that Gorbachev and his reforms were encouraging Romanian ethnic revival in Moldova. On 23 June 1990, the Moldovan Supreme Soviet adopted a declaration of sovereignty decreeing that Moldovan law superseded Soviet law. The following year, on 27 August 1991, Moldova declared its independence. Transdnestria rejected Moldovan sovereignty and declared its own independence on 2 September 1991.

For its part, the Soviet government first ignored the divisive situation in Moldova, and then sided with the breakaway territory. In late 1990, when the Transdnestrian congress was considering declaring its independence, the Soviet Ministry of Interior sent troops to guarantee the region's security.⁴ The Soviet government also helped to establish a Transdnestrian bank which provided finances for the coming war.⁵ It is even likely that the Soviet civil defence organisation and the official Soviet paramilitary organisation were at this time supplying the Transdnestrian volunteers with weapons.⁶ Following the failed August 1991 coup⁷ in Moscow the commander of the 14th Army, Major General Gennady Yakovlev, accepted bribes in exchange for supplying arms to Transdnestria's "Republic Guard"⁸ and even accepted a short term position as the Transdnestrian defence minister.⁹

The aborted coup of August 1991 further widened the existing differences between Moldova and Transdnestria. Moldovan President Mircea Snegur organised active protests against the coup-makers, whereas the Transdnestrian Russians and the Gagauzi sided with

⁴ Eduard Kondratev, *Izvestiya*, September 3, 1990, p.2.

⁵ *FBIS* April 29, 1991. Quoted in Stuart J. Kaufman and Stephen R. Bowers, "Transnational Dimensions of the Transdnestrian Conflict" in *Nationalities Papers*, vol.26, no. 1 (1998), pp.129-146, p.130

⁶ Stuart J. Kaufman, "Spiralling to Ethnic War: Elites, Masses, and Moscow in Moldova's Civil War", in *International Security*, vol.21, no.2 (fall 1996), pp. 108-138, p.130.

⁷ See Chapter Four.

⁸ Colonel Mikhail Bergman, Tiraspol garrison commandant of the 14th Russian Army, confirmed the fact that the 14th Army provided the Transdnestrians with weapons at this time. *Interfax*, March 18, 1992.

⁹ *Itar-Tass*, September 24, 1991.

them. These incidents set a precedent of limited Soviet involvement on the side of the separatists. They also revealed a complex web of personal contacts that had been established during the Soviet period among members of the elite in Moscow, Transdnistria and the Soviet 14th Army based in the region. To a much lesser extent, some of these ties continued into the post-Soviet period.

The simmering tension and sporadic fighting between the separatists and the Moldovan government erupted into three months of armed conflict from March to June 1992, known as the Moldova-Transdnistria War. At the beginning of 1992, Transdnistrian communist and military leaders expanded their control over Moldovan villages on the left bank of the Dniester river and some cities on the right bank – actions which Romanians described as a "creeping putsch".¹⁰ With the support of the (at this stage, Russian) 14th Army, Transdnistrian loyalists were organized into paramilitary units and dispatched into the rural areas to take over administrative buildings and police stations, replacing ethnic Romanians with ethnic Russians.¹¹ After months of these raids, full military action started on 24 March 1992 when the 14th Army crossed to the right bank of the Dniester river. By 20 June 1992, the fighting reached its height in the town of Bendery (Transdnistria's largest industrial centre located on the "right bank") when Russian troops helped to force Moldovan troops and police from the city.¹² A cease-fire was instated on 7 April 1992, but sporadic fighting

¹⁰Chinn and Roper, "Ethnic Mobilization and Reactive Nationalism: The Case of Moldova" in Nationalities Papers, vol. 23, no.2 (1995), pp.291-325, p.306.

¹¹Vladimir Durnov, Izvestiya, June 12, 1992, p.5.

¹² Most analysts have described the war as an ethnic conflict (because Transdnistria is more russified than the rest of Moldova). However, neither "ethnicity" (because the region is of mixed ethnic and linguistic characteristics and generally home to harmonious ethnic relations) nor "ideology" adequately describe the conflict. As in Tajik civil war, ideology was used to cover power struggle among various clans. In struggles with Moscow during perestroika opposition forces in Moldova, as in most other former Soviet republics, portrayed themselves as radically anti- communist – although many were from nomenklatura backgrounds. The Transdnistrian leadership wanted to contrast itself with the rest of Moldova – which was one reason that they described themselves as communists. Transdnistria retained several features from the Soviet period including the red flag with a green horizontal stripe and did not destroy its statues of Lenin. Kolsto and Malgin suggest that the Transdnistrian desire for independence was based upon "a vague, but nevertheless tangible common identity of most of its population". This identity, they say, cuts across ethnic divisions and is due more to history and geography than to ideology. In this interpretation, the conflict is primarily seen as an example of "regional separatism". Pal Kolsto and Andrei Malgin, "The Transdnistrian Republic: A Case of Politicized Regionalism", in Nationalities Papers, vol. 26, no.1 (1998), pp.103-127, p.104. This was a special issue of Nationalities Papers, edited by Michael Hamm and titled "Moldova: The Forgotten Republic".

continued. Another cease-fire in July led to the creation and involvement of a multilateral peacekeeping force. The July agreement in effect gave Transdnistria *de facto* independence.

2. Russia's Key Interests in Moldova

Tsarist and Soviet relations with the territory now known as Moldova did not predetermine Russia's actions towards that new state after 1991. However, they did very broadly set the tone for the Russian debates and policies on this topic. Many members of the Russian political elite held basic notions about the region based upon their understanding of Tsarist and Soviet historical relations with the territory. In the 1991-1996 period of chaos and uncertainty, knowledge of these former relations provided basic reference points with which to define Russia's interests in the region. The practical issues that Russia confronted required solutions and therefore became foreign policy interests.

The Russian debate over Moldova after 1991 therefore addressed the remnants of Imperial Russian and Soviet historical policies in the newly independent states. The debate focused on four historically intertwined Russian interests: the need to prevent Moldova's reunification with Romania; the protection of Moldova's ethnic Russians and Russian-speaking peoples; the continuation of Russia's military presence in the region; and the preservation or renewal of Russia's economic ties with the region. These interests were related to Moldova's historic ties to Russia and Russian culture (particularly in Transdnistria), its ethnic Russian and Russian-speaking diaspora, its large Russian military presence, and its weak economy that was still partly dependent on Russia. We examine each of these four interests in turn.

a) The Threat of Moldovan Reunification with Romania

Russia's close historical relations with Moldova, and especially Transdnistria, help to explain why Russian politicians and decision-makers were concerned with the future of this region. In particular, Tsarist Russian and Soviet struggles to retain control of the territory indicate why, at the beginning of the Moldova-Transdnistria, war Russia tried to prevent Moldova from reuniting with Romania.

The area now known as Moldova has had a complex history. Along with Wallachia to its west, historic Moldova was one of the two main regions in south-eastern Europe populated by Romanian-speaking people. Historically, the area comprising today's independent Republic of Moldova was geographically positioned between the Russian, Ottoman and Austrian Empires. Bessarabia, the territory located between the Prut and Dniester rivers, which comprises most of modern Moldova, was the eastern region of the traditional principality, most of which is now part of Romania.

Moldova's borders changed many times over the centuries.¹³ During the past two centuries, it was shuffled between and divided among the Russian Empire, Romania and the Soviet Union. In 1812, Russia acquired the bulk of modern Moldova by annexing Bessarabia.¹⁴ With the end of the Russian Empire in 1918, Russia lost Bessarabia to Romania.¹⁵ In 1940, as a result of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, the Soviet Union reacquired Bessarabia, and on 2 August 1940 the Soviet Socialist Republic of Moldova was formed. The Moldovan Republic remained part of the Soviet Union until 1991 – apart from the period of the Nazi invasion, when it was occupied by Romanian troops from 1941-44.

Thus, from its 1812 annexation by Russia until the Soviet Union's disintegration in 1991, most of Moldova's territory was under almost continual Russian or Soviet domination. This historical legacy underlies Russia's early interest in preventing Moldovan re-unification with Romania. The tumultuous past also helps to explain the inherent sensitivities of both Russia and Romania towards the new state.

¹³ For the most recent and comprehensive history of Moldova see Charles King, The Moldovans: Romania, Russia and the Politics of Culture (Palo Alto: Hoover Institute Press, 2000). Also used to develop the general history of Moldova in this chapter are: Alain Ruze, La Moldova entre la Roumanie et la Russie; de Pierre le Grand a Boris Eltsin (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1997); George Cioranescu, Bessarabia; Disputed Land Between East and West (Bucharest: Editura Fundatiei Culturale Romane, 1993); Andrei Stoiciu, Fiction et Realite Identitaire; Le cas de la Bessarabie (Montreal: Humanitas, 1995).

¹⁴ Western Moldova was united with Wallachia in 1859, forming the basis of modern Romania. Therefore, the present Romanian province immediately to the west of the Prut River is also called Moldova. Fisher-Galati explains this incorporation as primarily the Russian Empire's "need for a safe border and territorial base for the pursuit of the anti-Ottoman policies." Stephen Fisher-Galati, "The Moldavian Soviet Republic in Soviet Domestic and Foreign Policy", in Roman Szporluk (ed.), The Influence of East Europe and the Soviet West on the USSR (New York: Praeger, 1976), pp.229-250, p.230.

¹⁵ Bessarabia declared itself an autonomous republic on 2 December 1917 and was independent for four months before the Bessarabian State Council voted to reunite with Romania on 27 March 1918.

Although Russia has had long historic ties with most of what is now Moldova, it has had even longer historical relations with the separatist region of Transdnistria. Many political organisations in Russia after 1991 therefore favoured Transdnistria in the Moldova-Transdnistria conflict. However, while the ties influenced the debate, they by no means determined official Russian policy.

Understanding the differentiation between western Moldova (The Republic of Moldova) and eastern Moldova (Transdnistria) is fundamental. The current conflict dates to 1792 when the territory on the left bank of the Dniester River was ceded by the Ottoman Empire to Russia. In 1792 the Dniester river became the western border of the Russian Empire prior to the annexation of Bessarabia in 1812, and was again the border after the Romanian annexation in 1918. In October 1924, the new communist regime declared the Transdnistria area to be the Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR) of Moldavia. By 1991, like the rest of Moldova's territory, Transdnistria had not known independence. However, neither had it ever been under Romanian rule. It had, however been well exposed to Slavic culture.¹⁶

Although Transdnistrians have never been completely independent, they can appeal to a period of autonomous existence from 1924 to 1944. The Moldavian ASSR encompassed fourteen raions (districts) on the left bank of the Dniester. Its capital was Tiraspol, and it was administered as part of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic. However, its short-lived status as "autonomous republic" was ended in 1944, when eight of the fourteen raions that made up the Moldovan ASSR were removed from the Ukrainian Republic and joined with the newly reincorporated Soviet Socialist Republic of Moldova to its west. The remaining raions were incorporated into the Ukrainian Republic. Thus, the post-1991 Republic of Moldova (incorporating both Western and Eastern regions) was originally formed in 1944, a fact which helps to explain why many Russians thought of Transdnistria as a separate entity from Moldova.

¹⁶ See Donald L. Dyer (ed.), Studies in Moldovan: The History, Culture, Language and Contemporary Politics of the People of Moldova (Boulder, Co.: East European Monographs, 1996) and Ion Alexandrescu, A Short History of Bessarabia and Northern Bucovina (Iasi: The Romanian Cultural Foundation, 1994).

In light of this history, at the beginning of the 1992 Moldova-Transnistria conflict Russia felt threatened by the possibility of Moldova's reunification with Romania.¹⁷ This fear was heightened by the fact that Moldova was the only successor state in which the indigenous population could identify with an adjacent nation outside the former Soviet Union. At first, Russia's interest in preventing Moldova's reunification with Romania can be seen as legitimate. Many Moldovans did agitate for reunification with Romania, and Romania assisted Moldova during its clashes with separatists in 1992. Many members of the Russian political elite regarded this action as evidence of Romanian desire for unification. Their views were reinforced by Romanian nationalist propaganda about "recovering" Moldova and "saving it from the Russians". In June 1992 Moldovan President Mircea Snegur argued:

Today it is very difficult to determine the prospects for unification with Romania... The border with Romania must be open – every one of us has relatives on the other side of the Prut. Eventually we will take the border under our own control and get rid of the barriers. At the same time, I repeat, I would not venture to talk about unification... But one must know the wishes of the people, who were separated for so long from the "non-Soviet" part of Romania.¹⁸

However, Russia's fear of Moldova's reunification with Romania proved exaggerated and disappeared over time. After the initial discovery of their Romanian heritage, the Moldovan government repeatedly asserted its disinterest in reunion with Romania. Moldovans became suspicious of and hostile towards what they saw as Romanian interference in their affairs. Firstly, economically Romania had little to offer Moldova whose ties with the former Soviet Union had been more significant. Secondly, reunification threatened ethnic tensions in Moldova and went against new state-building initiatives. Lastly, the idea of reunification became less fashionable because it was clear that democratisation in Romania was moving very slowly and could eventually jeopardise Moldova's own political

¹⁷ This is examined in detail below in the section on Russian debates and policies.

¹⁸ Interview by Sergei Mitin, *Izvestiya*, June 9, 1992, p.2.

and cultural freedoms. Moldovans therefore rejected the nationalist and pro-Romanian candidates in its first free, post-communist parliamentary elections in February 1994. Subsequently, they decisively rejected reunification with Romania in a March 6 referendum.¹⁹

To conclude, the initial concern of members of the Russian political elite with the pro-unification propaganda from Romania and Moldova was legitimate. At the very beginning, preventing Moldova from joining Romania was both a real and perceived interest. However, as Moldova's interest in reunification diminished, so did Russia's concerns. In spite of this, several Russian politicians – such as Vice President Aleksandr Rutskoi – continued to perceive the situation to be serious enough for Russia to remain involved.²⁰ The threat of Moldova's reunification with Romania did not, therefore, point to an obvious solution which was accepted by all. Instead, a gap developed between Russia's real and perceived interests. There was much uncertainty and considerable room for debate among members of Russia's political elite about what steps should be taken.

b) The Russian-Speaking Diaspora

The existence of a Russian-speaking diaspora in Moldova, especially in Transdnistria, also helps to explain one of Russia's key interests in the conflict. However the question is – was this interest significant and did it dictate Russia's actions?

Historically, both Tsarist and Soviet governments tried to bring or retain Moldova under Russian or Soviet control through their nationality policies. Massive emigration of

¹⁹ Romania was the first state to recognize Moldova when it declared its independence on August 27 1991 and initially provided it with substantial material support. Especially in the early 1990s, the Romanian government assumed that Moldova would eventually reunite with Romania. Initial close cooperation was fostered by the Moldovans' early enthusiasm for "Romanianism". This was largely in response to years of denial of this heritage by the Soviet regime. Most Romanian political forces listed reunification as part of their platforms. However, domestic economic and political problems countered their taking any action to this end. Nevertheless, Romania remained involved in discussions to resolve the Moldova-Transdnistria conflict. While domestically, the opposition parties and the press made emotional calls for reunification, officially Romania supported Moldovan territorial integrity and a peaceful resolution to the conflict. Officially, reunification was seen only as a very long-term possibility – and one based more upon historical relations than ethnicity. See Tom Gallagher, "Nationalism and the Romanian Opposition", *Transition*, vol.2, no.1 (January 12, 1996), pp.30-32.

²⁰ The evolution of Rutskoi's views is carefully examined below. See Rutskoi's comments in Eduard Kondratev, *Izvestiya*, April 6, 1992, p.1.

ethnic Russians into Moldova during these periods created a large Russian diaspora there. This emigration to Moldova was part of a large-scale process that had included Russian emigration towards the newly annexed territories in the Baltic Sea region of Russia. Tsarist policies towards Bessarabia in particular encouraged non-Romanian ethnic groups (Russians, Ukrainians, Germans, Jews, Bulgarians and Gagauz) to settle in the territory in order to dilute the Romanian population and thus differentiate Bessarabia from the developing Romanian state to the west. As a result, Romanians, who had constituted 86% of the population of Bessarabia in 1817, were reduced to 48% of the population by 1897.²¹ The Soviet government continued these aggressive Tsarist migration policies, and initiated, as part of its larger nationalisation program carried out throughout the former Soviet Union, other harsh policies to assimilate the Romanian population.²²

After the Second World War, thousands more Russians and Ukrainians were encouraged to migrate to Moldova, creating large Slavic enclaves. Russians and Russian speakers settled mainly in the urban areas, largely working in technical jobs. The Romanians were overwhelmingly left in rural areas working in the agricultural sectors or in less highly skilled and less highly paid urban occupations. Russian became the language of public life, and the Latin alphabet of the Romanian language was replaced with Cyrillic. Although Moldova did not suffer from the deportation of whole peoples as in the Transcaucasus or Caucasus in the 1940s-50s, the government did force the relocation of certain social groups in Moldova (the official justification was an increase in criminal activities).²³ As a result of these policies and history, by 1989 Romanians made up 65% of the population of Moldova with the other major ethnic groups being Ukrainians (14%), Russians (13%), Gagauz (3.5%), Bulgarians (2.5%) and others (2%).²⁴

²¹ The Republic of Moldova (Chisinau: Foreign Relations Committee of the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova, 1992), p.16.

²² George Cioranescu, Bessarabia: Disputed Land Between East and West (Munich: Editura Fundatiei Culturale Romane, 1985). See chapter 13: The Policy of Russification, pp.196-231.

²³ Nikolai Bougai, "The 1940s-1950s: the Fortunes of the Moldovian People", Political History of Russia, vol.8, no.1 (New York: Nova Science Publishers, 1997) pp.17-28.

²⁴ All-Union population census 1989 [Vsesoyuznaya perepis' naseleniya 1989] (Moskva: Gosudarstvennyi Komitet SSSR po Statistike, 1990).

Tsarist and Soviet policies towards the population of Moldova were typical of Soviet treatment of other republics.²⁵ They were partly designed to differentiate Moldovans from their fellow Romanians to the west. Together they resulted in an increased hostility of ethnic Moldovans towards Russia and helped to forge elements of a new, though somewhat ambiguous, Moldovan identity. After 1991 there was, therefore, a strong desire on the part of many Moldovans to become part of a “greater Romania” while maintaining a unique “Moldovan” national consciousness. In other words, many Moldovans were still tied to Romania by the historical bonds of language and culture, but Slav influence (especially to the east) had, over time, produced a cultural identity distinct from that of the Romanian state.

The argument put forward here is that these nationality policies set an historical precedent for Moscow’s close involvement in the area immediately after 1991. They also help to explain why some members of the political elite in Russia had ties with the region. The cultural ties with Russia conditioned “natural” Russian interest in the new state. Most significantly, the existence of a Russian-speaking diaspora in Moldova provided one of Russia’s key declared interests in the war – the protection of its Russian-speaking brethren.

²⁵ Soviet officials and historians nurtured the idea that Moldova’s national identity was separate and distinct from that of Romania. Some current analysts have gone so far as to assert controversially that, from its inception in 1924, the Moldavian Republic was a Soviet instrument for political action against Romania. See Wilhelmus Van Meurs, The Bessarabian Question in Communist Historiography: Nationalist and Communist Politics and History-Writing (New York: East European Monographs, 1994), especially pp.106-144. For an overtly sympathetic account towards Romania, highly critical of Soviet policies see Nicholas Dima, Bessarabia and Bukhovina; The Soviet-Romanian Territorial Dispute (New York: Columbia Press, 1982). There were also other means of “russification” than forced or encouraged migration. Moldova was isolated from Romania by completely severing communications between them and by administratively dividing Moldova’s territory. Also, Moldova’s government and administration were put in the hands of Russian and Ukrainian functionaries; mixed marriages and military duties abroad were encouraged; and “substituting the Russian language, culture, and living style for the culture, customs, and civilization of the colonized peoples” was common. Finally, the predominantly Romanian rural population was at times treated ruthlessly. A massive famine occurred during the 1946-47 drought when Soviet officials failed to reduce compulsory grain collections, and immediately after, 30,000 peasants were deported during collectivisation. For details see, Ronald J. Hill, Soviet Political Elites, The Case of Tiraspol (London: Martin Robertson, 1977). Also see Fisher-Galati, “The Moldavian Soviet Republic in Soviet Domestic and Foreign Policy”, in Roman Szporluk (ed.), The Influence of East Europe and the Soviet West on the USSR (New York: Praeger, 1976), pp.229-250, p.222. Already beginning in 1843, the Romanian language was forbidden in administration and banned from all schools in 1871. In 1936, Russian became a compulsory subject in all secondary schools of the Soviet Union. On the famine and collectivisation see: William Crowther, “Moldova: caught between nation and empire”, Ian Bremmer and Ray Taras (eds.), New States, New Politics: Building the Post-Soviet Nations (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp.316-349, p.319

However, although Russia had a real interest in the fate of this diaspora, the issue was not as significant as it was made out to be by Russian politicians. The diaspora was relatively small in number and not particularly threatened. Moreover, the presence of the diaspora does not completely explain why many members of Russia's political elite, such as presidential advisor Sergei Stankevich, favoured Transdnistria over the Moldovan government.²⁶ Although Transdnistria was home to a large enclave of ethnic Russians, there were also significant numbers in the rest of Moldova including some who occupied senior positions in the Moldovan government. Clearly, the mere existence of this diaspora does not explain why it should be protected while other Russian diasporas across the FSU were being largely ignored.

In 1989, out of a total population of approximately 4.3 million in Moldova, ethnic Russians constituted the third largest population group after Romanians and Ukrainians.²⁷ Just over 500,000 ethnic Russians (13 % of the total population) lived in Moldova. In addition, about 400,000 members of other nationalities considered Russian to be their native language. The Transdnistria area housed a much greater proportional percentage of ethnic Russians, but still only 27% of Moldova's total Russians (153,400 Russians) lived there.²⁸ Therefore, siding with Transdnistria did not really mean siding with ethnic Russians as claimed by Aleksandr Prokhanov.²⁹

However, the presence of the Russian diaspora does illustrate Transdnistria's ties with members of the political elite in Russia, and it also explains why elements of the Russian political elite and the Russian public cared about the region. The diaspora was not seriously discriminated against as claimed by many Russian politicians, but it was threatened by the war.³⁰ Accustomed to being the elite, dominant group in Transdnistria, many ethnic Russians there were alarmed at the possibility of suddenly becoming a minority in an

²⁶ See for example, Sergei Stankevich, *Izvestiya*, July 7, 1992, p.3. This is explored in detail below in the section on debate and policy.

²⁷ *All-Union population census 1989* [Vsesoyuznaya perepis' naseleniya 1989] (Moskva: Gosudarstvennyi Komitet SSSR po Statistike, 1990).

²⁸ *Ibid.* Of the ethnic Russians in Moldova, 52% were born in Moldova and 36% in Russia.

²⁹ The views of extreme-right editor of *Den'* Aleksandr Prokhanov are examined below. *Den'*, no.18 (1992), p.3.

³⁰ *Itar-Tass*, March 20, 1992.

enlarged Romania. They therefore used the “Romanian card” to mobilise support for the independence of Transdnistria and gain the attention and sympathy of the Russian public.³¹ Uniquely among the diasporas, the Russians in Transdnistria mobilised themselves and fought for independence from Moldova. The Transdnistrian leadership repeatedly requested unification with Russia.

Over time, the Russian diaspora itself eventually lost hope that Russia would accept Transdnistria’s unification request, or that the Soviet Union would ever be recreated. The Transdnistria-Moldova war was therefore not a purely ethnic war as described by some Russian politicians. However, as we shall see, the presence of a diaspora was used to gain public support for Russian involvement in the region. In this way the diaspora issue was part of both the debate and policy, even though no specific actions ever were taken to “save” the diaspora. To conclude, the diaspora was an ongoing Russian interest. How Russia should react in light of the existence of this diaspora was a topic of significant concern and debate.

c) Russian Strategic Interests

Russia’s most significant interest in Moldova – both declared and objective – was strategic. As we have seen, Soviet policies left the new Russia with a large military presence in Moldova and particularly Transdnistria. It was through this presence that Russia initially became militarily involved in Moldova’s internal conflict in 1992 and, to a great extent, it explains why Russia remained a leading player until its resolution in 1996.

Russia's 14th Army, stationed in Transdnistria’s capital, Tiraspol, was an active and partisan participant in the separatist conflict. The army had been positioned there by the Soviet Union in 1945 for possible action in the Balkan peninsula, and was the largest component of the USSR’s forces based in Moldova.³² It was a formidable force composed of

³¹ Russian analyst, Skvortsova argues that the real goal of the Moldovan nationalist leadership was to reconfirm the common identity of the Moldovan and Romanian language, culture and people, and to prepare for the political unification of Moldova with Romania. She describes anti-Russian campaigns in the 1980s and their impact on the Russian-speaking diaspora. Alla Skvortsova, “The Russians in Moldova, Political Orientations”, in Ray Taras (ed), National Identities and Ethnic Minorities in Eastern Europe (London: Macmillan Press, 1998), pp.159-178, p.162.

³² Under the Soviet Union's command, the 14th Army was stationed partly in Ukraine and partly in Moldova (mostly on the left bank), as a component of the Odessa Military District. In the case of a Balkans war, its

armoured, infantry, artillery, tactical missile, air defence, Spetsnaz (special forces), chemical, air reconnaissance, and engineering units.³³

After 1991, the Russian elite as a whole continued to accept the need to retain a military presence in Moldova in order to prevent war and protect its strategic position vis-à-vis Ukraine and the Balkans. A military base in Moldova was considered necessary in case Russian peacekeepers were required to solve or prevent conflicts in the area. Retrospectively, Yeltsin wrote in his autobiography that “It was my deliberate policy to keep conflicts in check. I tried to put a break on them”.³⁴ According to General Alexander Lebed, Commander of the 14th Army, it would have been detrimental to conflict management in the area of the former Soviet Union for Russia to lose control over its military presence.³⁵ There was also the danger of who would get hold of the Russian army’s weapons if it withdrew.³⁶ A permanent base for Russian troops in the Transdnister area (which Moldova was initially adamantly against) was generally regarded to be a useful means to retain regional influence.³⁷ Thus, from the point of view of the Russian elite, especially in the first few years of the break-up of the Soviet Union, the need to retain a military presence in Moldova seemed to be reasonable and based on a continuation of its historical presence in the area.

A final reason for Russia to keep a military base in the region was to secure a close relationship with Moldova. With the end of the Soviet Union, Russia was geopolitically vulnerable. At the beginning of its rule in Moldova, the Popular Front was actively pro-Romanian and anti-Russian, and refused to join in CIS agreements.³⁸ The military bases functioned as a counter-threat to Moldovan aspirations to unite with Romania. Russia’s military presence (and even involvement) during the separatist dispute provided leverage to persuade

mission was to take control of the Turkish straits.

³³ Vladimir Socor, "Russia's Army in Moldova: There to Stay?", RFE-RL Research Report, vol.2, no.25 (June 18, 1993), pp.42-9, p.43.

³⁴ Boris Yeltsin, Midnight Diaries (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2000), p.248.

³⁵ L. Krutakov, Moskovskiye Novosti, no.44 (June 25-July 2, 1995), p.6.

³⁶ Leonid Bershidsky, Moscow Times, June 8, 1995. (Lexis-Nexis)

³⁷ Of course, the desire to retain bases in the Baltic region was even greater but with time it was obvious that the Baltic states were more independent and economically strong.

³⁸ A. Pasechnik, Pravda, December 11, 1992, p.2

Moldova to take a more pro-Russia stance and to ensure Russia's continued political and economic (if not military) influence in the region.

From the Moldovan point of view, Russia's intentions and actions were often seen to be imperialistic. Many suspected that Russia was using the 14th Army to control some of the former territory of the Soviet Union in an experiment to see if the "old means" might work to continue Russia's military presence in the near abroad and to keep the Transdnestrian leaders in power.³⁹ The Moldovan President wrote to the Secretary General of the United Nations: "We are seriously concerned about the repeated official declarations of late made by the leadership of the Russian Federation which clearly witness the lack of desire to give up the "rights" on territory not belonging to it".⁴⁰ Thus, it is difficult to judge whether Russia's interests in retaining military presence were "legitimate" or "imperialistic". Russian troops in Moldova actually decreased from 9,200 in 1992-93 to 4,900 in 1996-97.⁴¹ The only way to make a judgement is to consider the actions advocated to achieve military presence and their results, and we do this later in the chapter.

d) Russian Economic Interests

Historically, Russia had strong economic ties with Moldova, particularly the Transdnestria region. This legacy, too, conditioned Russian interest in the area and the relations between specific political groups in Russia and Transdnestria. Moldova had benefited from economic development during the Soviet period – especially during the Khrushchev era.⁴² Along with traditional strengths in food growing and processing, Moldova became a leading manufacturer of high-technology goods within the Soviet Union. Despite

³⁹ Responding to Russian Defence Minister Grachev's comments that Russia would send troops wherever the Russian population needs protection, Moldovan President Mircea Snegur said "That is a Nazi approach: to dispatch the military to the Dnestr region for the sake of 100,000 Russians...". Snegur continually called for the withdrawal of the 14th Army. Sergei Mitin, *Izvestiya*, June 9, 1992, p.2.

⁴⁰ "Letter dated June 22, 1992 from the President of the Republic of Moldova addressed to the Secretary-General", *UN document*, S/24138, p.3.

⁴¹ Russia had 1,600 peacekeeping troops in Abkhazia in 1996/97. *The Military Balance 1997/98*, (London: IISS, Oxford University Press, 1997), p.110.

⁴² 75% of Moldova's territory is covered by rich black "chernozem" soil, and it has a temperate climate making it a naturally productive agricultural region. Agricultural crops such as cereals, sunflowers, sugar beets and grapes were produced. *IMF Economic Reviews: Moldova* (Washington, D.C.: IMF, 1993), p.2.

this technological progress, however, by 1987 Moldova remained the fourth least urbanised of the Soviet republics and was the lowest place in the USSR with respect to education.⁴³ This legacy left Moldova economically very weak and partially dependent upon Russia.

However, more significant to the development of Russia's policies after 1991 was the fact that Transdnistria had fared somewhat better than the rest of Moldova during the Soviet era. During that time, Transdnistria became renowned for its industrial activity and relatively high standard of living. In particular, during the 1960s and 1970s, Soviet policies incorporated Transdnistria into the Soviet military-industrial complex.⁴⁴ Transdnistria became closely tied to the rest of the Soviet Union through its all-Union defence factories and was therefore drawn more into the Soviet economy than into the local Moldovan market.⁴⁵ This preferential treatment was resented in the rest of the Moldovan Republic where the lagging economy remained based largely on agriculture.

After 1991, Russia did not publicly declare economic relations with Moldova to be a significant interest. In fact, Moldova lacked the ability to develop products to sell in western markets and was unable to export into the distressed economies of Russia and Ukraine. Between 1989 and 1997 its GDP fell by around 60%, providing an average monthly income of only US\$33.⁴⁶ Separatist conflict in Transdnistria deterred foreign investment in Moldova and further worsened its economic plight.

These negative factors did not override the fact that Moldova's industry was concentrated in the Transdnistria and also that the major oil and natural gas pipelines into Moldova passed through it. Moldova was dependent on Russia (and Ukraine) for energy imports. Clearly, Russia and Transdnistria had mutual interests in continuing the former

⁴³ Michael Ryan and Richard Prentice, Social Trends in the Soviet Union From 1950 (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987), p.74.

⁴⁴ Dan Ionescu, "Life in the Dniester 'Black Hole'", Transition, vol.2, no.20 (October 4, 1996), pp.12-14, p.12.

⁴⁵ To quote Aleksandr Karaman, Vice-President of Transdnistria, "...Eighty percent of our economy is geared to Russia. We have quite a few one-of-a-kind production facilities that Russian industry has a stake in... We are signing agreements on economic cooperation with cities and provinces of Russia". Timur Abadiyev, Rossiyskiye Vesti, May 6, 1993, p.2.

⁴⁶ Ronald J. Hill, "Moldova", The CIS Handbook (London: Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, 1999), pp.112-122, p.119; also World Bank Development Indicators Database, July 2000, from <http://devdata.worldbank.org/data-query>.

economic ties, but it could be argued that Transdniestria had significantly more to gain from the relationship than Russia did. In an interview, the leader of Transdniestria, Igor Smirnov, admitted that Transdniestria needed Russia to survive economically more than Moldova did. “As before, our major trading partner is Russia, to which we send machinery, machine tools, agricultural products and products of the processing industry”.⁴⁷ Given its minute size and strategic vulnerability, Transdniestria needed some type of support from Russia (or Ukraine) in order to survive. Transdniestrian enterprises were dependent on raw materials from Russia and access to Russian markets for its products. During the Moldova-Transdniestria war, Transdniestria became economically separated from the rest of Moldova, and Russia (initially) provided the region with access to Russian markets and raw materials.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, Russia’s interest in securing economic ties with Moldova was real, if comparatively insignificant – especially its desire to secure relations with Transdniestria and persuade Moldova to join the Economic Union of the CIS. These economic issues, unlike the others seen above (the threat of reunification with Romania, the Russian diaspora, Russian strategic interests) provoked little controversy or debate in Russia.

3. The Debates and The Policies: Russian Military and Political Involvement in Moldova, 1991-1996

As we have seen above, the environment did not completely constrain Russia’s foreign policy choices. There was much uncertainty about Russia’s real interests and therefore plenty of room for debate about policy options. Within the parameters set by Russia’s history (e.g. the facts that Russia did have a diaspora, military presence and economic ties in Moldova) the Russian government had policy options in the Moldova-Transdniestria conflict. We will now examine the debates in Russia over these foreign policy choices in order to discover which ideas were dominant, what the official policies were, and

⁴⁷ Interview with Smirnov by Valery Reshnetnikov, *Izvestiya*, June 16, 1992, p.2.

⁴⁸ Of the US \$439 million owed by Moldova to Gasprom by 1999, \$US 364 million has been incurred by Transdniestria. Ronald J. Hill, “Moldova”, *The CIS Handbook* (London: Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, 1999), pp.112-122, p.117.

whether there were any “pathways” from which ideas might have affected the choices made among policy options.

In analysing the Russian political debates about Moldova during 1991-1996, three periods in the debates and foreign policy development can be distinguished. The first, from August 1991 to March 1992 – the “Atlanticist period” – was characterised by the dominance of liberal westernist ideas. The second, from March 1992 to October 1992, was dominated by a battle of ideas and the growth of pragmatic nationalist ideas. The third, from October 1992 to December 1996 was characterised by the dominance of pragmatic nationalist ideas and the formation of a consensus. We now explore, in each of these stages, the Russian political debate and the foreign policies.

a) Stage One: The Atlanticist Period (August 1991 - March 1992)

i) The Debates

During this first stage, there was as yet little debate over how Russia should react towards events in Moldova. As shown in Chapter Four, there was far too much internal confusion within Russia and the other former Soviet states, as well as a lack of knowledge about the specifics of the situation, for any clear-cut policy decisions to be made. Moreover, with the Soviet Union still in existence until December 1991, and no quick agreement thereafter over the general principles of Russian-Moldovan relations, it not surprising that there were no well developed ideas towards a conflict which had not yet turned to war.

Nevertheless, the Russian media evinced a dominant sympathy for the Transdnistrian separatists – with whom many Russian political organisations had connections – just as it had during the preceding Soviet years. Generally the Russian public was inundated with media coverage which strongly favoured the separatists. Consistent with its fundamentalist nationalist foreign policy sympathies, for example, the newspaper Den argued that Russia should give military support to the Transdnistria separatists as a step to restoring the Soviet Union.⁴⁹ Igor Smirnov, the head of Transdnistria’s separatist

⁴⁹ Den, no.21 (1991), p.4.

government, attempted to use the favourable media coverage and political connections to recruit volunteers for his militia and to influence other Russian political and military leaders.⁵⁰ The most significant of these were members of the Communist Party and the Liberal Democratic Party.⁵¹

Most of the Russian political groups with links to Transdnistria subscribed to fundamentalist nationalist ideas and were highly critical of the Russian government's foreign policy. The National Salvation Front was the first such local organisation to form in the Russian-speaking community in Transdnistria. Another, the Russian Party in St. Petersburg, acted as a conduit to send Cossacks and others to fight in Moldova as well in Abkhazia, Tajikistan and the former Yugoslavia. The well-funded Congress of Russian Communities also gave aid to Transdnistria (and other Russian communities) with the aim of reunifying the "Divided Russian Nation".⁵² Finally, individual Russian politicians subscribed to fundamentalist nationalist ideas and wanted the restoration of Soviet power supported Transdnistria. Liberal Democratic Party (LDPR) member Andrei Mitrofonov, for example, praised Transdnistria for being "one of the first territories liberated from the democrats".⁵³ Good relations with Transdnistria were also seen as a means of Russian control in Moldova.

The Transdnistrian leadership was more pro-Russia than the Moldovan government was and, like many Russian fundamentalist nationalists, wanted to recreate the Soviet Union. Transdnistria's leaders defined themselves as communist, however this was done to contrast themselves to the Moldovan government which was anti-communist (in reaction to the old Soviet regime). The Transdnistrian government therefore would be more accurately defined as "anti-anti-communist". There was a desire to rebuild the territory of the former Soviet

⁵⁰ Interview with Igor Smirnov by Valery Reshetnikov, *Izvestiya*, June 16, 1992, p.2. Also see Vladimir Socur, "Dnestr Involvement in the Moscow Rebellion", *RFE/RL Research Report*, vol.2, no.46 (November 19, 1993) pp.25-32.

⁵¹ Leonid Mlechin, *Izvestiya*, December 28, 1993, p.3.

⁵² See the Congress of Russian Communities (KRO) platform in *Election Platforms of Political Parties Participating in the Elections for State Duma* (Moscow: International Republican Institute, December 6, 1995), pp.3-8.

⁵³ *Author's Interview* with Andrei Mitrofonov, who was in charge of foreign policy of the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR), June 20, 1995.

Union but not to re-adopt Soviet ideology. Russian was the dominant language in Transdnestria.⁵⁴

The links between a minority of extremists in Russia and Transdnestria, as well as the support for Transdnestria by prominent Russian centrists led by Chairman of the Supreme Soviet Ruslan Khasbulatov, would later put pressure on President Yeltsin to take Transdnestria's cause into account at a time when the Russian government was vulnerable (as seen in Chapters Three and Four).⁵⁵ Domestic political gain, therefore, was a prime motivation for the government's later rhetorical sympathy for the Transdnestrian cause – even though it did not spawn official action. The Russian government did nothing to break the links between political organisations and individuals in Russia with the “hard-line” movements abroad – including Transdnestria. Primarily this was because they had little ability to do so but also because the links could potentially be manipulated to gain domestic political support and perhaps to help secure fundamental interests abroad. In other words, at first, the Russian government allowed Transdnestria some favoured status even though many Transdnestrians had close ties with extremist elements within Russia and supported other causes that were (or may have become) harmful to the Russian state. For example, Transdnestria later played an influential role in the October 1993 coup attempt – as will be examined below. It was home to many criminal organisations who profited from and thus supported the continuation of the Moldova-Transdnestria conflict.⁵⁶ Transdnestria also signed pacts with secessionist movements, including the Abkhaz, to express solidarity with other separatist movements.⁵⁷

Of course, not all who supported the Transdnestrians were outside the government. Vice President Aleksandr Rutskoi, for example, initially led the pro-Transdnestrian cause, as

⁵⁴ Interview with Smirnov by Valery Reshnetnikov, *Izvestiya*, June 16, 1992, p.2.

⁵⁵ Andranik Migranyan, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, January 21, 1994, pp.1, 4.

⁵⁶ Apparently, two of Tiraspol's security chiefs were involved in both criminal activities and political repression and thus had both personal and political reasons for continuing the dispute. One of these men, General Vadim Shevtsov retained his links with the extremist Russian National Unity part of Alexandr Barkashkov. Both General Vadim Shevtsov and General Nikolai Matveev were former Soviet OMON special political officers. Stuart J. Kaufman and Stephen R. Bowers, “Transnational Dimensions of the Transdnestrian Conflict” in *Nationalities Papers*, vol.26, no. 1 (1998), pp.129-146, p.136.

⁵⁷ *The Economist*, November 13, 1993, pp. 51-2.

is shown below. Also, “centrists” such as Nikolai Travkin, Chairman of the Democratic Party of Russia, were sympathetic to if not supportive of the Transdnestrian desire for independence – although for very different reasons.⁵⁸ Travkin had been a member of the parliamentary delegation sent to Moldova in September 1991 that had concluded “there can be no question of state division of Moldova and recognition by Russia of the self-created Transdnestrian Republic”.⁵⁹ Travkin argued, similar to Nationalities Minister Galina Staravoiteva, that force should not be used to bring the region under Moscow’s power, but rather that Russia should peacefully support the Transdnestrians in making their own decision about their future.⁶⁰ Later, as the situation in Moldova deteriorated in the spring of 1992, the Russian Supreme Soviet adopted an appeal to both sides to settle the conflict peacefully, to withdraw armed units from the combat zones and to start a political dialogue. The Appeal of 22 March stated that Transdnestria should have the right to self-determination if Moldova re-united with Romania.⁶¹

ii) The Official Position

Initially, the Russian government generally ignored the separatist conflict brewing in Moldova. Immediately after the disintegration of the Soviet Union in December 1991, Yeltsin signed a statement with the CIS heads of states agreeing to the inviolability of Moldovan borders. This action was termed “a corner-stone of its policies towards the Moldovan state, the most important factor of stability in the Commonwealth and the region”.⁶² Government officials were indecisive, but officially frowned upon the earlier Soviet practice of limited support to the Transdnestrians.⁶³

⁵⁸ Nikolai Travkin, *Izvestiya*, September 25, 1991, p.3. In this article Travkin argues that Transdnestrians are not “rightists” but “people who ache for their countrymen” – i.e. who want to re-unite with Russia and Russian-speaking peoples.

⁵⁹ Eduard Kondratev, *Izvestiya*, September 19, 1991, p.2.

⁶⁰ Staravoiteva commented on the views she held in early 1991-92, *Author’s Interview* with the late Galina Staravoiteva, August 17, 1995, Moscow. Staravoiteva, who was murdered in November 1998, was one of Yeltsin’s early advisors on nationality affairs and Duma deputy. “As democrats, we must work to ensure the protection of all peoples and the provision of equal rights to all, regardless of ethnicity or place of national origin.”

⁶¹ *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, March 23, 1992, SU/1336/C4/1.

⁶² *Kiev Statement of the Heads of States Members CIS*, 1992.

⁶³ *Author’s Interview* with Staravoiteva, August 17, 1995.

As the growing importance of the simmering Transdnistria-Moldova dispute became more evident, Yeltsin chose to support Moldova's new "democratic" government and the principle of territorial integrity over the separatist cause of the pro-Communist Transdnistrians. The reasoning behind this was based upon a liberal westernizing idea: Russia could not maintain preferential ties with Transdnistria (or other regions) if that meant jeopardising its newly favourable relationship with the West. At the time, it was widely believed that the West would frown upon Russia's support for a pro-communist, separatist region.⁶⁴ However, perhaps most significantly, Transdnistrian separatism in Moldova (and elsewhere) was not to be encouraged because of the possibility that encouraging separatist movements might become a dangerous precedent in the CIS states, provoking numerous border disputes, and potentially even leading to the dismemberment of the multinational Russian Federation itself.

iii) The Policy

During this first stage, the only "Russian action" in Moldova was taken independently by Russia's 14th Army. It armed and trained the 8000 men in Transdnistria's "Republican Guard" which later fought against the Moldovan government's forces. The "Republican Guard" was a regular corps of full-time salaried soldiers who were experienced veterans of the USSR's armed forces. Most of its officers came through formal transfers or informal loans from Russia's 14th Army.⁶⁵ This helps to explain how difficult it was at this time (and later) to arrange a genuine withdrawal of Russia's 14th Army when the soldiers could easily transfer into the "Transdnistria Republican Guard". Technically, in September 1992, the "Republican Guard" was reorganised into Transdnistria's regular army and much of its weapons were bought or stolen from the 14th Army.⁶⁶

Russian military presence was further reinforced by a Spetsnaz (special forces) unit, internal security troops, and "border troops" in eastern Moldova. These included many

⁶⁴ Interview with Fyodor Shelov-Kovedyaev, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, July 30, 1992, pp.1, 5.

⁶⁵ There was general conscription and recruits could serve in either 14th Army or Transdnistrian army.

⁶⁶ Vladimir Socar, "Russian Forces in Moldova", *RFE/RL Research Report*, vol.1, no.34 (28 August, 1992), pp. 38-43.

officers who had served with the KGB and the Soviet Ministry of Internal Affairs. Moreover, several thousand Russian Cossacks and other soldiers of fortune arrived from Russia in early 1992 to oppose the Moldovan government. The Cossacks were more interested in restoring the Tsarist Empire, rather than in defending Transdniestrian independence.⁶⁷ These new, paid volunteers, many of whom joined the "Republican Guard", were granted resident permits and apartments, and termed "local inhabitants" by Transdniestrian authorities.⁶⁸

The fact that 80% of the 14th Army's personnel, including its officers, were local inhabitants also greatly complicated the Army's involvement in the conflict and the negotiation of its continued presence or withdrawal. According to General Alexander Lebed, Commander of the 14th Army, "more than half the officers are ethnic Slavs, born and raised in Moldova. They have apartments here and jobs, but back in Russia they have nothing. There is fear as well that if they pull out, their families will fall victim to a new round of inter-ethnic fighting".⁶⁹ Army reservists employed in the area's defence industry, and military veterans, formed privileged groups with common interests and political attitudes – including support for a "Greater Russia". This explains their close bonds with those members of the Russian political elite discussed above who subscribed to fundamentalist nationalist ideas. Moreover, in 1990 when the Moldovan government threatened to abolish the housing and employment privileges of the veterans and soldiers, the local Transdniestrian authorities guaranteed their continuation. Thus, the 14th Army's early position of support for the Transdniestrian separatists can be explained by its long presence and close ties with the local populace as well as by the fact that Tiraspol (capital of Transdniestria) had supported its residence and privileges.

However, despite the independent actions of the 14th Army on the ground in Transdniestria, officially all indications were that the 14th Army was about to be withdrawn. And, although Russian troops in Moldova may have been helping to arm certain groups as

⁶⁷ Moskovskiye Novosti, July 1, 1992, p.2.

⁶⁸ "Press Briefing by Georgy Marakutsa, Chairman of the Dniester Supreme Soviet", Official Kremlin International News Broadcast, June 23, 1992. There were also thousands of available and experienced reservists, many of which were veterans from Afghanistan, and previously employed in the area's defence-related industries.

⁶⁹ Moscow Times, October 25, 1994, p. 4.

they did elsewhere in other former Soviet states, these occurrences were conducted quietly and on a relatively small scale. The Russian government itself indicated that it was prepared to drop the old Soviet tradition of maintaining dominant military influence in the region. If anything, only the possibility of peaceful, step-by-step future re-integration was officially envisioned.

b) Stage Two: The Battle of Ideas (March 1992 - October 1992)

i) The Debates

Fighting in Moldova broke out on 24 March 1992. This crisis (along with other factors discussed in Chapter Four) provoked Russian debates over how the country should act towards other potential "hot spots" in the near abroad. During the spring and summer of 1992, the Moldova-Transdnistria conflict helped bring to an end the initial relatively uninformed stage in Russian foreign policy and precipitated the rise of pragmatic nationalist ideas in the official articulation of Russian policy. During this stage the 14th Army at first surreptitiously, and then openly, involved Russia in the Moldova conflict forcing Moscow to make decisions about its own actions in a CIS conflict for the first time. Consequently, Russian politicians and policy-makers both attacked the government for its lack of policies and outlined an array of proposals.⁷⁰ These ranged from the application of international pressure, the dispatch of "peacekeeping" troops, the imposition of economic sanctions and military action, to outright annexation of the territory.⁷¹

Two weeks after the fighting began, discussions were convened at the Sixth Congress of People's Deputies (6-21 April 1992) over what Russia's reaction ought to be towards the outbreak of the war.⁷² Almost unanimously, the deputies attacked the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) for "lacking minimal virility" in its policy toward the conflict in Moldova. They argued that "Russia, as the largest state (in the CIS), naturally is obliged to play first

⁷⁰ Aleksandr Pilat, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, April 7, 1992, p.1

⁷¹ Maksim Yusin, *Izvestiya*, April 14, 1992, p.6.

⁷² Verbatim report of 6 April 1992, Sixth Congress of Russian People's Deputies, in *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, April 8, 1992, pp.3-6.

fiddle in guaranteeing human rights across the border, in the republics of the former Union".⁷³ This was the first major debate in which disagreements between most of the members of parliament and some members of the executive became glaringly apparent over the issue of using force in CIS conflicts.

Not all key members of the Russian executive advocated a peaceful means to support the Moldovan government. Most significantly, Vice-President Aleksandr Rutskoi, an early proponent of fundamentalist nationalist foreign policy ideas, whose views were now shifting towards pragmatic nationalism, led parliament's attack on the MFA and Kozyrev.⁷⁴ Rutskoi's political party criticized the government's supposed neglect of the issue: "Until recently, the Foreign Ministry in effect failed to notice the war in Transdnistria, into which Russia was drawn long ago, whether we like it or not...".⁷⁵

In his comments at the Sixth Congress, Rutskoi argued that Russians abroad needed to be protected from the discrimination being inflicted upon them and proposed the direct use of Russian military force to guard against abuses.⁷⁶ At Rutskoi's urging, parliament passed a resolution in support of the population of Transdnistria entitled "On assistance to ensure human rights in the Dniester area", which recommended the use of the 14th Army as a peacekeeping force.⁷⁷ That resolution increased tensions and hostility between Russia and Moldova and was met in Moldova by protests and demonstrations. The Moldovan government interpreted Rutskoi's speech as an aggressive signal of Russia's intentions to rebuild its former empire.⁷⁸ The Russian MFA attempted to reprimand Rutskoi for his

⁷³ Comments by Deputy Aleksei Surkov during a question and answer session with Kozyrev, Radio Rossiya, April 18, 1992.

⁷⁴ Author's Interview with Mikhail Astafiyev, Rutskoi's deputy in charge of international relations and foreign policy, April 25, 1995.

⁷⁵ Vasiliy Lipitskiy, Rossiyskaya Gazeta, June 26, 1992. Lipitskiy was the chairman of Rutskoi's "Free Russia Party".

⁷⁶ Verbatim report of 6 April 1992, Sixth Congress of Russian People's Deputies, in Rossiyskaya Gazeta, April 8, 1992, pp.3-6.

⁷⁷ The proposition was passed on April 6, 1992.

⁷⁸ The Moldovan complaints were made to the United Nations. Resolution of the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova, Annex 1, p.2 in "Letter dated June 24, 1992 From The Permanent Representative Of Moldova to the United Nations Addressed to The Secretary-Genera", UN Document, S/24185, June 25, 1992, pp.1-2.

remarks but, undeterred, he continued to make inflammatory remarks, famously declaring, at a rally in Bendery, that Transdniestria "existed, exists, and must exist".⁷⁹

Members of Russia's political elite visited Transdniestria that spring. For example, one of the more vocal advocates of fundamentalist nationalist ideas, Aleksandr Prokhanov, editor of the newspaper Den, toured the region and used even stronger language than Rutskoï in support of the separatists. Although his views reflected those of an extremist minority, they received wide press coverage in Russia – especially in his own paper. Prokhanov praised the 14th Army for assisting the Transdnistrians – although this assistance had not yet even been officially acknowledged. As he put it, the use of force was a noteworthy example of “how Russia should act” and a first step towards the eventual restoration of the Soviet Union.⁸⁰

In June 1992, serious fighting broke out once again. This time, Russia's 14th Army openly intervened on the side of the Transdnistrians in the battle of Bendery from 19-22 June. This was the first case of clear Russian military intervention in a new state formed from the former Soviet Union. The failure of the MFA's peaceful negotiation tactics compared to the immediate success of Russia's military actions in the capture of Bendery helped to reinforce the pragmatic nationalist view that force might at times be necessary to protect Russian interests in the CIS states. After the battle of Bendery, even the Russian MFA switched towards a more interventionist foreign policy which was, at least rhetorically, more sympathetic to the Transdnistrians. As for parliament as a whole, it supported Russian military involvement in Bendery and its only criticisms were that Russia's actions were too late and too weak, and it blamed the MFA for negotiating an unsatisfactory cease-fire.⁸¹

Why did Russia's military actions help form a kind of political consensus over general pragmatic nationalist foreign policy ideas? A process of “learning” occurred which

⁷⁹ It must be emphasized that like many of the fundamentalist nationalists, Rutskoï used strong rhetoric in an effort to gain attention and to increase his personal popularity. It did not always mean that he was prepared to act on his words. And, as shall be shown below, once he was given a position in which he could implement policy towards the region, Rutskoï's actions were more moderate than his previous rhetoric. Eduard Kondratev, Izvestiya, April 6, 1992, p.1.

⁸⁰ Den, no.18 (1992), p.3.

⁸¹ Author's Interview with Dr. Andrei Zagorsky (Vice Rector, MGIMO) May 28, 1999.

suggested “road maps” for Russia’s future policies. First, Russia’s military involvement proved that the West would not criticize or intervene in response to Russia’s actions in the CIS states. The 14th Army’s success at the battle of Bendery also seemed to confirm (at least to many in the media) that military force might actually prove effective in solving conflicts.⁸² Continuing tensions followed by the outbreak of conflicts elsewhere demonstrated that it was necessary to preserve the presence of military bases in crucial areas abroad in order to solve, or at least prevent, the spread of conflicts. After Russia’s military actions in June 1992, the foreign policy debate about Moldova centred on two interests whose historic origins were outlined in the first section of this chapter: the protection of the Russian diaspora (including defining the status of Transdnistria) and the continuation of Russian military presence. Moreover, many Russian politicians began to believe that the emotional issue of Russian-speakers in the near abroad could be used to score points domestically, and this was combined with a growing current of dislike for Yeltsin and his overall policies.

a) Political Attitudes and the Defence of the Russian Diaspora

After the battle of Bendery, deputies in the Duma began to argue for a policy which would require Moldova to recognise Transdnistria – beginning with allowing Transdnistria to take part in peace negotiations. Parliamentarians continued to push for the implementation of the resolution they had passed earlier requesting the Russian government to mediate talks on the legal status of Transdnistria "in keeping with the principles and norms of the UN Charter".⁸³ The inclusion of Romania (along with Russia, the Ukraine, and Moldova) in the negotiations was criticized as the *de facto* recognition of Romania's special responsibility in Moldova, and thus as playing into the hands of those who supported Moldova's absorption into Romania.

Sergei Stankevich, for example, criticized the Russian government for giving in to Moldova's unilateral demands for the withdrawal of troops, agreeing to disarm the

⁸² Timur Abadiev, *Rossiyskiye Vesti*, May 6, 1993, p.2.

⁸³ The resolution of the Congress of People's Deputies of the Russian Federation: "On the Assistance in Furthering Human Rights in the Dniester Region", no. 2680-1 (April 8, 1992).

Transdnestrian guards and restoring legitimate bodies of power in Moldova. He argued that the agreement did not provide any protection or guarantees for the residents of Transdnestria other than the "stability of the graveyard".⁸⁴ He blamed the "obvious indecisiveness and inconsistency" of Russia's official "representatives" as the cause for the outbreak of fighting in Bendery and Moldova's use of "brute force".⁸⁵ Stankevich further proposed the creation of a federal system in Moldova, recognizing the special status of the Dniester region.

A more extreme position towards protecting the Russian diaspora in Transdnestria also attracted rhetorical support. Russian Vice President Alexander Rutskoi used especially inflammatory rhetoric when he stated that Russia was willing to come to the forceful aid of Russians abroad, and suggested that Transdnestria could perhaps join Russia.⁸⁶ Also acting provocatively, Russia's parliament recommended a proposal (later rejected as being too strong) that if Moldova did not agree to Transdnestrian demands such as the creation of a safety corridor, the Russian parliament would begin serious discussions about the question of Transdnestrian independence – including how it could be absorbed into Russia.⁸⁷ The parliament even sent a complaint to the CSCE that Moldova had committed "genocide".⁸⁸

Izvestiya journalist Vladimir Dubnov was one of the very few who argued that "an incorrect picture of events in Moldova is forming in Russia" and called on Russian journalists and politicians to be less sympathetic to the Transdnestrians. In his opinion, the conflict was Moldova's internal affair and he thought that the 14th Army should immediately withdraw. He blamed parliamentarians in Russia for making Moldova Russia's enemy. "Rutskoi and Stankevich have greatly complicated matters. Not having grasped the situation themselves, they have deceived their country".⁸⁹

⁸⁴ Sergei Stankevich, Izvestiya, July 7, 1992, p.3.

⁸⁵ Sergei Stankevich, Izvestiya, July 7, 1992, p.3.

⁸⁶ Eduard Kondratev, Izvestiya, April 6, 1992, p.1.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 1.

⁸⁸ Fyodor Lukyanov, Izvestiya, July 7, 1992, p.5.

⁸⁹ Vladimir Durnov, Izvestiya, June 12, 1992, p.5.

b) Political Attitudes on Military Action and the Continuation of Military Presence

The debate over the status of Transdnistria and how to protect the Russian-speaking diaspora therefore was intrinsically tied to the debate over what to do with Russia's military. In general, a growing number of members of the political elite defended Russian military action in Bendery as a necessity without which Transdnistria would have been destroyed and believed that the 14th Army should be used to separate the opponents.⁹⁰ With the help of some Moldovan deputies, a document outlining these views was developed by members of Russia's Supreme Soviet, such as Yevgeny Ambartsumov, but it was later rejected.⁹¹

At the end of June 1992, the Chairman of the Supreme Soviet of Transdnistria, Georgy Marakutsa, arrived in Moscow to ask for Russian military assistance and to express Transdnistria's desire for political union with Russia.⁹² Soon after, Russia's parliament specifically proposed that the stationing of troops in Moldova (and other areas of the FSU) should be a long-term option and that a special provision regarding the status of Russian troops abroad should be adopted. Foreign Minister Kozyrev agreed and hoped that this would prevent a precedent of the Russian military being involved in other CIS states without legal basis – which had been the case with the 14th Army in Moldova.⁹³ Meanwhile, the Russian media began portraying Moldova as the aggressor, unable to act in a peaceful and civilised manner, and thus deserving of punitive action by Russia.⁹⁴

The June 1992 appointment of General Alexander Lebed to command the 14th Army also significantly influenced both the Russian debate over military involvement in Moldova (as well as towards the near abroad in general) and the specific actions of the 14th Army. During his time as commander of the 14th Army (1992-95), General Lebed was committed to maintaining a military presence in Moldova. At the beginning of his command he spoke openly about the need to recreate the former Soviet or Russian empire. This aggressive

⁹⁰ Sergei Chugaev, *Izvestiya*, July 9, 1992, pp.1,2. This article details the positions of many parliamentarians.

⁹¹ This document was rejected when Mosnau, chairman of the Moldovan parliament in Chisinau, sent a telegram to the Moldovan deputies to the effect that they did not have the authority to sign such a document. Vitaliy Buzuev, interview with Ambartsumov, *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, April 13, 1992, p.1.

⁹² "Press Briefing by Georgy Marakutsa", *Official Kremlin International News Broadcast*, June 23, 1992. (Lexis-Nexis). The Transdnistria delegation was headed by Transport Minister Yefimov.

⁹³ Andrei Kozyrev, *Izvestiya*, June 30, 1992, p. 3.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

rhetoric quickly subsided but Lebed himself described his appointment as marking a shift towards a more assertive Russian foreign policy in which Moldova would be a testing ground.⁹⁵ As we shall see below, his tremendous popularity within the army and the local population later won him a political role in Transdniestria.

ii) The Official Position

Initially, the Russian government did not respond to the Moldova crisis in March 1992 except to state that it would support Moldova's sovereignty through peaceful means. The MFA (then primarily in charge of foreign policy making) was not prepared to support the separatists or to condone the use of military force. Instead, its declared aims were to support the Moldovan government on the basis of democratic international norms and to encourage the involvement of international organisations in negotiating the dispute. According to Deputy Foreign Minister Anatoly Adamishin, these implicit aims were not specifically targeted towards Moldova but made in other broad contexts.⁹⁶ Unilateral military actions were not justifiable even to defend the human rights of the Russian-speaking diaspora. Fyodor Shelov-Kovedyaev, Kozyrev's principle deputy in 1992, argued against Russia's use of armed forces specifically in Moldova.⁹⁷ The difference between Kozyrev's views and the more aggressive ones expressed by Rutskoi and many of the parliamentary deputies were recognised and appreciated by the Moldovan government. Moldovan President Snegur eventually termed Rutskoi a "Nazi" but he acknowledged that "I have been told that Boris Nikolaevich was offended. I am counting very much on the clear-headed thinking of Andrei Kozyrev".⁹⁸

Initially, Yeltsin remained silent. He may have felt that he owed a certain allegiance to Moldovan President Snegur for being one of the few CIS leaders who supported him during the August 1991 coup. Then, according to Russia's Minister of Defence Pavel

⁹⁵ See Lebed's comments in Moscow News, no.27 (July 5, 1992), p.2.

⁹⁶ Personal Interview with Anatoly Adamishin, June 9, 1999. Also see Chapter Four.

⁹⁷ Shelov-Kovedyaev in Aleksandr Gagaa (interview with Shelov-Kovedyaev), Nezavisimaya Gazeta, July 30, 1992, pp.1,5.

⁹⁸ Snegur interviewed by Sergei Mitin, Izvestiya, June 9, 1992, p.2.

Grachev, immediately before the battle of Bendery Yeltsin advocated the withdrawal of the 14th Army.⁹⁹ Yeltsin envisioned that this withdrawal would be determined by talks between Russia and Moldova that would take into account the costs, the ability to re-house the troops, and the stability of the political situation in Moldova. However, the primary goal of Russia's policy was to retain its army in Transdniestria in order to prevent the development of a civil war.

After Bendery, the Russian government's rhetoric became similar to that of the parliament. It was increasingly sympathetic towards the separatists, and officially raised the issue of discrimination against the Russian population in Moldova.¹⁰⁰ The Russian government began specifically both to support the separatists in their parliamentary boycott and their rejection of the Moldovan government's offer to form a "government of national consensus". Yeltsin himself became more active in making foreign policy towards Moldova. He met with the Presidents of Moldova, Romania and the Ukraine and argued for the need for Russia to play a humanitarian role and he promised the neutrality of the 14th Army.¹⁰¹ Later, reminiscing about the burden of Russia's involvement in Moldova, Yeltsin wrote that "Moldova can hardly resolve this problem without us".¹⁰² However, Yeltsin's primary objectives continued to be to "secure Russia's entry into the civilised community" and to "enlist maximum support of (Russia's) efforts towards transformation."¹⁰³ "Concerning the general international activities of the government, the central goals are... to ensure external conditions favourable to the political and economic reforms that have been started".¹⁰⁴ It was evident that not all liberal westernist ideas would be discarded in the government's development of a more "pragmatic" foreign policy.

Meanwhile, Foreign Minister Kozyrev was on the defensive for not being able to prevent the war. In an address to the Congress of People's Deputies, he argued that his

⁹⁹ Pavel Felgenhauer (interview with Russian Defence Minister Grachev) Nezavisimaya Gazeta, June 9, 1992, pp.1-2.

¹⁰⁰ Author's Interview with Dr Andrei Zagorsky, May 28, 1999.

¹⁰¹ "Communiqué of the meeting of the Presidents of the Republic of Moldova, Romania, the Russian Federation and Ukraine", UN Document, Annex, S/24230, July 2, 1992.

¹⁰² Boris Yeltsin, Midnight Diaries (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2000), p.250.

¹⁰³ Yeltsin's speech at the Congress of People's Deputies, Rossiyskaya Gazeta, April 8, 1992, pp.1, 3-4.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

negotiation policies had *not* been cowardly: "Megaphone diplomacy and heroic poses by me or by anyone else, lead nowhere, absolutely nowhere. We cannot send a military helicopter for every Russian-speaking boy or girl in a school in Moldova...".¹⁰⁵ Kozyrev also countered the accusation that his foreign ministry had neglected CIS members, labelling it "pure political rivalry" on the part of the "same forces attempting to stage a battle over the question of preserving the Union, this time in the form of the CIS".¹⁰⁶ However at the same time, Kozyrev now also argued that, "... if systematic murders are committed and the diplomatic brakes do not work, Russia has the right – pending intervention by an international court of arbitration – to apply unilateral sanctions".¹⁰⁷ As the liberal newspaper Nezavisimaya Gazeta surmised: "It is very difficult not to intervene, not to pound the table with one's fist (or pound Kishinev (now Chisinau) with aircraft), when one sees what is happening in Moldova". But "...the democratically minded people of Russia will have to struggle with all their might against attempts to forcibly change borders, even if they are justified by the loftiest and most obvious principles of reason".¹⁰⁸

iii) The Policy

After the first round of fighting broke out in March 1992, Foreign Minister Kozyrev attempted to reach a solution by means of negotiations and initiated an OSCE sponsored summit with the foreign ministers of the Ukraine, Moldova and Romania. He hoped to secure economic autonomy for the Russian minority in Transdnistria while, at the same time, stressing the importance of preserving the territorial integrity of all CIS countries including Moldova. The summit culminated with a statement that "Russia, Ukraine, and Romania intend from now on to build relations with Moldova, based on respect for the territorial integrity and independence of this state".¹⁰⁹ A multilateral commission was created to allow political consultations and monitor a cease-fire and a disengagement of forces. Transdnistria

¹⁰⁵ Radio Rossiya, April 18, 1992.

¹⁰⁶ Andrei Kozyrev, Nezavisimaya Gazeta, April 1, 1992, pp.1, 3.

¹⁰⁷ Andrei Kozyrev, Izvestiya, June 30, 1992, p.3.

¹⁰⁸ Dimitry Furman, Nezavisimaya Gazeta, July 3, 1992, p.3.

¹⁰⁹ Eduard Kondratev, Izvestiya, March 25, 1992, p.1.

was declared a free economic zone. However, although the negotiations did eventually lead to a first cease-fire on 7 April, sporadic fighting continued throughout the area.¹¹⁰

Thus, Kozyrev responded to the outbreak of fighting in Moldova and to criticism that he had earlier neglected the FSU by pursuing a more engaged policy. Besides initiating a leading role for the Russian government in the negotiations, Kozyrev became more personally involved. He went on a series of trips to Moldova during which he repeatedly promised Russian support for Moldova's territorial integrity. He visited Moldova during his first official tour of the former Soviet states from 2 to 10 April. His trip coincided with the second round of quadripartite negotiations among the foreign ministers of Ukraine, Moldova and Romania on 6 April. However, despite these activities, Kozyrev had little success in his aim of guaranteeing the territorial integrity of Moldova. The idea was deemed redundant by the Ukraine, and his suggestion of using Russia's 14th Army as a peacekeeping force was rejected by all parties on the basis of its questionable neutrality. Kozyrev also visited the Transdniester region where he denied that Ruskoi's comments were government policy and instead encouraged the separatists to support the cease-fire.

On 28 March 1992, Transdnestrria appealed to Russia for protection as fighting spread for the first time to Bendery. Officially this request was ignored but, unofficially, Russian troops in the region helped to arm, and even to fight alongside, the separatists. *Izvestiya* reported that Russia had sent financial aid to Tiraspol in March, and that on April 14th Army troops were arming and fighting alongside the Transdnestrians.¹¹¹ There is also some evidence that as early as March 1992 the Bank of Russia was sending money in support of the separatists.¹¹²

On 1 April 1992, Yeltsin removed the 14th Army from CIS control and placed it under the command of the Russian Federation.¹¹³ From then on, the army stationed in Transdnestrria's

¹¹⁰ Eduard Kondratev, *Izvestiya*, April 7, 1992, pp.1, 5.

¹¹¹ Eduard Kondratev, *Izvestiya*, April 20, 1992, p.1.

¹¹² *Radio Odin*, March 25, 1992.

¹¹³ With the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Ukraine took over the 14th Army forces on her territory. Moldova demanded the 14th Army's removal from its territory while Transdnestrian leaders attempted to gain hold of it. However, after a brief period of CIS control, on April 2, 1992 Yeltsin passed a decree placing the army under Russian control. Thus, minus the right-bank units due to be transferred to Moldova, the 14th Army was incorporated in Russia's armed forces. At the same time, Russia also appropriated from CIS command the paratroop units on the right bank of the Dniester. As well, large amounts of equipment belonging to right-bank forces and scheduled to be

capital Tiraspol was widely accused of being an active participant in the separatist conflict. In May, both Russian Defence Minister Pavel Grachev and CIS Commander-in Chief Yevgeny Shaposhnikov threatened to intervene on the side of the Transdnistrians.¹¹⁴ Although the precise role that the 14th Army played in the dispute remains contentious, it has been generally accepted that the 14th Army provided the separatist militia forces with weapons and intervened on their behalf during the crucial battle of Bendery.¹¹⁵ Approximately 5000 men from the 14th Army crossed to the right bank of the Dniester and became involved in fighting around Bendery, helping the Transdnistrians to force the Moldovan troops from the city. There is now "overwhelming evidence" that in this battle the 14th Army was taking its orders from superiors in the Russian army.¹¹⁶ Valery Manilov, the military spokesman for the CIS command, is quoted as having said in early 1993 that the 14th Army did not take a "single step" without explicit approval from Moscow.¹¹⁷

After the breakdown of the first cease-fire and Russia's military involvement in June in Bendery, Kozyrev and the MFA lost their previously dominant position in the negotiation process. Instead, for the first time, Yeltsin and Rutskoi agreed with each other on how to solve the conflict and they both took on higher profiles in the negotiating process. At the same time, Yeltsin's foreign policy towards the near abroad became more assertive while Rutskoi's became less extreme and more "pragmatic". Similar to other advocates of fundamentalist nationalist ideas, when given the chance to actually implement decisions, Rutskoi's actions were much more moderate than his words had been. This was not

handed over to Moldova were transferred to left bank units by Russian and CIS military authorities. By 1992, on the right bank Russian forces included the 14th Army garrison in Bendery, the 300th Paratroop Regiment in central Chisinau and the Lower Dniester Border Guards on the Moldovan-Romania border – under CIS command. See, Vladimir Socur, "Russian Forces in Moldova", *RFE/RL Research Report*, vol.1, no.34 (28 August, 1992), pp. 38-43.

¹¹⁴ Valery Vyzhutovich, *Izvestiya*, May 27, 1992, p.1.

¹¹⁵ The city of Bendery, located on the right bank of the Dniester river, had voted in a local referendum to join the Transdnister Republic. By June 1992, political power in the city was divided between the municipal government and the militia subordinated to Tiraspol and the Moldovan municipal police. On June 19th, the Moldovan government moved its military into the city. General Lebed assumed operational command of the 14th Army, and with the help of the Transdnistria militia, defeated the Moldovan offensive and captured Bendery by June 21.

¹¹⁶ Bruce D. Porter and Carol R. Saivetz, "The Once and Future Empire: Russia and the near abroad", *The Washington Quarterly*, vol.17, no.3 (Summer 1994), pp.75-90, p.84.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

surprising as it is usually easier to espouse emotional, anti-government rhetoric than to take responsibility for coping with conflicts.

On 3 June 1992, Yeltsin and Moldova's President Snegur met and agreed to create a "safety corridor" controlled by peacekeeping forces between the two warring parties. Ruskoi was sent in place of the "softer" Kozyrev to negotiate another cease-fire – which took effect on 25 June. The Moldovan side was now much more accommodating. For the first time, Moldova agreed to Transdnistria's participation as an observer. In return for Moldova's newly co-operative stance, Ruskoi abandoned his previous one-sided support of the separatists and increased political pressure on Transdnistria to come to an agreement.¹¹⁸

In early July that year, Yeltsin and Snegur met again and agreed upon a cease-fire and the need to separate the combatants.¹¹⁹ This process resulted in a bilateral agreement signed on 21 July which included the withdrawal of all combat forces, the creation of a multilateral peacekeeping force, a provision for the gradual withdrawal of the 14th Army, and the commitment that the territorial integrity of Moldova would be ensured. However, the agreement also specified that if Moldova opted to reunify with Romania, Transdnistria would be allowed to secede. The provision for Russian withdrawal, however, soon became conditional on an agreement for a political settlement.

Subsequently, a security zone 225 km long and between 4-12 km wide was established and a tripartite peacekeeping force was set up with a joint headquarters. Rather than an international or neutral force, a ten-battalion peacekeeping force was made up of the combatants themselves (five Russian, three Moldovan, and two Dniester battalions). Russia was named guarantor of the truce and dominated the peacekeeping organisation. The 21 July cease-fire agreement in effect granted Transdnistria *de facto* independence and, soon after, Ruskoi was again invited to Transdnistria to help form a coalition government. In a subsequent round of negotiations in September 1992, Moldova agreed that Bendery would become a free economic zone (similar to the rest of Transdnistria).

¹¹⁸ Author's Interview with Mikhail Astafiyev, Ruskoi's deputy in charge of international relations and foreign policy, June 25, 1995.

¹¹⁹ Mircea Snegur, Letter dated 31 July 1992 from the President of the Republic of Moldova addressed to the Secretary General, UN Document, S/24360, p.3.

c) Stage Three: Achieving Consensus (October 1992-June 1996)

i) The Debates

During the third stage, from late 1992 to 1996, the relations between certain specific members of the Russian political elite, especially the pro-communist and Greater-Russia oriented movements and the Transdniestrian separatists, remained strong. The Russian government made no effort to diminish these ties and continued to tolerate them even when Transdniestria supported the communist-nationalist rebels (as it had in the August 1991 putsch) in Russia's failed coup in October 1993.¹²⁰ During the October coup, fighters from Transdniestria made up the largest and most active of the former USSR groups in the rebellion.¹²¹

After the coup, the new Russian State Duma elected in December of that year continued to support the Transdniestrians. For example, it recommended the creation of a Russian consulate in Tiraspol, and agreed to send observers to an illegal referendum on Transdniestria's status.¹²² Many of the newly elected deputies – especially Zhirinovskiy and the Communist faction – called for Transdniestria's separation.¹²³ In terms of military involvement, however, the previously forceful rhetoric was becoming more cautious. For example, in 1993, Sergei Karaganov warned that “In case the armed conflict recommences, the unification of Moldova and Romania will emerge as the only alternative. Annexation by Russia (of Transdniestria) will be a questionable acquisition and will set a dangerous

¹²⁰ The dispute between the Russian parliament and president came to a head in the fall of 1993, when Yeltsin disbanded the parliament. Subsequently on December 12 1993, there was an election for a new parliament and plebiscite held for a new constitution. See Chapter Three for details.

¹²¹ Vladimir Socur, “Dniester Involvement in the Moscow Rebellion”, *RFE/RL Research Report*, vol.2, no.46 (November 19, 1993), p.25. This was a small force that included members of their Republican Guard (irregular army) and Transdniester Battalion (special purpose force) and Black Sea Cossacks (composed of Russians claiming Cossack ancestry and linked to Don Cossack factions in Russia). There were also officers of the former USSR Ministry of Internal Affairs OMON units (from Riga and Tallinn who were transferred to Dniester Republic after the collapse of Soviet rule in the Baltics). Also involved were Transdniestrian irregulars who fought with Serbs against Croatia after the 1992 cease-fire in Moldova as were members of Transdniestrian units which had supported Abkhazia against Georgia. Tiraspol officially denied the involvement of Transdniestrians but many observations by officials and the media confirmed the presence of Transdniestrians and their participation in attacks and protection of top rebel leaders including Rutskoi.

¹²² “Declaration of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Moldova to the United Nations on November 18, 1995”, *UN Document*, S/1995/971, November 20, 1995, Annex, p.2.

¹²³ Leonid Mlechin, *Izvestiya*, December 28, 1993, p.3.

precedent posing a threat to the territorial integrity of Russia itself. In the meanwhile, the separation of Pridnestrovye [Transdnistria] and the possibility to use it as an instrument of pressure on Ukraine, Moldova, and Romania might appear tempting for the Russian “state minded” politicians. However, Russia has little legal rationale for such action”.¹²⁴

Meanwhile, Lebed was elected to the Transdnistrian Supreme Soviet in September 1993, winning 88 percent of the vote on a platform openly advocating that Transdnistria be transferred to Russian control.¹²⁵ The decision of a foreign citizen, a commander of a foreign army located in Moldova, to take part in unconstitutional elections was seen by the Moldovan Ministry of Foreign Affairs as a “brutal and unspeakable interference” in Moldova’s internal affairs. Moreover, it was interpreted as a “new attempt by certain forces in Russia for a *de facto* recognition of the pseudo Dniester Republic”.¹²⁶

With strong popular support in Transdnistria, General Lebed had great power over the decisions that affected the status of the 14th Army. Lebed repeatedly referred to Transdnistria as a part of Russia and the right bank city of Bendery as “an inalienable part of the Dniester republic” – thereby undermining previous agreements signed by President Yeltsin. Although his views were independent of those of the Russian government, however, the Russian MoD seems to have generally supported them.¹²⁷

By 1994, Lebed was not only criticising the Moldovan government but was also extremely vocal in his denunciation of the Transdnistrian government.¹²⁸ He attacked the Transdnistrian leadership for its corruption, including criminal activities such as illegal arm sales – especially implicating Transdnistria’s security organizations. Lebed also became highly critical of the Russian government. His position was most sympathetic towards the difficult situation in which many local Transdnistrians found themselves – stuck in the middle of a conflict and abandoned by Russia. Consistently he argued against the withdrawal

¹²⁴ Sergei Karaganov, Russia-the State of Reforms (Gutersloh: Bertelsmann Foundation Publishers, 1993), p.62.

¹²⁵ “Statement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Moldova”, UN Document, S/26452, Annex, September 14, 1993. p.2.

¹²⁶ “Statement of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Moldova”, UN Document, S/26452, Annex, September 14, 1993, p.2.

¹²⁷ Author’s Interview with Dr. Andrei Zagorsky, May 28, 1999.

¹²⁸ Natalya Prikhodka, Nezavisimaya Gazeta, April 9, 1994, p.1.

of his army from Transdnestria. “Until the status of this area is defined and until it is guaranteed at an international level that peace will be preserved here, we will not leave... The politicians can take this into account or ignore it”.¹²⁹

Lebed’s earlier victory at Bendery and his rising popularity as spokesman for Russian-speakers in the near abroad would later help him in his political career in Russia. Before that however, Lebed’s actions in Transdnestria helped to popularise many of the pragmatic nationalist ideas: the need for Russia to remain involved in the near abroad, to be more assertive in protecting its interests, and to protect the rights of Russian-speakers there. (See Chapter Three for the details of the evolution of Lebed’s views and their influence on policy).

The 14th Army remained in Transdnestria. Later in 1995, when Russian Defence Minister Grachev proposed its reduction, Lebed and the Russian Duma led by Konstantin Zatulin, Chair of the Committee on CIS Affairs and Relations with Compatriots, protested. They argued that the financial and technical difficulties of the withdrawal of the army would be too great, and they were concerned about what would happen to the military weapons.¹³⁰ Zatulin, also at the time the head of the Duma delegation to Transdnestria¹³¹ held views similar to those of Lebed. In his opinion, the 14th Army was “the guarantee of peace and tranquillity in Transdnestria” – otherwise, he proffered, there would be another war such as in Chechnya.¹³² Other Duma deputies repeated Lebed’s arguments that any reduction in the army command would be a “crime”. Then, on 24 May 1995, the Duma passed the first reading of the federation resolution that imposed a ban on changing the structure of the 14th Army’s command and forbade any reduction of either the 14th Army or its equipment.¹³³ On February 9 1996, the Duma voted 310-4 that Russian troops should remain in Transdnestria

¹²⁹ Svetlana Gamova, *Izvestiya*, February 26, 1993, p.5.

¹³⁰ Leonid Bershidsky, *Moscow Times*, June 8, 1995.

¹³¹ *Itar-Tass*, May 22, 1995.

¹³² *Itar-Tass*, February 11, 1995.

¹³³ Irina Selivanova, “Trans-Dniestria”, in Jeremy Azrael and Emil Payin (eds.), *US and Russian Policymaking with Respect to the Use of Force* (Santa Monica: RAND, 1996). On line at www.rand.org. Selivanova is senior researcher at the Institute of International Economic and Political Research, Russian Academy of Sciences.

and that a Russian consulate should be opened there.¹³⁴ However, as will be seen below, despite Duma support Lebed was fired. Therefore, notwithstanding Lebed's widespread popularity inside and outside Russia, and his influence on events in Moldova and more generally on Russian foreign policy thinking, he was dependant upon Yeltsin's support.

ii) The Official Position

The Moldovan government wrongly assumed that its steadfast support for "democracy" and Yeltsin would eventually win Russia's support against the "traitors" and "communists" from Transdnistria. Russian policy after 1992 did continue to support Moldova's territorial integrity but it became more openly sympathetic to the separatists both in terms of military support and in its negotiations. It appears that supporting democracy in the former Soviet republics was not a significant factor in the development of Russia's policy. While acting to bring peace to the region, Russia sided primarily with whichever side could help retain her primary interests, and secondly with whichever side had more influence in Russia's domestic politics. From mid 1992-94, supporting Transdnistria was useful in maintaining a base for Russia's 14th Army and in providing a means to remain involved in the region. It was also useful as a popular and emotional issue with which to galvanise public support inside Russia.

Using Moldova as an example, in 1992 Kozyrev emphasized that Russia did not have a moral right to remain indifferent to requests for help to ensure peace, and even went so far as to advocate military force in special circumstances. In direct opposition to his earlier statements, Kozyrev argued that this "hard-line" approach had already been developed, used, and proved effective in the Trans-Dniester conflict.¹³⁵ Not surprisingly, Kozyrev's thinking greatly concerned the Moldovan government which now interpreted his rhetoric as provocative and was suddenly concerned that Moldova might be threatened by the "application of force" if the conditions imposed by the 14th Army were not met. The Moldovan Ministry of Foreign Affairs

¹³⁴ Don Ionescu, "Playing the Dniester Card in and After the Russian Election", Transition, vol.2, no.17 (August 23, 1996), pp.26-28.

¹³⁵ "Address by Andrei Kozyrev Before the Russian Supreme Soviet", Russian Television Network, October 22, 1992.

accused the Russian 14th Army of violating the Moldovan-Russian Convention of 21 July 1992, and bringing "total disaster and despair" to the population of the left bank of the Dniester river through "excessive militarization..., persecution of those who share different views, restrictions on travelling and prohibition of participation in the elections to the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova...".¹³⁶ Russia's MFA claimed that Russia was involved politically and militarily in the conflict primarily in order to defend the human rights of Russians in Moldova. However this was not substantiated, either by Russians in Moldova or by UN reports which found no evidence that their rights had been infringed.¹³⁷

iii) The Policy

By the fall of 1992, the military conflict had ended and the situation stabilised. From August 1992 until 1 December 1994, with the tacit consent of the Russian peacekeeping forces, Transdniestrian authorities moved three motorised brigades into the security zone, as well as a border guard detachment and several Cossack detachments totalling 3,500 men.¹³⁸ These actions caused the Moldovan members of the joint Russian-Moldovan commission supervising the cease-fire to complain about Russia's biased role and her interference in internal Moldovan affairs.¹³⁹ On many other occasions, the Moldovan government expressed dismay about Russia's support for maximum Transdniestrian autonomy.¹⁴⁰ According to Moldovan authorities, Russia acted as a "protective shield" behind which Tiraspol was able to consolidate its state structures, including its own constitution and currency, form its own army and border guard units, and take control of a large section of the security zone. They worried that when the

¹³⁶ Quoted in "Statement issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Moldova on 10 February 1994", United Nations, Security Council, UN Document S/1994/195, Annex, p.2.

¹³⁷ Charles King, Post-Soviet Moldova, A Borderland in Transition (London: RIIA, Post-Soviet Business Forum, 1995), pp14-15.

¹³⁸ Mihai Grubincea, "Rejecting a New Role for the Former 14th Russian Army", Transition, vol.2, no.6 (March 22, 1996), pp.38-40, p.38.

¹³⁹ In February 1993, the Moldovan government complained of "large scale military manoeuvres" by the 14th Army. Nicolae Tau (Moldovan Minister of Foreign Affairs), "Letter dated 18th February to the Secretary General, United Nations, Security Council", UN Document S/25321, Annex, 1993, p.2.

¹⁴⁰ Natalya Prikhodka, Nezavisimaya Gazeta, November 25, 1993, p.3.

14th Army eventually left Transdnistria would still have its own pro-Russian army – which could then be manipulated by Russia in order to keep Moldova within its sphere of influence.¹⁴¹

In a sudden and short-lived policy reversal in June 1993, Russia did demand permanent military bases in both Transdnistria and the right-bank.¹⁴² This harsh demand was quickly withdrawn but was followed on 1 August by the imposition of high tariffs on goods imported from Moldova – further damaging the already distressed Moldovan economy. In October 1993, under severe economic pressure, Moldova gave in to Russian demands and agreed to join the CIS Economic Union as well as several other political structures.¹⁴³ The reason President Snegur gave to justify this new position was that without CIS membership Moldova would have reduced possibilities of co-operation with other CIS members. As well, he said, Moldova's possibilities of buying energy sources, fuel and raw materials would be gravely damaged and her chances for selling products on the Russian market would suffer.¹⁴⁴ In response to Moldova's entering into the CIS agreements in December 1994 Russia lifted the punitive tariffs on Moldovan goods.

Under great economic, political and military pressure from Russia, the Moldovan government – believing that there was little choice but to cooperate with Russia – also became more flexible in its negotiations over Russian troop withdrawal. Talks between the two states over the withdrawal of the 14th Army had begun in the fall of 1992. However, they had quickly become deadlocked when the Russian government suddenly decided to link the terms of the withdrawal to the "satisfactory" resolution of the Transdnistria conflict.

¹⁴¹ "Memorandum on the maintenance of peace and stability in the CIS, signed by the Heads of State of the CIS in Alma Ata on 10 February 1995", United Nations, General Assembly, UN Document, A/50/120 (April 10, 1995), pp.2-3.

¹⁴² At a meeting with senior officials of the Russian MoD, the Moldova's Minister of Foreign Affairs, loudly objected to Yeltsin's proposals of the creation of military bases on Moldovan territory and reiterated Moldova's official position of insisting on "complete, unconditional and immediate withdrawal of all foreign military forces from Moldovan territory". "Declaration of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Moldova, United Nations, Security Council", UN Document, S/25962 (June 16, 1993), p.2.

¹⁴³ In December 1991, Moldova had joined the CIS but had restricted its participation to economic matters. In mid 1993, Moldova joined the CIS Economic Union and signed several political conventions. Then in April 8 1994, Moldova ratified its entry into the CIS economic structures but not the military alliance. This is examined further below. Natalya Prikhodka, Nezavisimaya Gazeta, December 4, 1994, p.3.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

After Moldova increased her level of co-operation with Russia, Yeltsin recommended in February 1994 that the OSCE be used to find a final political settlement to the conflict. A bilateral commission was created to work out the details of special status to be conferred upon Transdniestria. By the end of July, Moldova had adopted a new constitution which asserted its sovereignty but also gave substantial autonomy to Transdniestria and Gagauzia. As a result of this compromise, representatives of Russia's MoD finally agreed to begin talks on the withdrawal of the 14th Army and in August 1994, the MoD declared that Russia was ready to withdraw troops.¹⁴⁵ However, now that Russia had for the first time agreed to withdrawal, it was both Moldova and Transdniestria hesitated. Moldovans believed that the presence of Russian troops was necessary in order to curb the separatists, but Transdniestrians wanted the Russian troops to remain in order to safeguard their interests. The commander of the 14th Army, Lebed, also continued to resist the withdrawal of Russian troops which he deemed necessary in order to "keep the peace".

In October 1994 the Moldovan government finally agreed to the three year phased withdrawal of the 14th Army dependent upon the political settlement of the conflict. However, no political settlement was forthcoming. Analysts Kaufman and Bowers may have been correct to argue that the negotiations had stalled largely because Transdniestria no longer had any incentive to make concessions as long as the Russian army remained.¹⁴⁶ However, less persuasive is the analysts' argument that Russian officials anticipated that this would be Transdniestria's reaction and considered it to be part of a grand Russian plan to secure its military presence in the region.¹⁴⁷ Instead, it seems that with no political agreement forthcoming, at this stage Moscow continued its policy of keeping troops deployed until all conditions for a withdrawal were present and until an agreement could be ratified by parliament. Both the MoD and Yeltsin made clear their increasing reluctance to continue to accept the political and economic costs of maintaining the troops.

¹⁴⁵ "Press Briefing by the Russian Foreign Ministry Spokesman Grigory Karasin", Official Kremlin International News Broadcast, October 25, 1994. (Lexis-Nexis)

¹⁴⁶ Stuart J. Kaufman and Stephen R. Bowers, "Transnational Dimensions of the Transdniestrian Conflict" in Nationalities Papers, vol.26, no. 1 (1998), pp.129-146, p. 133.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

In the final analysis, Russian troops did not withdraw but they were downsized. In April 1995, despite protests in the Duma, the 14th Army was transformed into an “operational military group” – prompting Lebed’s resignation. Subsequently, in June 1995 Grachev proposed the retention of a military base in Transdniestria, and by December 1995, Russia suggested that the 14th Army take over the duties of the Russian peacekeeping forces in Moldova because of the “huge burden of expenses”. This may be interpreted as a step towards withdrawal. The immediate result, however, was the continuation of a Russian military presence in the region.¹⁴⁸

Meanwhile, negotiations over the political status of Transdniestria continued to be stalled even though both sides were now, at least rhetorically, more accommodating towards each other and no longer threatening the use of force.¹⁴⁹ The Transdniestrian separatist leadership hoped that the 1996 Russian presidential elections would bring to power a new president, such as Zyuganov¹⁵⁰ or Zhirinovskiy – both of whom were more vocally sympathetic to Transdniestria cause.¹⁵¹ Yeltsin, meanwhile, attempted to broker a political resolution before the elections, obviously partly because it may have increased his popularity. Thanks to his effort, Snegur and Smirnov initialled a peace memorandum on 17 June and outlined an agreement that Transdniestria would function as a separate state. However, this was a short-lived victory as immediately thereafter Snegur refused to sign the agreement and once again the peace process stalled. The signing ceremony, due to take place on 27 June, was cancelled.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁸ Mihai Grubincea, “Rejecting a New Role for the Former 14th Russian Army”, *Transition*, vol.2, no.6 (March 22, 1996), pp.38-40, p.38.

¹⁴⁹ Joe Camplisson and Michael Hall, *Hidden Frontiers* (Newtownabbey: Island Publications, 1996). (This book is the result of a series of “learning exchanges” between those involved in conflict resolution in Moldova and Northern Ireland.)

¹⁵⁰ Zyuganov explained his views on foreign policy at this time in *Intercon Daily Report on Russia*, March 26, 1996. (Lexis-Nexis)

¹⁵¹ See “Appeal by the Creative Intelligentsia of Russia in support of Gennady Zyuganov as Candidate for President of Russia”, *Pravda Rossii*, Marcy 28, 1996, p.1. In this appeal there is a call to save “our people dying in Transdniestria”.

¹⁵² *Kommersant-Daily*, August 14, 1996, p.4. On November 13, 1996, the Russian Duma declared Transdniestria a “zone of special interest for Russia” and asked that Yeltsin consider installing permanent bases there.

4. Conclusions

Russia's interests in the Moldova-Transdnistria conflict were conditioned by the fact that both Tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union had earlier adopted policies to assert their influence over the territory. Russia's historical inheritance from these relations included: the threat that Moldova might join Romania; the presence of the 14th Army in Moldova; a large Russian-speaking diaspora located particularly in the Transdnistria region; and weak economic ties with the region. This combined inheritance ensured Russia's general interest in the war.

Within the parameters of these four long-standing interests Russian foreign policy-makers faced many policy options. The significance of the material environment in each case was controversial and did not dictate one specific policy path. There were gaps between Russia's real and perceived interests and therefore debates about policy choices mattered.

Russia was militarily, and then politically, involved in the Moldova-Transdnistria conflict from 1992 through to the 1996 negotiations. Previous relations facilitated the 14th Army's unofficial support of the separatists after 1991 – the transfer and sale of weapons, training of troops and even fighting on their behalf. The earlier relations also help to explain why Russian policy towards the conflict has been interpreted as favouring the Transdnistrians. This conclusion, however, was misleading because early on in the conflict the 14th Army acted without an official, publicly acknowledged government policy – although it had the tacit support of the military leadership in Moscow.

The actions of the 14th Army greatly affected the first results “on the ground” and they, in turn, influenced both the Russian debates about the conflict and official government policy towards the new events. The 14th Army's support of Transdnistria, vocally backed by an array of domestic forces in Russia, helped ensure that Transdnistria would win the war, consolidate new state structures and avoid further major outbreaks of fighting. Later on, Russian peacekeepers also played a significant role in assuring peace in Moldova.

In stage one, from August 1991 to March 1992, Russia's foreign policy debates on the topic were limited. Generally the Russian political elite was sympathetic to the

Transdnistrians because of their long-standing personal, political and economic ties as well as ethnic connections with the region. Because of these former ties, as well as the fact that the Soviet Union had only broken up in December of 1991 and everyone was still adjusting to that reality, early debate was dominated by the fundamentalist nationalist idea of reuniting Transdnistria with Russia.

The debates appear to have had little impact on official Russian foreign policies at this time. Rather, these policies were based upon the liberal westernist ideas of supporting Moldova's new "democratic" government and territorial integrity. Supporting the pro-communist and separatists from Transdnistria was not a viable option for the government because it considered that to do so would jeopardise Russia's relations with the West and perhaps even encourage separatism within Russia itself. Nevertheless, "on the ground" in Moldova, Russia's 14th Army acted independently, on a relatively small scale, to arm and train the local Transdnistrian population.

In stage two, from March 1992 to October 1992, Russia became militarily involved in the conflict – the first such involvement in a new state form from the collapse of the Soviet Union. When fighting broke out in March, it created an opportunity for the Russian political elite to express their concerns and in an open debate to propose various options for how Russia should react and what Russia's future in Moldova (and elsewhere in the FSU) ought to be. The parliament, led by Rutskoi, strongly supported the Transdnistrian side, while the MFA supported neutral negotiations to bring about peace. No official policy was drawn and the 14th Army continued to support the Transdnistrians.

The outbreak of violence in March and the ensuing foreign policy debates led to the formation of a consensus among the Russian political elite that Russia should be more actively involved in preventing war and in protecting its diasporas – particularly those threatened by war. Thus, a process of "learning" occurred in reaction to the event towards which Russia's policy was seen as hesitant and floundering. Pragmatic nationalist ideas increased in popularity.

Subsequently, in June 1992 when the 14th Army helped to capture Bendery following the second outbreak of violence in Moldova, pragmatic nationalist ideas became even more widely adopted. After that military success, the government's rhetoric (now dominated by Yeltsin and the MoD) became more sympathetic towards the separatists and advocated more forcefully the protection of the diaspora. Before the war, generally only the right wing groups and press were active in their vocal support of the diaspora communities which were trying to achieve autonomy. Now this cause was taken up by the broader political spectrum.

Meanwhile, both Yeltsin and Ruskoi took on more active roles while the MFA was sidelined. A new round of negotiations brought about the 21 July cease-fire agreement: a tripartite peacekeeping force, a commitment to the territorial integrity of Moldova which in effect gave Transdnistria *de facto* independence and a provision (later reneged on) for the gradual withdrawal of the 14th Army. The fact that a Russian diaspora in Moldova was achieving what amounted to political separation from a successor state was noticed by other diaspora groups – many of which hoped to emulate it – and by other newly independent states which saw it as a dangerous precedent.

During stage three, from October 1992 to June 1996, the debates were characterised by vocal support for the Transdnistrian cause in both parliament and the media. Lebed and Zatulin popularised the idea that Russia's military should remain in Transdnistria to prevent further fighting and protect the local population. Even the MFA switched its position and now argued for Russia's military involvement. However, by the end of this period their support for the use of force if necessary was now tempered by concerns about the financial, humanitarian and legal costs of such a policy.

In terms of concrete policies, despite Russia's official efforts peace negotiations stalled. Nevertheless, Russia achieved closer and more favourable relations with Moldova after it imposed Russia tariffs on Moldovan goods. Moldova subsequently entered the CIS Economic Union, became more flexible at the negotiation table, and agreed that Transdnistria would retain considerable autonomy within Moldova. Finally, in 1995, Russia

agreed to downsize the 14th Army and start a phased withdrawal. However, negotiations over Transdniestria's political status stalled and so did the withdrawal.

To conclude, the Moldova-Transdniestria war was one of several factors that encouraged the Russian government to broaden its foreign policy focus from economic issues and the West to include the former Soviet states. The debates in Russia over this conflict highlighted Russia's practical interests – protection of the Russian-speaking diaspora in the near abroad, the presence of the 14th Army, and the continuation of economic ties – which urgently needed to be addressed.

A very broad consensus over what to do in Moldova developed in mid 1992. This was not primarily because the West failed to challenge Russian intervention in mid 1992. Such casual attribution would be far too simplistic. The key point about the West is that at first Russia's liberal westernist government believed that Western attitude and actions mattered. However, key government officials soon changed their minds. In other words, the government's foreign policy thinking evolved – and the West's apparent complacency, was only a minor reason for this transformation.

Instead, as it was shown here, pragmatic nationalist ideas became dominant in Russia's foreign policy debates concerning Moldova and suggested a “road map” which guided Russian policies towards remaining involved in obtaining peace in the region, establishing military presence, and securing general economic interests. These foreign policy ideas were of considerable importance because at the time there were few objective criteria to dictate that a particular policy should be chosen. The pragmatic nationalist foreign policy orientation was adopted from the debates as a result of many factors including domestic political events and events on the ground in Moldova. Despite agreement over very broad foreign policy ideas after 1992, differences remained over how to protect key interests and debates about Russia's political and military involvement in Moldova continued until 1996.

Chapter Six: The Russian Political Debates and Military Involvement in The Georgia-Abkhazia Conflict

The second conflict within the former Soviet Union in which Russia became militarily involved was between Georgia and its separatist region of Abkhazia, a few months after the beginning of the Moldova-Transdnistria civil war. War broke out in Georgia in August 1992. Russia once again played a leading role, both politically in the conflict negotiations and militarily with its troops fighting first (unofficially) with one side and then (officially) the other. Eventually it acted as a neutral “peacekeeper”.

This chapter examines the evolution of the Russian political debates concerning policy towards the Georgia-Abkhazia conflict. As in the Moldova case study, the specific debate followed and was part of the general contours of concurrent debates over foreign policy as a whole. To clarify the context of the debates, the first section briefly outlines the events leading up to the war, its evolution and the role of Russia’s military in the conflict. The second section then identifies and examines Russia’s key strategic, political and economic interests, carefully specifying and assessing the extent to which these material interests were legacies of Tsarist and Soviet history. As in the Moldova case, discrepancies between real and perceived interests are clarified in order to discover once again how much room there was for the influence of debate given this material setting.

Turning to an analysis of the dominant ideas within the debates themselves, the third section identifies and provides a chronological analysis of three stages of policy and debate towards the Georgia-Abkhazia conflict. These were the same stages as in the Moldova case study. Within each stage dominant ideas are examined in relation to the official positions, policy outputs and military actions.

1. From Separatism to War in Abkhazia

The roots of conflict in Abkhazia go back for centuries. However, in a brief period of peaceful independence from 1921 to 1931 the region of Abkhazia existed as the Abkhaz

Soviet Republic. Then, under the Soviet Union it was forced into the Georgian Soviet Republic. Abkhazians did not accept their diminished status as a part of Georgia. A latent secessionist movement gained impetus in 1978 when the Abkhaz lost their bid to secede from the Republic of Georgia and join the Russian republic. This loss prompted many more such campaigns, all of which the Soviet government rejected, but which gained for Abkhazia special economic aid and cultural concessions. In March 1989, Abkhaz leaders requested that their region's status as an autonomous republic within Georgia be upgraded to that of an equal republic. This proposal resulted in demonstrations and ethnic clashes in Abkhazia in the spring of 1989, but the issue went unresolved.¹ Abkhazia's anti-Georgia, pro-Russian sentiment was expressed again in the all-Union referendum of 17 March 1991. The Abkhaz population, led by Vladislav Ardzinba, voted overwhelmingly in favour of preserving the Soviet Union.

On 9 April 1991, however, Georgia declared its independence from the Soviet Union and reinstated its 1921 Constitution in which there was no mention of Abkhazia. This act, plus the election in May 1991 of a leading Georgian nationalist demagogue, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, as president increased tensions between Abkhazia and Georgia.² Gamsakhurdia ignored Abkhazia's calls for local home rule (and those of South Ossetia, Georgia's other separatist region). Instead, he introduced an unpopular system of republic prefects to monitor the political activities of local officials, and fuelled demands for secession with his inflammatory rhetoric.³ His actions were based on the premise that the Georgian

¹Russian politicians debated who bore responsibility for the violence perpetrated, specifically for the involvement of Soviet troops in the most violent of clashes on April 9th 1989. At the first Congress of the USSR People's Deputies Gorbachev blamed the Soviet army. General Igor Rodionov denied any involvement. Later, Deputy Anatoly Sobchak led an investigation which clearly implicated the army. See the debates in *Pervyi s'ezd narodnykh deputatov SSSR. Stenografichesky otchet*, vol.1 (Moscow, 1989), pp.517-549. Also see Anatoly Sobchak, *Tbilisskii izlom* (Moscow: Paleia, 1993).

² When Gorbachev allowed elections in 1989, Georgian nationalists ("Round Table-Free Georgia") won the October 1990 republic elections and elected the national dissident and anti-communist Zviad Gamsakhurdia as head of state. After Georgia became independent, Gamsakhurdia was elected President in May 1991.

³ As shall be shown, even Gamsakhurdia's departure in December 1992 and exile in January failed to ease the mounting tension which his policies had fuelled. Georgian academic Ghia Nodia describes Gamsakhurdia's ethnic policies and argues that it was conflicting territorial claims rather than the alleged mistreatment of minorities by the majorities which were at the heart of conflicts in Abkhazia, Transdnistria, Ossetia and Nargorno-Karabakh. See Ghia Nodia, "Political Turmoil in Georgia and the Ethnic Policies of Zviad Gamsakhurdia" in Bruno Coppieters (ed.), *Contested Borders in the Caucasus* (Brussels: VUB Press, 1996), pp.

people had long been victimized and persecuted in their own land and that the time had come to right this injustice. Thus, upon his election Gamsakhurdia took away South Ossetia's autonomy and dismissed Abkhaz demands for sovereignty.

Abkhazia was left with no effective constitution or legal ties to Georgia. As a result, while war was raging in South Ossetia⁴, the Abkhazian parliament decreed a return to the constitution of 1925 which had been instituted when Abkhazia was a sovereign republic within the Soviet Union.⁵ Abkhaz leaders then proposed negotiations to re-establish relations with Georgia on an equal footing as a new federal state. Upon hearing this idea the Georgian deputies of the Abkhaz parliament walked out in protest. The Georgian parliament, in the throes of its own civil war, responded by annulling the declaration, and on 14 August 1992 sent detachments from the Georgian National Guard to Abkhazia with the official authority to protect rail routes from Russia and search for hostages taken by supporters of newly ousted President Gamsakhurdia. However, apparently against the orders of the new Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze, Georgia's Defence Minister Kitovani ordered the troops to enter the Abkhaz capital of Sukhumi and to take over the local government buildings.⁶ This act began a military conflict which lasted throughout most of 1993, and for which the leaders are still seeking a political solution.⁷ After Georgia's initial advances, the Abkhazians launched a counteroffensive and gradually re-established control of their territory – in a process similar to the Transdnistrians who established defacto independence in Moldova. Thus, a low intensity conflict from 1991-92 was followed by a major outbreak of violence in

73-9.

⁴ The Ossetian war is briefly explored below.

⁵ Some analysts argue that this action was misinterpreted by the Western media as a declaration of independence. For example, Pauline Overeem, "Report of a UNPO coordinated human rights mission to Abkhazia and Georgia", in *Central Asian Survey*, vol.14, no.1 (1995), pp.127-154, p.134.

⁶ See John F. R. Wright, "The Geopolitics of Georgia" in John F. R. Wright, Suzanne Goldenberg and Richard Schofield (eds.), *Transcaucasian Boundaries* (London: UCL Press, 1996), pp.134-150, p.143.

⁷ The development of the conflict was influenced by many factors including: Gamsakhurdia's chauvinism, the movement for autonomy in the North Caucasus, the instability with the break-up of the USSR, the relations between the Abkhaz leadership and Russia's "hard-line" forces, and the fall of Gamsakhurdia. For analysis of the immediate origins of the war see: Elizabeth Fuller, "Abkhazia on the Brink of Civil War", *RFE-RL Research Report*, vol. 1, no.35 (September 4,1992), p.1.

August-September 1992, and then more low intensity fighting ensued until the final and largest outbreak of violence began in September 1993 with the Abkhaz assault on Sukhumi.⁸

Almost immediately after Georgian detachments had entered into Abkhazia, Abkhazian leaders called for Russian protection. As in the case of Transdniestria, the close ties between Russia's army on the ground and the local population encouraged the army's early unofficial support of the separatists – who were once again also supported by some domestic political constituencies in Russia. However, in the case of Abkhazia, the ties between the Russian troops and the separatists were not as strong as in Transdniestria. Nevertheless, parallel to the Moldova-Transdniestria conflict, the Russian troops in Georgia initially acted independently on the side of the separatists with local commanders ignoring the orders of their military superiors in Moscow.⁹ Then, as Russian policies developed, the troops fell in line with government policy. Almost immediately, Georgia began to make allegations about Russian intervention in favour of the Abkhazians. Some intervention did take place but it was greatly exaggerated by the Georgians. This is examined in detail below.

As well as being militarily involved in the Georgia-Abkhazia conflict, Russia was simultaneously involved in Georgia's civil war and in its conflicts with its other separatist region, South Ossetia.¹⁰ It was of great importance to Russia not to let Georgia slip into total anarchy. And, because of Russia's substantial involvement in Georgia's various conflicts, Russia could apply pressure to convince Georgia's leaders to acquiesce to Russian demands.

Very briefly, a civil war was taking place in Georgia during 1992 and 1993, and these tumultuous events were closely intertwined with Russia's involvement in Abkhazia. Georgia's President Zviad Gamsakhurdia fled into exile in January 1992 after a coup by what

⁸ Among recent research on the Georgia-Abkhazia conflict are the following: Bruno Coppieters, David Darchiashvili and Natella Akaba (eds.), Federal Practice: Exploring Alternative for Georgia and Abkhazia (Brussels: VUB University Press, 2000) and Dov Lynch, The Conflict in Abkhazia: Dilemmas in Russian "Peacekeeping Policy", Discussion Paper 77 (London: RIIA, 1998).

⁹ Author's Interview with Dr. Andrei Zagorsky (Vice Rector, MGIMO – Moscow State Institute for International Relations), May 28 1999.

¹⁰ Itar-Tass, May 30, 1992. Ruslan Khasbulatov, chairman of the Supreme Soviet, accused Georgia of genocide against the Ossetians. Ivan Yelistratov and Sergei Chugaev, Izvestiya, June 15, 1992, p.1. For a discussion of a USSR Supreme Soviet Discussion on South Ossetia see Vestnik Gruzii, February 26, 1991 in BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, SU/1006C1/7.

many analysts have termed a “Moscow-backed faction”.¹¹ Two months later, former Soviet foreign minister (and former Georgian Communist Party chief) Eduard Shevardnadze gained power.¹² Gamsakhurdia and his followers took over a western zone of Georgia (Mingrelia) bordering Abkhazia. When the Georgian government’s army was defeated in Abkhazia in September 1993, Gamsakhurdia’s oppositionist forces began a drive eastward from Mingrelia into Georgia’s heartland. At this stage, in response to cries of help from Shevardnadze, Russia intervened and pushed out Gamsakhurdia’s troops. Gamsakhurdia eventually died in obscure circumstances in December 1993.¹³

2. Russia’s Key Interests in Georgia

Russia had major objective interests in Georgia. These included: the desire to retain military influence in the area (this was more significant than in Moldova), to protect the small Russian diaspora, (this was less significant than in Moldova), and to develop economic ties with the region (more significant than in Moldova). However, what mattered in the development of Russian foreign policy was which interests the political elite perceived to be most significant and how they believed that these interests could best be achieved. The gaps and interconnections between the “objective” interests, those proclaimed in the debate and those declared as official policy are examined below.

As in the case of Moldova, aspects of Tsarist and Soviet relations with Georgia very broadly influenced but did not determine Russia’s involvement after 1991 in the Georgia-

¹¹ Nodia argues that the “coup” was more complicated than the common assertions that it was a simple military plot by the old bureaucratic and intellectual elite, deprived of former privileges and eager to replace the leader of the Georgian independence movement with a former communist with ties to Moscow. He also disagrees that Gamsakhurdia’s fall was the result of a struggle between democracy and dictatorship - because Gamsakhurdia’s anti-democratic leanings were known from the beginning. Instead he argues that Gamsakhurdia was not a good leader and that his “paranoid suspiciousness made him unable to keep his supporters on his side”. Ghia Nodia “Political Turmoil in Georgia and the Ethnic Policies of Zviad Gamsakhurdia” in Bruno Coppieters (ed.), Contested Borders in the Caucasus (Brussels: VUB Press, 1996), pp. 73-89, p.87.

¹² Gamsakhurdia was ousted in December 1992 and fled into exile in January 1992. Shevardnadze (who resigned as Foreign Minister of the Soviet Union in December 1990) was invited back to Georgia and was elected Chairman of the State Council in March. Shevardnadze then won the presidential elections in October 1992. Between January and March 1992, Georgia was ruled by a Military Council.

¹³ Galina Kovalskaya, “The End of A Legendary Leader”, New Times, Moscow, no.2 (January 1994), pp.10-11.

Abkhazia conflict. Once again, the historical legacy of Tsarist and Soviet policies in the region left particular dilemmas for Russia. The new Russian political elite had to quickly devise foreign policies towards a region with which Russia had had very close historical ties, a region which had undergone “russification” policies but retained a strong sense of national identity and was geographically connected to Russia. The roots of the Georgia-Abkhazia conflict itself extend to Tsarist and Soviet domination of the territory. The historical ties Russia inherited with Georgia and Abkhazia were different, which may help to explain Russia’s involvement in the conflict. Most significantly, in 1991 Russia inherited a Russian-speaking diaspora in Georgia, a Russian military presence and a legacy of economic ties, all of which became an intrinsic part of the debate about Russia’s involvement in the Georgia-Abkhazia conflict.

a) The Threat of Destabilizing the Caucasus

Unlike Moldova, which has no ties to a particular region, Georgia is linked to both the Transcaucasus (which includes Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan) and the wider Caucasus (which includes the three Transcaucasian states as well as the North Caucasian republics within the Russian Federation itself). The region’s closely intertwined history and geographical proximity to Russia encouraged Russia to promote stability in the region. This interest in stability was greatly strengthened by the fact that a part of the region (the North Caucasus) remained within Russia after the break-up of the Soviet Union.¹⁴

Tsarist and Soviet struggles to retain control of the Caucasus reveal a long history of interest in the region. The Caucasus was divided and shuffled between the Persian and Ottoman empires in the 16th and 17th centuries. In 1783, Russia acquired the Christian areas of Georgia in her role as protector of eastern Christians against the Muslim empires. Many Russians perceived early Russian domination of Georgia as progressive, mutually beneficial

¹⁴ George Hewitt objects to Russian academic Dimitry Danilov’s assertion that “the Northern Caucasus is actually an inalienable part of Russian territory” as being “dangerous and deceptive”. However, the fact remains that the North Caucasian states are part of the Russian Federation. Russia’s desire to keep them within Russia goes a long way towards explaining their interest in the entire Caucasus region. See, Dimitry Danilov, “Russia’s Search for an International Mandate in Transcaucasia”, in Bruno Coppieters (ed.), Contested Borders in the Caucasus (Brussels: VUB Press, 1996), pp.137-152, p.137 and George Hewitt, “Abkhazia, Georgia and the Circassians (NW Causasus)”, Central Asia Survey, vol. 18, no.4 (1999), pp.463-499, p.472.

and voluntary, largely because the initial protectorate was created at the Georgians' request. Then, in 1801, Russia annexed this region and by 1878 took control over the entire Caucasus.¹⁵ It had taken the Russian Tsars over two centuries to consolidate their hold on this region.

Most of the wars fought by Russia during its penetration into the Caucasus were against the Persian and Ottoman empires. These wars set a precedent for subsequent rivalries over this region between Russia, Iran and Turkey. The Caucasus became perceived as both a "buffer zone" and "battlefield" between the predominantly Orthodox Christian empire in the north and the largely Muslim powers in the Middle East.¹⁶

Tsarist Russia collapsed in 1917, allowing Georgia a brief period of independence before being unwillingly incorporated into the Soviet Union in 1921. There followed a period of Georgian federation with Armenia and Azerbaijan as part of the Soviet Union's Transcaucasian federal republic (which obviously reinforced the perception of Georgia's association with the Transcaucasian region). Then, in 1936, Georgia emerged as a fully-fledged union republic within the Soviet Union.

Russian perceptions of Georgia are therefore based on the fact that when Georgia became independent in 1991 it had been under almost continual Russian and Soviet domination since 1801. Unlike Moldova, which was ruled by Romania from 1812 to 1940, no other foreign power had dominated Georgia after its incorporation into the Russian Empire. Thus, immediately after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, when the Russian political elite had still not yet fully accepted the fact that former Soviet republics had achieved independence, this was particularly true of Georgia. Of course, the independence of Ukraine, Belarus and Kazakhstan were greater shocks.

¹⁵ By 1878, the newly acquired territories included Daghestan, Chechen-Ingushia, Ossetia, Karachay-Balkaria, Abkhazia, Kabarda, and Adyghea. Georgia was annexed in 1801, Mingrelia in 1803 and the western province of Imereti in 1804. George Hewitt, "Abkhazia: a problem of identity and ownership", Central Asian Survey, vol.12, no.3 (1993) pp.267-323. p.271. See also Mariam Lordkipanidze, Essays on Georgian History (Tbilisi: Metsniereba, 1994).

¹⁶ See Sergei Panarin, "Political Dynamics of the "New" East (1985-1993)" in Vitaly V. Naumkin (ed.), Central Asia and Transcaucasia; Ethnicity and Conflict (London: Greenwood Press, 1994), pp.69-107. Panarin is head of the Sector for Studies of Relations between Russia and Peoples of the East, at the Institute of Oriental Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences.

The region of Abkhazia¹⁷ has a somewhat different history than the rest of Georgia.¹⁸ In its very early history it was dominated at various times by the Greeks, Romans, Byzantines and Turks. Before 1810, Abkhazian rulers formed many nominal or effective unions with various Georgian kingdoms or princedoms.¹⁹ Thus, both Abkhaz unity with Georgia and Abkhaz autonomy have been argued on historical grounds. In the first half of the nineteenth century the Abkhazians (and other North-West Caucasian peoples) became independent when Russia defeated the Ottoman Empire.²⁰ Abkhazia came under the protection of Tsarist Russia in 1810 but continued to administer its own province. Unlike Georgia, but similar to the rest of the Muslim North Caucasus, it put up fierce resistance but despite this effort was taken under complete Russian control in 1864.

A major Abkhaz grievance in the conflict with Georgia after 1991 concerned the loss of political status that Abkhazia has undergone in the 20th century. Soon after the Russian Revolution of 1917, Abkhazia proclaimed its independence and entered into the short-lived North Caucasian Republic.²¹ It was annexed by Communist Russia in 1919-20 and from 1921 to 1931 it held republic status as the Soviet Socialist Republic of Abkhazia. In 1931, Stalin further demoted Abkhazia's status from that of a treaty-republic associated with Georgia to a mere autonomous republic within the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic. This demotion meant effective incorporation of Abkhazia into Georgia and was the cause of considerable lingering Abkhaz resentment towards both Russia and Georgia.

As a result of this turbulent history of shared fierce resistance to Russian conquest, repression and expulsion, strong ties exist between Abkhazia and Russia's North Caucasian

¹⁷ Throughout the rest of the text the word region is not used. That term is greatly objected to by Abkhazians. Dr. Giorgi Otyerba, Deputy Foreign Minister of Abkhazia, November 22, 1999, LSE Talk.

¹⁸ The most recent and most comprehensive book in English about the Abkhazians' history, language, economy, geography, war etc is George Hewitt, The Abkhazians (Surrey: Curzon Press, 1999).

¹⁹ There are references in Abkhaz literature to the Abkhazian kingdom of the 9th and 10th centuries. The Abkhazians use this history to claim sovereignty over the region although the same kingdom could also be described as a common Georgia-Abkhazian kingdom. Alexei Zverev, "Ethnic Conflicts in the Caucasus 1988-1994", in Bruno Coppieters (ed.), Contested Borders in the Caucasus (Brussels: VUB University Press, 1996), pp.13-71, p. 15.

²⁰ Givi V. Tsulaia, Abkhazia and Abkhazians in the context of Georgian History (Moscow: Russian Academy of Sciences, 1995).

²¹ The North Caucasian Republic included Daghestan, Chechen-Ingushia, Ossetia, Karachay-Balkaria, Kabarda, Adyghea and Abkhazia.

republics. The strong historical, ethnic and religious links explain why Russian citizens from these republics have independently aided and fought for Abkhaz independence in the post-1991 conflict. They also explain the existence of strong pro-Abkhazia lobbies in Russia.

An important legacy of Soviet rule in Georgia was the establishment of sub-republican autonomous political units. This policy gave the Abkhaz their own autonomous area bearing the Abkhaz name within Georgia and allowed them to have a political significance out of proportion to their numbers.²² Thus, as in the previously examined case of Transdniestria, Abkhazia's status after 1991 as a secessionist zone within a newly independent state can be interpreted partly as a consequence of Soviet era nationality policies which, to a certain extent, encouraged the flourishing of various cultural and ethnic groups. Within the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR), Abkhaz culture managed to flourish. Significantly, however, this occurred, as in Transdniestria, under the influence of, and mostly on the basis of, the Russian language. After 1945, the Abkhazians looked to Russia for protection from Georgia which was seen as the more immediate threat and the least attractive culture. Abkhaz authorities (similar to the Transdniestrians) often appealed directly to Moscow over the republican authorities, setting the historical precedent for Abkhaz petitions for Russian aid after 1991.²³

This tumultuous history underlines Russia's key interest in promoting peace in this region. The Russian empire had been accused of fomenting hostility among the various peoples of the Caucasus by adopting a policy of "divide and rule" in order to consolidate its

²² There was an Abkhaz university as well as theatre, television and radio services, magazines and newspapers. Parents preferred to send their children to Abkhaz schools. According to Georgian academics, the Bolsheviks formed the Abkhazian ASSR in order to create permanent sources of tension and thus enable Georgia to be more easily controlled. Thus, historically, the Georgians perceived Abkhazia as a threat to Georgian national interests - which partly explains their current efforts to suppress any aspirations for independence from these regions. Darrell Slider, "Crisis and Response in Soviet Nationalist Policy: The case of Abkhazia", Central Asian Survey, vol.4, no.4 (December 1985), pp.51-68.

²³ In turn, Georgian republican authorities, like their counterparts in Moldova, adopted many policy initiatives to integrate Abkhazia into the rest of the republic: they restricted local prerogatives, exploited their rights to control appointments, and used demographic and cultural policies to protect their interests. Many discriminatory policies such as the closure of Abkhaz schools from 1944 to 1952 by Stalin, were put in place centrally by Moscow and carried out by Georgians. Evidence of Abkhaz persecution can now be found in KGB top-secret documents from the 1940s detailing the "counter-revolutionary nationalist movements in Abkhazia". These are translated by Rachel Clogg, "Documents from the KGB archives in Sachem. Abkhazia in the Stalin years", in Central Asian Survey, vol.14, no.1 (1995), pp.155-189, pp.181-188. These policies were part of the general Stalinist persecution but carried out by Georgians. Of course, the fact that Stalin and Beria were Georgians was bound to influence Abkhaz perceptions of the crackdown.

hold on the region.²⁴ However the Russian empire, and later the Soviet Union, also often acted as arbiter and peacemaker between the various groups. With the demise of the Soviet Union, some elements of this legacy survived. Regional rivalry and internal strife returned to the region and Russia once again became involved in trying to resolve the conflicts. Most significantly, however, this abbreviated history demonstrates why Russia after 1991 was especially sensitive to the disunity and the multiethnic nature of the Caucasian region which made any conflict in the area inherently dangerous. The stabilization of conflicts in Transcaucasia was perceived as necessary in order to stop any “spill-over” effects (or encouragement of separatist elements) which could threaten the unity of the Russian Federation.

Since 1991, there have been two main zones of interethnic conflicts in the Transcaucasus: the conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia over Nargorno-Karabakh (in which Russia’s military was indirectly involved) and separatist disputes in Georgia (in which Russia’s military was directly involved). Within its own North Caucasus, Russia has been involved in a war with Chechnya.²⁵ However, although there has been a broad consensus over the need for peace in the region, the means and extent of Russian involvement in the conflict were very controversial and thus a subject of vigorous political debate.

b) The Russian-Speaking Diaspora

As in the case of Moldova, Tsarist and Soviet history left Georgia with a Russian-speaking diaspora and specific political ties with Moscow. It also meant that Abkhazia, similar to Transdnistria, inherited its own separate, close relations with other political elements in Moscow. Imperial Russia’s attempts to russify Georgian society began in the 1890s. However, in spite of major demographic changes these attempts generally failed and

²⁴ Paul B. Henze, "Russia and the Caucasus", *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, vol. 19, no. 4 (Oct.-Dec.1996), pp. 389-402, p.391.

²⁵ This war is not examined directly in this thesis but it did have major repercussions for Russia’s security and military policies. The thesis will touch upon its indirect impact on Russia’s policies – especially towards the Caucasus. See Roy Allison, “The Chechnia conflict: military and security policy implications”, in Roy Allison and Christoph Bluth, *Security Dilemmas in Russia and Eurasia* (London: RIIA, 1998), pp.241-280.

instead stimulated a new Georgian awareness.²⁶ Later, Soviet nationality policies in Georgia, in many ways similar to those carried out in the other republics, had the contradictory effect of simultaneously fostering both nationalism and repression.²⁷ Ethnic cleavages were manipulated by Moscow in order to maintain Soviet power and discourage dissent along ethnic lines. At the same time, Georgia continued to develop many of the characteristics of an independent state. Compared to Moldova, Georgia emerged from the Soviet Union with a much stronger sense of national identity.

Abkhazia underwent many changes in ethnic composition over the last two centuries which generated related historical memories of Abkhaz persecution. In the 19th century, there had been a mass exodus of Abkhaz as they fled or were expelled to the Ottoman Empire following the Russian conquest of the Caucasus and in the wake of the Russo-Turkish war in 1877-78. During this period, most of the Muslim Abkhaz emigrated. The majority of those who remained were nominally Christians.²⁸ The Tsarist officials distributed the land left by the emigrants among high-ranking military and civil officials, and large-scale colonization of Russians, Greeks, Armenians, Germans, Estonians and Bulgarians was encouraged in the 1880s and 1890s.

Demographic changes continued throughout the 1930s and 1940s under the Communist Party Secretary for Transcaucasia, Lavrentii Beria.²⁹ Some Abkhazians were forced to leave,

²⁶ For a comprehensive account of Russian influence and policies in Georgia during both Imperial and Soviet times see Ronald Grigor Suny, The Making of the Georgian Nation (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994). "Although the thrust of Marxism had seemed opposed to the creation of a coherent and separate Georgian nation, the actual evolution of Soviet Georgia resulted in the emergence of a compact and conscious nation prepared to act in its own interest, either on its own or in concert with the current government". Suny, p.318.

²⁷ See Margot Light, "Russia and Transcaucasia" in John F. R. Wright, Suzanne Goldenberg and Richard Schofield (eds.) Transcaucasian Boundaries (London: UCL Press, 1996), pp.34-54.

²⁸ The Abkhazians first adopted Christianity in the fourth century. Then, when Abkhazia was under Turkish rule from the 15th to the early 19th century, part of Abkhazia was converted to Islam. In 1886, 14.6% of Abkhazians were Sunni Muslim. The Abkhaz population was then Christianised in the late 19th century, under Russian rule. Today, Abkhazians in Abkhazia are mostly Orthodox Christians whereas their half a million diaspora in Turkey, the Middle-East countries, Western Europe and North America are largely Sunni Moslems. It is often cited today that there is not a single mosque in modern Abkhazia. See Shirin Akiner, Islamic Peoples of the Soviet Union (London: Kegan Paul, 1986).

²⁹ A whole range of peoples were deported from the Transcaucasus. See Nikolai Bougai, "1940s – The Deportation of Peoples from Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan", Political History of Russia, vol.8, no.1 (Commack, N.Y.: Nova Science Publishers 1997), pp.1-16.

and Mingrelians, Georgians, Russians and Armenians were again encouraged to move into the vacated territory. As a result, the ethnic Abkhazians soon constituted a distinct minority in their own autonomous republic, and they have remained a minority. In 1989, the population of the Soviet republic of Georgia was approximately 5 million with 75% ethnic Georgian, 8% ethnic Armenian, 6% Russian, 3% Ossetian, 2% Abkhazian, and 6% others.³⁰ The same year, Abkhazians constituted only 17.8% of their autonomous republic, and the Georgians 45.7% of the Abkhaz republic.³¹

The ethnic Russians who lived in Georgia had arrived at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The Russian population particularly increased in the 1930's when industrialization required skilled workers, and when many Russians escaped to the Transcaucasus during the period of forced collectivisation and the famine of 1932-33. However, neither Georgia nor the other Transcaucasian states had significant ethnic Russian diasporas. The diaspora was much more of an issue in Moldova where ethnic Russians made up a larger proportion of the population. In 1989, ethnic Russians in Georgia were the second largest minority at 6.3 percent (or 341,000) – just behind the Armenians (8.1%).³² Also, unlike Moldova's separatist region of Transdnistria, the diaspora in Georgia's separatist region of Abkhazia was not the dominant group. Neither was it the target of any anti-Russian policy. In fact, the Georgian government *feared* a Russian exodus – which was already occurring due to the Abkhazia conflict and the economic crisis – because it would create further economic problems.³³

Russia's primary concern was therefore not so much the protection of the Russian diaspora in Georgia but the more complicated question of how Georgia's independence, and civil and separatist wars would affect Russia's citizens in Russia's North Caucasus. Thus in the

³⁰ All-Union population census 1989 [Vsesoyuznaya perepis' naseleniya 1989] (Moskva: Gosudarstvennyi Komitet SSSR po Statistike, 1990).

³¹ There are problems about how to determine who it is correct to describe as a "Georgian". See George Hewitt, "Abkhazia – A Problem of Identity and Ownership", Central Asian Survey, vol.12, no.3 (1993), pp.267-323. p.268.

³² The data is from the last Soviet census in 1989. Vestnik statistiki, no.1, 1991. Also see All-Union population census 1989 [Vsesoyuznaya perepis' naseleniya 1989] (Moskva: Gosudarstvennyi Komitet SSSR po Statistike, 1990). This number has since been reduced by emigration.

³³ About 1000 Russians were killed and 30,000 fled. Moskovskiy Novosti, no.25 (June 19-26 1994), p. A4.

case of Georgia, the “Russian Question” had mainly to do with Russia’ internal problems and the need to stabilize any situation in Georgia which could worsen the inter-ethnic disputes within Russia’s own borders. Nevertheless, although the Russian population was relatively small some Russian politicians, as well shall see, used the diaspora to justify Russian involvement in the area. Even if the Russian diaspora in Georgia was not a significant interest, we will see that this issue affected policy in that the diaspora was used as a justification for the continuation and strengthening of Russian presence in the region.

c) Russian Strategic Interests

One of Russia’s most significant interests in Georgia was strategic. With the break-up of the Soviet Union, Russia inherited a significant military presence in Georgia. The former Soviet Transcaucasian Military District had been based across Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan. In Georgia, at the time of the disintegration of the Soviet Union, this included approximately 20,000 former Soviet ground troops as well as the vessels and bases of the Black Sea Fleet and Border Guards.³⁴ The Soviet troops in Georgia were there to protect the southern flank of the USSR and especially the 300 km Black Sea coast – particularly from the threat of Turkish military superiority in the region. The role of the Soviet Transcaucasus Border District guards was to both “create a border” in order to effectively control the southern approaches to the Russian Federation and to help maintain order and protect those living alongside the border.³⁵ After 1991, Russia assumed direct control of all the former Soviet forces in Georgia.

One of the key issues to be debated about Georgia after the break-up of the Soviet Union was what to do with these troops and bases in Georgia: should they be withdrawn, remain, or be transferred to Georgian control? Many of the former Soviet troops in the Transcaucasus were in fact withdrawn or disbanded relatively quickly. However, Russia

³⁴ In December 1992, Russian forces in the Transcaucasus included the 24th Army Corps, the Transcaucasian Military District and the Group of Forces in the Transcaucasus. For details see Svobodnaya Gruzija, December 16, 1992, quoted in Elizabeth Fuller, “Paramilitary Forces Dominate Fighting in Transcaucasus”, RFE/RL Research Report, Special Issue on Post-Soviet Armies, vol.2, no.25 (June 18, 1993), pp.74-82, pp.75, 82.

³⁵ Richard Woff, “The Border Troops of the Russian Federation”, Jane’s Intelligence Review, vol.7, no.2 (February 1995), pp.70-73, p.71.

inherited five former military bases in Georgia, a military installation at Eshera for monitoring seismic activity, as well as strategically significant ports along the Black Sea coast. Meanwhile, similar to most other post-Soviet states (and especially in the short-term), Georgia was dependent upon Russia in that it was left with no regular army of its own (it had difficulty controlling its many paramilitary factions) and lacked the experience of frontier defence.³⁶ The government of Moldova was similarly dependent on Russia for the stability its military presence could provide, and for help to create their own forces and to protect their borders.

Security was the overriding “real” and perceived Russian interest in Georgia because Russians had both memories and perceptions of past threats which they had historically encountered from this region. Russia also had an immediate external geopolitical interest in the region including a desire to surround itself with “friendly” and peaceful neighbours and to prevent a security vacuum which other regional (Turkey, Iran) or international (United States) powers could fill.³⁷ The need to stabilize conflicts in Transcaucasia was perceived as necessary in order to stop any “spill-over” effects (or encouragement of separatist elements) which could threaten the unity of the Russian Federation. Migration, arms sales and illegally armed groups on Russia’s territories were other related concerns.³⁸ Finally, there was the primary need to end the violence, and prevent the disintegration of Georgia itself.

Russian military forces remained in Georgia, therefore, in order to prevent a “security vacuum”, to solve actual and potential conflicts, and because it was too costly to withdraw.

³⁶ By 1990, the Georgian coastal waters had been controlled by the Poti-based 184th Coast Guard Brigade of the former Soviet Black Sea Navy (which was made up of various 48 combat and support warships and boats). In 1992 the brigade was completely withdrawn from Georgia, having left behind only six vessels - two small landing ships and four boats of various classes. Besides, there were naval bases of the 6th Ochamchire Coast Guard Brigade of the Transcaucasian Frontier District deployed nearby Poti, Batumi, Anaklia, Ochamchire and Sukhumi. Since 1996, Russian frontier guards have pulled almost all their vessels out of Georgia and eliminated coastal checkpoints. Irakli Aladashvili, “Marine Borders Need Immediate Defence”, Army and Society in Georgia (Caucasian Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development (CIPDD), July 1998). (www.cipd.org)

³⁷ Turkey, for example, was a major player in the bid for oil interests in the region and became (in a very limited fashion) involved in the conflict on the Abkhaz side. Turkish volunteers fought in Abkhazia and gave Abkhazia financial help. An analysis of Russia’s economic interests and relations with Turkey can be found in Stephen Blank, “Russia’s Real Drive to the South”, Orbis, vol.39, no.3 (Summer 1995), pp.369-386.

³⁸ An estimated 43,000 Russians left Georgia in 1992 and another 53,000 in the first months of 1993. “Russians Abroad in the Former Soviet Union”, The Economist, May 21, 1994.

While there, Russian troops also acted to protect Russia's strategic interests, taking advantage of opportunities to do so within the conflict. Also, as in the case of Moldova Russia had an interest in securing and maintaining the former external Soviet borders. Throughout all of Georgia, Russian military presence decreased from 20,000 in 1992-94 to 8,500 in 1996-97. In Abkhazia in particular, the overall strength of both the regular Russian troops (the bulk of which was inherited from Soviet times) and peacekeeping battalions (introduced in 1994) continued to rise from 1000 in October 1992 to 3000 by October 1996.³⁹ Regular troops in Abkhazia began to decrease in 1994 when peacekeeping troops were introduced (some regular troops simply switched functions). Nevertheless, Russian military interest in Georgia (as in the other former Soviet states) gradually receded in comparison to Tsarist or Soviet times. It became mostly defensive in nature and excluded any large-scale military operations.

d) Economic Relations

Historically, Russia and Georgia had had strong economic ties. After 1991 Russian economic interest in Georgia continued even as the Georgian state began to diversify its trade. Georgia's economy had developed greatly during the Soviet period so that by 1991 Georgia was one of the wealthiest republics. Like Moldova, it was developed primarily as an agricultural region with some mineral wealth. Its subtropical climate favoured the cultivation of grapes, citrus fruit, vegetables, spices and tea. Food processing and wine production became the main industries and Georgia's spas made it a popular tourist destination.⁴⁰ However, because Georgia's economy had been highly integrated with the other former republics, upon independence it remained greatly dependent on Russia.⁴¹ This dependency, as well as the potential to renew trading ties, also affected the understanding and interest of the Russian political elite in the Georgia-Abkhazia conflict after 1991.

³⁹ The Military Balance 1997/98 (London: IISS, Oxford University Press, 1997) p.110.

⁴⁰ World Bank Development Indicators Database, July 2000, from <http://devdata.worldbank.org/data-query>.

⁴¹ The Soviet era terms of trade for Georgian goods tended to be much more favourable than the global capitalist ones – for example in food to fuel ratios.

After 1991, Russia's economic interests in Abkhazia in particular included rich agricultural lands, the Tkvarcheli coalmines, the port of Sukhumi, a direct railway link between Russia and Georgia, and a resort area (with an attractive coastline and climate). Of even greater interest for Russia was the location of Georgia (as a whole) and access to the lucrative development and transportation of oil and gas from the Caspian Sea and Central Asia which this location provided.⁴² This particular interest eventually united many members of the Russian elite over the need for Russia to maintain a foothold in the region. However, this issue of Caspian oil in particular did not affect Russian policies directly until around 1995-96.⁴³

Thus, Russia's economic interests in Georgia were greater than those in Moldova and helped motivate Russian politicians and decision-makers to pursue peace in the region in order to quell anarchy and to support Georgia's territorial integrity. However, they were not the most significant factors in defining Russian perceptions or policy towards the Abkhazia conflict. As with the other former Soviet states, trade with Georgia soon collapsed, and despite Russia's attempts to renew it, it made little progress.⁴⁴ Georgia's GDP dropped nearly 73 percent between 1991 and 1994. The economy stabilized only in 1995.⁴⁵ Moreover, the severe economic crisis in the Transcaucasus and the interruption of industrial production and cooperation in the region led to a sharp decline in many elements of Russia's traditional economic interests. Civil war, ethnic conflicts, natural disasters, shortage of fuel and energy resources, and the dramatic increase of internally displaced persons (IDPs) all contributed to Georgia's economic problems.⁴⁶

⁴² Russia unsuccessfully invested substantial diplomatic efforts to undermine the legal grounds for developing new oil fields in the Caspian Sea. Russia also tried to ensure that the oil would be transported via Russian territory and shipped from Novorossisk. The Caspian region has oil reserves estimated to be as high as 200 billion barrels. Thus, there has been a consensus that Russia should be involved in any lucrative oil deals and the main debate in Russia has been whether or not to welcome Western participation in the development of Caspian oil. Rosemarie Forsythe, "The Politics of Oil in the Caucasus and Central Asia", *Adelphi Paper*, no.300 (London: IISS, 1996).

⁴³ Elaine Holoboff, "Russia: Oil, Guns and Pipes", *War Report*, no.50 (London: Institute for War and Peace Reporting, April 1997), pp.25-6.

⁴⁴ Michael J. Bradshaw, "Foreign trade and inter-republican relations", Denis J. B. Shaw (ed.), *The Post-Soviet Republics: A Systematic Geography* (London: Longmann Group Limited, 1995), pp.133-150, p.149.

⁴⁵ In 1993 Georgia's GDP (both real growth and per capita) was -25; by 1996, 11. *World Bank Development Indicators Database*, July 2000, from <http://devdata.worldbank.org/data-query>.

⁴⁶ Avtandil Sulaberidze, "Towards Poverty Eradication in Georgia", pp.130-176 in Yogesh Atal (ed.), *Poverty Transition and Transition in Poverty* (Paris: UNESCO, 1999).

3. The Debates and the Policies: Russia's Military and Political Involvement in Georgia, 1991-1996

Above it was seen that Russia inherited the unstable and fractious region of the Caucasus on her border, as well as a small Russian diaspora, a large military presence and economic ties with Georgia. After 1991 these inheritances did not dictate specific Russian policies towards the conflict between Georgia and Abkhazia. Instead, there was controversy over how Russia should react and considerable room for debate over policy choices.

The following analysis of the Russian debates about its policy options from 1991 to 1996 is divided into three stages. In each stage, we seek to clarify the dominant foreign policy ideas of the key members of the political elite in the debate and to identify Russia's official policy and military action. Pathways by which ideas and debate may have affected policy choices are highlighted.

a) Stage One: The Atlanticist Period (August 1991-March 1992)

During this first very short stage, there was no Russian political debate specifically about relations with Georgia or how Russia should deal with the Georgia-Abkhazia conflict. Fighting had not yet broken out between the two sides. While some members of the Russian political elite initially tended to favour the Abkhaz, the ties were not as strong as those with the Transdnistrians (who were mostly ethnic Russians). However, the Abkhazians opposed the division of the Soviet Union and thus received the vocal support of individuals in Russia (generally outside the executive) who had the same goal. In contrast, the government of Georgia (similar to the government of Moldova) was asserting its independence and trying to distance itself from its former ties. It was supported by many Russian politicians who espoused liberal westernism. Nevertheless, it is unlikely, as Georgian analyst Revaz Gachechiladze and Russian analyst Svetlana Chervonnaya argue, that the Abkhaz had special relations with the Russian elite that were strong enough to explain Russia's actions in the war.⁴⁷ The Abkhaz

⁴⁷ To quote Gachechiladze, "In no other autonomous republic were its leaders so close to the governing Politburo members of the CPSU and Soviet (Russian) generals as in Abkhazia". Revaz Gachechiladze, *The New Georgia* (London: UCL Press, 1995) p.177. Svetlana Chervonnaya goes so far as say the conflict was "part

did have close relations with elements of the Russian political and military elite from Soviet times, but so too did the Georgians. Many Russian diplomats, including Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev, worked under Shevardnadze while he was Soviet Foreign Minister.⁴⁸ The Abkhazians were especially active in their attempts to influence Russian policy in their favour (often by exaggerating the links between Russia and Abkhazia), but again so too were the Georgians. The point here is that the specific ties that both sides – Abkhazian and Georgian – had in Moscow did, of course, affect the content and emotion of the Russian political debate about the conflict, even if they did not specifically influence a particular policy or action.

As in the case of Moldova and the other former Soviet states, after the break-up of the Soviet Union the Russian government officially supported Georgia's independence and territorial integrity. However, as yet, it had taken no position towards the growing Abkhaz dispute and was content to leave Georgia to its own devices. Russia's foreign policy in general was articulated by the government in terms of liberal westernist ideas, and the debates and policies neglected the specific Abkhaz issue. Also at this early stage, the Russian government was negotiating a settlement for the South Ossetia conflict – a role which the former Soviet government had also played. Thus, the Russian government was already demonstrating its interest and sensitivity to conflicts along its borders with the North Caucasus by its negotiations and military presence. Nevertheless, most of the military forces under Russian control in the Transcaucasus were in the process of being withdrawn back to Russia.

of a deeply calculated and premeditated programme by certain elements within the Russian and Abkhazian political and military hierarchy". She argues that Russia attempted to destabilize the regime to retain its influence there. "The hard-liners of the old regime are still at work within the lands of the former Soviet Union" (p. xvii, xviii). She stresses the "infiltration" of the KGB in Abkhazia (p.89) and describes in detail aid Abkhazia received from various peoples in the North Caucasus (p.128-131). She terms the Abkhazians agents of Soviet Union sent there to protect Soviet interest. (p.134). Svetlana Chervonnaya, Conflict in the Caucasus: Georgia, Abkhazia and the Russian Shadow (Glastonbury UK: Gothic Images Publications, 1994).

⁴⁸ For example, Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov knew the Abkhaz leader Vladislav Ardzinba from their years working together at the Institute of Oriental Studies; Deputy Foreign Minister Boris Pastukhov knew Eduard Shevardnadze from his years as first secretary of the Soviet Komsomol. Grachev apparently had "special relations" with Tenghiz Kitovani (Georgia's defence minister and Shevardnadze's rival). Author's Interviews with Dr. Dimitry Trenin (Carnegie Institute) May 25, 1999; and Col. Gen. Andrei Nikolaev (Commander of Russia's Border Troops), June 8, 1999.

In August 1992, the former Soviet Transcaucasian Military District was renamed the "Russian troops in Transcaucasia" and a division of assets took place which left the Georgians with a considerable quantity of advanced weapons.⁴⁹ As in the other former Soviet republics, old Soviet military equipment was plundered by local paramilitary and criminal elements, often with the help of corrupt members of the former Soviet military.⁵⁰ The Russian Border Troops also needed to help Georgia with training and financial assistance to protect its borders. To protect Russian security on the new frontier with Azerbaijan and Georgia, the North Caucasus Border Troops District was set up in late 1992.⁵¹

b) Stage Two: The Battle of Ideas (March 1992-October 1992)

i) The Debates

The start of the war between Moldova-Transdnistria in March 1992 had initiated a debate in Russia over its involvement in CIS conflicts. The debates intensified when war broke out between Georgia and Abkhazia in August. Thus, before the war began, during the spring and summer of 1992, members of the Russian political elite discussed how Russia should react to the developing crisis. The debates represented an array of foreign policy ideas – the most strident and vocal of which were fundamentalist nationalist. As we shall see, proponents of these ideas loudly, and often provocatively, advocated the use of military force against the Georgian government supporting the Abkhaz separatists and in the Russian press, in parliament and during organized trips to Abkhazia.

Support for the Abkhaz was only to a limited extent the result of the traditionally close historical ties between Russia and Abkhazia. Members of the political elite, who espoused fundamentalist nationalist ideas and supported the Transdnistrians, such as Gennady

⁴⁹ Mark Smith, *Pax Russica: Russia's Monroe Doctrine* (London: RUSI, 1993), pp.52-3.

⁵⁰ By 1993, Russian military presence in the region was less than 10 percent of what it had been in the former Transcaucasian Military District. This is according to Valery Simonov, the former Chief of Intelligence of the 19th Independent Air ~~Force~~ Army, stationed in Georgia until 1991. Valery Simonov, "Kavkaz: krov', slyozy i dengi" *Sovershenno sekretno*, Moscow, no.8 (1994), p.3.

⁵¹ In 1994 it became the Caucasus Special Border District. According to its deputy commander its area of responsibility extends from the shores of the Black Sea in the west to the Caspian Sea in the east. See Richard Woff, "The Border Troops of the Russian Federation", *Jane's Intelligence Review*, vol.7, no.2 (February 1995), pp.70-73, p.71.

Zyuganov, also tended to support the Abkhazians. However, Abkhazia had other influential supporters in Moscow including the Chairman of the Supreme Soviet Ruslan Khasbulatov⁵² and right-wing fundamentalist nationalist deputy Sergei Baburin, who led discussions in the parliament about the conflict. These men wanted Russia to regain an influential role in the region (or at least the future possibility of such a role). For them, siding with Abkhazia was a means of restoring influence in Georgia at a time when Georgia's political leaders were loudly proclaiming its independence. They also had learnt from the Moldova crisis that this issue of Russian involvement in the CIS states could allow them to score political points against the government. Moreover, these and other more moderate, members of the political elite worried that Russia's traditional security interests in the region seemed to be threatened. Specifically, Georgia was refusing to enter the CIS, Armenia and Azerbaijan were fighting over Nargorno-Karabakh, and, further afield, Russia was losing naval ports with the division of the Black Sea Fleet with the Ukraine.

Russian academic Emil Pain attributed the vocal Russian support for the Abkhaz to "the revenge of Russia national-patriots" who believed that because "Shevardnadze destroyed the Soviet Union, let his Georgia be destroyed now".⁵³ Certainly, Shevardnadze had many enemies in elite Russian circles – especially in Russia's military and among those holding fundamentalist nationalist ideas. However, he also had many influential friends from when he was Soviet Foreign Minister. The Russian high command disliked Shevardnadze whom it held responsible for the break-up of the Soviet Union and the end of Warsaw Pact, but it was even less enamoured with Gamsakhurdia.⁵⁴ Gamsakhurdia's strong nationalist rhetoric throughout 1991-92 about independence and the desire to build a "Caucasian Home" was perceived as threatening.

Other Russian politicians blamed not Shevardnadze but the Russian government for allowing the Georgia-Abkhazia crisis to develop in the first place, and called for immediate government action. According to Baburin, "Georgia is conducting this war with the

⁵² Khasbulatov was chairman of the Supreme Soviet until he joined the unsuccessful October 1993 coup against Yeltsin.

⁵³ Emil Pain, *Izvestiya*, October 9, 1992, p.2.

⁵⁴ "Russian Foreign Policy, Your Policy or Mine?", *Economist*, October 30, 1993, p.50.

Abkhazians with the... most barbarous arms... All these were transferred to the military formations of the illegitimate State Council of Georgia that came to power as a result of a coup... The blood of Abkhazia is on the Kremlin".⁵⁵ Members of the Russian military elite agreed that Russia had created the conditions for war by allowing the Georgian state to have these weapons. As former KGB Colonel Aleksandr Sterligov explained, because of this transfer of weapons "Russia personified by Shevardnadze is conducting an undeclared war against the peoples of Abkhazia".⁵⁶ These weapons had been legally transferred in accordance with the CIS Tashkent agreements; however there had been the stipulation that they would not be used in domestic disputes. There were, of course, many other channels for acquiring Russian military supplies in the region, for example through illegal arms sales and looting.

As in the Transdnistria conflict, specific Russian politicians promoted their pro-Abkhaz stance in the press. The fundamentalist nationalist newspaper Den' published articles which demanded Russia to re-establish control over Georgia, relentlessly attacked Yeltsin for failing to assist the Abkhazians, and called for the return of the empire.⁵⁷ Pravda printed an appeal by the Abkhaz for Russia to intervene on their behalf.⁵⁸ Members of the Communist faction, such as Gennady Saenko, harshly criticized the government and called for substantial Russian involvement.⁵⁹ There is also evidence that certain Russian politicians met with Abkhaz leaders to make secret arms deals. If genuine, this evidence indicates a direct relationship between specific individual Russian politicians and unofficial Russian involvement in the conflict. Catherine Dale, for example, writes that Baburin met with Ardzinba several times at the town of Zelennaya Roshcha to discuss arms deals.⁶⁰ However, when questioned by the author, Baburin

⁵⁵ Sergei Baburin, Den', no.35 (August 30-September 5,1992), p.1.

⁵⁶ Aleksandr Sterligov (former KGB colonel) "Russia, in the personal of the citizen, E.A. Shevardnadze, is conducting an undeclared war against the peoples of Abkhazia", Den', no. 35 (August 30-September 5, 1992), pp.1, 3.

⁵⁷ See the extreme right-wing paper Den' in mid to late 1992. For example, no.30 (August 23-29, 1992), p.1; no.34 (September13-19, 1992), p.1; no.36 (October 11-17, 1992), p.1; no. 39 (October 8-14,1992), p.1.

⁵⁸ Pravda, August 15, 1992, p.1.

⁵⁹ Itar-Tass, October 30, 1992.

⁶⁰ See Catherine Dale, "The Case of Abkhazia (Georgia)" in Lena Jonson and Clive Archer (eds.), Peacekeeping and the Role of Russia in Eurasia (Oxford: Westview Press, 1996), pp.121-137, p.127.

would only confirm that arms trading had taken place both by Russian troops in the area and by individuals generally from the North Caucasus. He said that he had met with Ardzinba but denied any personal involvement in the sale of arms.⁶¹

Despite the fact that it was not official Russian policy, support for the Abkhaz by a vocal minority in the press and the rumours of Russian involvement on behalf of Abkhazia intimidated the Georgian government and encouraged the Abkhaz separatists. This was demonstrated in Shevardnadze's response to the Chairman of the Supreme Soviet Khasbulatov in a phone call on 15 June 1992 in which Khasbulatov apparently threatened to involve Russia in any developing conflict. Shevardnadze denounced the warnings as "political and ideological preparatory fire for the infringement of our republic's territorial integrity and sovereignty" and said that this intimidation reduced "the room of our peacemaking efforts... while excessively expanding the bounds of distrust, aggressiveness, and extremism".⁶² Although likely overstated for domestic political consumption, these comments capture the outrage expressed in the early stages of the conflict by the Georgian government towards the rhetorical interference of Russian politicians in Georgia's internal affairs.

When fighting did break out in Georgia on 14 August 1992, it provided, as in the case of the Moldova-Transdnistria conflict, yet another specific issue with which the government could be attacked. Almost immediately, the nationalist Russian Unity bloc called for a parliamentary session to examine the crisis. Baburin, then leader of the Russian All-People's Union, led a group of deputies on a (supposedly biased in favour of the separatists) fact-finding mission to Abkhazia.⁶³ In an interview with the author, Baburin said that Yeltsin had provoked the conflict in order to destabilize the region so that he could declare a state of emergency and consolidate his political control.⁶⁴ As for Baburin's foreign policy views, he

⁶¹ Author's Interview with Baburin, May 21, 1999.

⁶² Shevardnadze Interviewed by Leon Onikova, *Izvestiya*, June 22, 1992, p.1.

⁶³ The Russian Unity bloc was headed by Victor Aksyuchits (former head of the Russian Christian Democratic Movement and later a key player on the central council of former Vice-President Aleksandr Rutskoi's Derzhava movement) and Mikhail Astaev (who later formed the All-Russian National Right Center). Sergei Baburin was then the founder of the Rossiya deputies' group and leader of the Russian All-People's Union. See, *Itar-Tass*, August 27, 1992.

⁶⁴ Author's Interview with Baburin May 21, 1999. The corridor leading to Baburin's Duma office was covered with pictures of Baburin, standing among with soldiers among ruins in Abkhazia and the former Yugoslavia,

said that he believed at the time that Abkhazia should be part of Russia, and still believed that had Russia used force, the conflict would have been stopped early on and Abkhazia would likely have re-united with Russia.⁶⁵ A second delegation including Sergei Filatov, First Deputy Chairman of the Russian Supreme Soviet, and Yevgeny Kozhokin, Deputy Chairman of the Security Affairs Committee of the Russian Supreme Soviet, was sent to Georgia. This time, in order to avoid any controversy, it visited both parties to the conflict. However the delegation also ended up siding with the Abkhaz and was therefore criticized by the Georgians.⁶⁶

By now, political parties across the spectrum – and not only the fundamentalist nationalists – criticized the government for not having “learned a lesson” from the Moldova crisis and for failing once more to react quickly to a mounting crisis. On 24 August 1992, ten days after Georgian troops entered Abkhazia, the Russian political coalition, Civic Union, denounced the Russian government for its “unjustified passivity” and demanded they protect the Abkhazians.⁶⁷ Other “centrists”, for example Ramazan Abdulatipov, Chairman of the Supreme Soviet Council of Nationalities and *de facto* leader of the centrist faction Sovereignty and Equality, which was formed to advocate sovereignty for autonomous territories, expressed sympathy with the Abkhaz but were not as provocative nor as predisposed to using force as the more vocal extremists.⁶⁸ Instead, they called for more fact-finding missions to be sent to Abkhazia and vocally supported the Abkhaz cause in speeches and articles.

Just over a month after the fighting had begun on 25 September 1992, as the pro-Abkhazia stance became more popular among the political elite, and before any official policy had been outlined, the Russian Supreme Soviet put forth its own assessment and agenda. Its resolution “On the Situation in the North Caucasus and Events in Abkhazia”

underlined with statements denouncing Georgian and NATO “enemies”.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ Evgeny Kozhokin is currently director of the Russian Institute of Strategic Studies, Moscow. See Evgeny Kozhokin “Georgia-Abkhazia”, in Jeremy Azrael and Emil Payin (eds.), US and Russian Policymaking with Respect to the Use of Force (Santa Monica: RAND, 1996). On line at www.rand.org

⁶⁷ Itar-Tass, August 26, 1992.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

denounced Georgia's actions, declared Georgian troops to be responsible for the bloodshed, and stated that Russian military equipment should no longer be given to the Georgians. The Russian parliament also criticized both the Russian government and the West for their pro-Georgia position towards the conflict.⁶⁹

As for Russia's military leadership, it tended to view the Caucasus (the Transcaucasian states and Russia's northern Caucasus) as a single strategic region.⁷⁰ The Abkhaz bases along the Black Sea were believed to be essential for Russian control of a region which could provide a buffer for Russia against Turkey and Iran. Thus members of the Russian armed forces urged the Russian government to defend the Abkhaz.⁷¹ Although elements in the military may have been naturally inclined towards using force, that possibility was limited by serious financial constraints which prevented any future large-scale intervention.

ii) The Official Position

In the spring of 1992, while lacking a policy towards Georgia as a whole, Russia's policy at first focused upon the Georgian republic of South Ossetia. Very briefly, when South Ossetia (across the border from Russia's republic of North Ossetia) began to agitate for independence, Russia helped to bring order to the region and an agreement for a cease-fire was reached on 24 June 1992 in which all armed units would be withdrawn from the conflict zone. A tripartite Russian-Georgian-Ossetian peacekeeping force was deployed to the region that July. Only one battalion (800 paratroopers) was deployed at approximately the same time that Russian troops were sent to Transdniestria. The cease-fire has been maintained although to date no political resolution has been reached. The South Ossetians have been in *de facto* control of the area since 1992 and isolated acts of political terrorism have continued to spark tension. Although Khasbulatov accused Georgia of genocide against the Ossetians, and advocated the admission of South Ossetia into Russia, officially their pleas for

⁶⁹ The resolution "On the Situation in the North Caucasus and Events in Abkhazia" is discussed in Rossiyskaya Gazeta, September 30, 1992, pp.1-2.

⁷⁰ Author's Interview, Russian Col. Rimarchuk, June 2, 1999.

⁷¹ Ibid.

incorporation into the Russian Federation were rejected.⁷² The conflict in South Ossetia had repercussions in Russia's republic of North Ossetia which also began to agitate for independence. This process highlighted the fact that the Caucasus was an interconnected region and that it was in Russia's interest to help maintain peace there.

On 28 August 1992 Yeltsin issued an "Appeal from the Russian President to the Leadership of Georgia and Abkhazia" in which he proclaimed Russian support for Georgian territorial integrity and promised to prevent the Georgian army from entering Abkhazia.⁷³ Thus, officially, peaceful involvement was proposed to resolve the conflict. As it was stated at the time in the liberal newspaper, Nezavisimaya Gazeta, "If we ourselves set such an example we will have the moral right to exert pressure (but not through violence or the threat of violence) on behalf of Russian minorities and peoples like the Gagauz, the Ossetians and the Abkhaz".⁷⁴ Deputy Prime Minister Georgy Khizha called the North Caucasus an area of "special interest" for Russia. He said that Russia should be especially concerned about Abkhazia because of the looting, crime and economic hardship which also affected ethnic Russians living there.⁷⁵ The division in foreign policy thinking about how to respond to the Moldova-Transdnistria conflict which existed between the Russian MoD and the MFA was reflected in the policy rhetoric towards Georgia. The Russian MoD was once more in favour of using military force to solve the conflict. The MFA, meanwhile espoused a comparatively "soft-line" approach by which it supported negotiations as the best means to resolve the conflict.⁷⁶

iii) The Policy

Soon after fighting began on 14 August, Russia, as in the case of Moldova-Transdnistria conflict, played an important mediatory role between the two parties. Yeltsin himself (rather than the MFA which was already being sidelined for its lack of action in

⁷² Itar-Tass, May 30, 1992. Ivan Yelistratov and Sergei Chugaev, Izvestiya, June 15, 1992, p.1.

⁷³ The appeal was printed in Krasnaya Zvezda, August 28, 1992, p.1.

⁷⁴ Dmitry Furman, Nezavisimaya Gazeta July 3, 1992, p.3.

⁷⁵ Georgy Khizha quoted in Rossiyskiye Vesti, September 3, 1992, p.2.

⁷⁶ Author's Interview with Dr. Andrei Zagorsky (Vice Rector, MGIMO – Moscow State Institute for International Relations) May 28, 1999.

Moldova) called for the resolution of the conflict and was from the beginning active in foreign policy-making.⁷⁷ Yeltsin did follow a clear, if cautious, policy of conflict negotiation. Negotiations began in Moscow between Georgia and Abkhazia. They resulted in the first of many temporary cease-fire agreements on 3 September 1992. Under pressure from Russia, Ardzinba signed a (short-lived) document allowing the presence of Georgian troops on Abkhazian territory and calling for the involvement of UN observers.⁷⁸ Thus, relatively immediate action was taken to localize the conflict, to prevent potential spill over in the region and to discourage the involvement of other powers. Unfortunately, the Abkhaz resumed fighting in October and the agreement was abandoned.⁷⁹

At this time, no official action was taken to support a particular side in the conflict and Yeltsin denied responsibility for his army's supposed actions in favour of the Abkhaz. However, an article in Pravda claimed that the then secretary of the Russian Security Council, Yuri Skokov, persuaded Yeltsin in the first few weeks of the war to sanction Russian support for the Abkhaz. Allegedly, Skokov argued that if Russia did not do so, Russian military influence in Georgia would be replaced by that of NATO.⁸⁰ This suggests that Russia's unofficial support of the Abkhaz was understood, at least by some, as a means to retain Russia's influence in the region. Another of Russia's chief officials stated concerns was the geographical proximity of Abkhazia to the North Caucasian republics and the danger it would pose to the unity of the Russian Federation if they were dragged into the conflict. Yeltsin cautioned the peoples of the North Caucasus to refrain from destabilizing the situation, but at this time no action (for example, closing the border – which would not have been easy and would have required financial expenditure, but was later attempted) was taken to prevent them from helping the Abkhaz.⁸¹

⁷⁷ Valery Vyzhotovich, Izvestiya, September 4, 1992, p.2.

⁷⁸ Valery Vyzhotovich, Izvestiya, September 4, 1992, p.2.

⁷⁹ Georgian analyst Khostaria-Brosset argues that Abkhazia ignored the September 3 peace agreement because its leadership believed many Russian politicians as well as the Confederation of Mountain Peoples would support the Abkhaz cause. He controversially describes the entire war as mainly the consequence of the Abkhaz acting in a senseless and irresponsible fashion. Khostaria Brosset, Inter-Ethnic Relations in Georgia: Causes of Conflicts and Ways of their Settlement (Tbilisi: Metsniereba, 1993). (in Russian)

⁸⁰ Pravda, August 17, 1992, p.3.

⁸¹ Yeltsin's address to the peoples of the North Caucasus was printed in Krasnaya Zvezda, August 28, 1992,

When war broke out, the immediate Russian interest concerned the fate of the ethnic Russian minority and Russian citizens on holiday in Abkhazia. On 15 August 1992, the day after the Georgian army entered the territory of Abkhazia, a Russian airborne regiment was flown to Abkhazia to evacuate ethnic Russians and protect strategic military installations.⁸² This regiment and other Russian troops which remained on Abkhazian territory were soon caught between Georgian and Abkhazian forces and subjected to attacks (mainly to steal weapons) by both sides – each of which wanted to drag Russia into the conflict. This was broadly the same situation as in Moldova. Reports that Russian troops were forced to retaliate in self-defence ring true. In this context, the Transcaucasian Military District Commander General Valery Patrikeev, spoke of the necessity to return fire long before the official order came from the Chief of the General Staff of the Russia Armed Forces, Viktor Dubynin.⁸³

Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev admitted in 1993 that the Russian troops in Georgia actually assisted the Abkhaz armed forces throughout 1992 and 1993.⁸⁴ However, this support seems to have come voluntarily and for cash from a dispirited and poorly paid Russian military. It is also extremely difficult to determine whether the support was from regular Russian units or from various groups of volunteers from Russia. The fact that the Abkhazians were more dependant than the Georgians on buying weapons from Russia helps to explain why some Russian troops favoured them over the Georgians. The money used by the Abkhazians to buy weapons seems to have come from Abkhazia's large diaspora in Turkey, Syria, Jordan, Europe and the USA, and this reinforces the idea that "Russian action" was largely a matter of individuals seeking profit.⁸⁵ There is little evidence that the Russian government was following a pro-Abkhazia policy and even less that this was the result of an

p.1.

⁸² Natalya Groznaya, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, August 21, 1992, p.3.

⁸³ Several articles in *Krasnaya Zvezda* state that the Russian military acted in self-protection and in support of the Abkhaz from the beginning of the conflict. See September 15, 1992, p.1; October 7, 1992, p.1.

⁸⁴ See interview with Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev conducted by Igor Rotar, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, November 24, 1993, pp.1, 3.

⁸⁵ Dodge Billingsley, "Georgian-Abkhazian Security Issues", *Jane's Intelligence Review*, vol.8, no.2 (February 1996) pp.65-68, p.67. Billingsley's detailed examination of Russian involvement in terms of weapons transfers, air and naval assets and regular units supports this argument.

explicit directive from Yeltsin. In fact, much more than in the case of Moldova, Russian units on the ground were probably supplying weapons to both sides.⁸⁶

However, while Russian troops were returning fire in self-protection, volunteers from Russia's North Caucasus were supporting the Abkhazians. As in Transdnistria, "Russian military actions" on behalf of the separatist side were taken by soldiers of fortune from Russia.⁸⁷ In the case of Abkhazia, Russian citizens from the so-called "Confederation of the Peoples of the Caucasus" and the "Grand United Circle of Cossacks" fought on the separatist side and patrolled the Russia-Georgia border.⁸⁸ These were Russian citizens but most of them had little or no allegiance to Russia.⁸⁹

As early as 1989, the smaller nations of the North Caucasus had debated the idea of recreating the large "North Caucasian Mountain Republic" (which had existed from 1921-1924) including the Abkhaz Republic, Checheno-Ingushetia, North Ossetia, Kabardino-Balkar, and Karachai-Cherkess. In August 1989 steps were taken towards this goal with the formation of an Assembly composed of representatives from the different republics. Under the leadership of Yuri Shanibov, it provided verbal support to the Abkhaz who were already threatened by Georgian nationalism. The Assembly was transformed into the Confederation in November 1991 and provided psychological and material support to the Abkhazians – thanks largely to Chechen and Circassian volunteers. Eventually, Shanibov declared his ultimate goal to re-establish North Caucasian independence. However, with the Chechen war the Confederation's activities decreased practically to the point of non-existence. The subsequent leader, the Chechen Yusup Soslambekov, told the author that the Assembly had failed to create a real

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ As seen in Chapter Five, several thousand Russian Cossacks and other soldiers of fortune from Russia fought on the Transdnistrian side.

⁸⁸ Author's Interview with Yusup Soslambekov (President of the North Caucasus Assembly) June 8, 1996. Also see, Nezavisimaya Gazeta, October 12, 1993, p.2.

⁸⁹ Author's Interview with Yusup Soslambekov June 8, 1996. Soslambekov described the common "mountain" and "militant" cultures of the Caucasians and said that there was no need to resurrect a national identity among these peoples, as it was already active. He noted that the "fighting history" of the Caucasians had "begun with uprisings in 1864 against the Slavic colonizers" and that the struggle would continue. He described the area as a "volcano ready to erupt". He said that the Assembly gave military aid to the Abkhazians but that Chechnya had received little more than humanitarian aid from any outside sources. (Note: Despite their united front, there were many controversies among the original members of the "Confederation" which partly explains their inconsistencies in terms of providing aid to Abkhazia).

republic partly because the Abkhaz and fellow North Caucasians had not supported Chechnya in its war against Russia.⁹⁰

There were also close links between the Abkhazian and Transdniestrian separatists. According to Helsinki Watch, Transdniestrian officials paid many Russian mercenaries to fight in Abkhazia.⁹¹ Transdniestria supported Abkhaz independence as a gesture of support for fellow separatists and fellow supporters of the re-creation of the territory of the Soviet Union (at least in the early 1990s). The same small Transdniestrian force that had been involved in the attempted coup in Moscow in October 1993 was apparently also involved in Abkhazia.⁹² Yusup Soslambekov told the author that approximately 90 percent of the dead and wounded in Abkhazia were not Abkhaz but Russians from the North Caucasus.⁹³ However, the early involvement of volunteers from the North Caucasus was independent of Russian policy and was unwelcome by the Russian government. The Russian MoD denied having any knowledge about them and took no responsibility. Defence Minister Pavel Grachev officially supported Yeltsin's line of non-interference and warned only that Russian troops would retaliate against any attacks or attempts to appropriate equipment.⁹⁴ In an example of their displeasure about both the attempt to create the Confederation of the Peoples of the Caucasus and its involvement in Abkhazia, Russian authorities arrested its leader, Musa Shanibov, who later escaped and went to fight in Abkhazia.⁹⁵

Of course, as in the case of Moldova, early action taken on the ground narrowed the policy options available to the Russian government and, in this case, the early unofficial military assistance for the Abkhazians initially steered policy towards supporting the Abkhaz.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ See *The Economist*, November 13, 1993, pp.51-2. Shamil Basayev, a leader of the Chechen struggle against Moscow, fought as a hired mercenary in Abkhazia in 1992-3.

⁹² See Chapter Five.

⁹³ *Author's Interview* with Yusup Soslambekov, June 8, 1996.

⁹⁴ Pavel Felgenhauer, *Segodnya*, September 21, 1993, p.1.

⁹⁵ According to Alexei Zverev, snipers from the Baltic states and members of an extreme nationalist Ukrainian organization (UNA-UNSO) were mercenaries and volunteers on the Georgian side supposedly sent to struggle against Russian imperialism. *Rossiyskiye Vesti*, August 27, 1992, p.1.

c) Stage Three: Achieving Consensus (October 1992- June 1996)

i) The Debates

As in the case of Moldova-Transdnistria, a specific event in late 1992 helped bring the Georgia-Abkhazia conflict to the Russian public's attention and to focus the debate over the specifics of what Russia's role in the conflict should be. On 14 December 1992, a Russian helicopter was shot down while evacuating ethnic Russians from the conflict area. This was one of several attacks upon Russian troops which were repeatedly discussed in the Russian media. The event initiated a debate over the precise path that Russian policy should take in order to maintain influence in Georgia.⁹⁶

Of course, those Russian newspapers which typically expressed fundamentalist nationalist ideas continued to strongly attack government policy. Den', for example, was equally as supportive of the possibility of a merger of Abkhazia with Russia as it had been with Transdnistria.⁹⁷ The main military paper, Krasnaya Zvezda, denounced Russia's sacrifice in becoming involved in the conflict, but at the same time applauded actions taken to protect Russian interests and criticized the West for its lack of action. It wrote:

What humiliation and outrages Russian servicemen and members of their families suffered and indeed continue to suffer in Georgia! One terrible figure in the past two years, seventy Russian servicemen – think on it, reader – have been killed in Georgia!... And Russia, vilified, slandered, unlike Georgia's beloved West, which fobbed Georgia off with supplies of humanitarian aid... took on the entire burden of peacemaking in the region.⁹⁸

The right-wing movement National Republican Party of Russia, led by Nikolai Lysenko, and the National Salvation Front were the most enthusiastically in favour of Russia defence of the Abkhaz cause. Using highly inflammatory rhetoric, and exaggerating the common thinking between its members and the Abkhazian people, the National Salvation Front attacked the

⁹⁶ Around this time there was a general increase in the number of attacks on Russian troops and installations. Victor Litovkin, Izvestiya, December 15, 1992, p.1.

⁹⁷ See for example, Z. Achba, Den', no. 48 (November 29-December 5, 1992), p.2.

⁹⁸ Petr Karapetyan, Krasnaya Zvezda, October 22, 1993, p.1.

official policy towards the conflict.⁹⁹ Other politicians, such as Vice President Aleksandr Rutskoi (who played a significant role in the debate and policy making towards Transdniestria) used the same arguments that they had offered in the case of Transdniestria – that Russia should defend the Abkhaz in order to protect the “Russian-speakers”.¹⁰⁰ This argument was made despite the fact that in the case of Abkhazia “Russia’s brothers” were significantly fewer in number than in Transdniestria.

Georgian President Shevardnadze himself highlighted the significance of the rifts among the Russian political elite and once again blamed the deterioration of Russian-Georgian relations directly on Russia's "reactionary forces". Controversially, he accused "nationalist" forces of providing arms, training and finances to the Abkhazians. Shevardnadze complained:

On the one hand is the side headed by Yeltsin, and on the other – I would even use rather crude words – there are the bastards who did everything they could to raise Abkhaz separatism to the level of fascism... We have been the victims of these games, of this confrontation within Russia... Unfortunately, I could not do anything to prevent this. There were huge forces, which Georgia had no chance of countering. This is why Sukhumi and Abkhazia have been lost and why there is a civil war in Georgia... The events in Abkhazia and Georgia are typical examples of what a totalitarian regime and supporters of totalitarian regimes can do.¹⁰¹

These comments came from a man with an interest in stressing Russian wickedness and they greatly exaggerated the situation. However they were also made in reaction to a vocal minority within Russia that was whipping up emotions on the side of the Abkhazians.

In contrast to the fundamentalist nationalists, pragmatic nationalists credited themselves, and not the government, for their “positive and practical impact” on the making of Russia's

⁹⁹ *Den'*, no.2 (January 7-13, 1993), p.2.

¹⁰⁰ Alexander Rutskoi interviewed on *Radio Rossiya*, June 21, 1993; and *Author's Interview* with Mikhail Astafiyev (Rutskoi's deputy in charge of international relations and foreign policy, member of the “All Russia's Right Center”, part of the Motherland Movement) June 25, 1995. For the evolution of Rutskoi's views about Transdniestria, see Chapter Five.

¹⁰¹ "Shevardnadze Interview by Daniel Lecomte, *ARTE Television Network* (Strasbourg), October 8, 1993. Also see Shevardnadze's statement in *Segodnya*, September 28, 1993, p.1.

foreign policy and congratulated themselves for providing the solution to the Abkhaz conflict.

To quote Konstantin Borovoi:

Georgia's request for the presence of Blue Helmets got it nowhere. The situation went on deteriorating and was settled thanks to Russia's efforts... difficult problems will not be solved by one president calling up another but by using various channels... political parties, and the initiative of politicians.¹⁰²

In other words, individual politicians (not extremists) and parliament did influence the making of policy towards the Georgia-Abkhazia conflict, and Russia pursued the same policy that any other state would have done in such a situation: it became actively involved in the pursuit of peace and the protection of Russian interests. As Konstantin Borovoi further explained: “The United States, for one, never hesitates to move its fleet to forward positions, never shrinks from announcing bomb raids. That’s an active foreign policy that may even be called aggressive. Why should we refuse to do that?”¹⁰³

Throughout this period, members across the political spectrum in the lower house of the Russian parliament continued to be sympathetic to the Abkhazian cause. Parliament considered requests from the Abkhaz Supreme Council to allow Abkhazia to merge with Russia, and even demanded that Georgia consider the Abkhaz request to unify with Russia.¹⁰⁴ The Duma protested against the government’s signing of the February 1994 Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation. On 3 February 1994, all factions in the Duma, including Russia’s Choice, signed a statement that objected to the treaty for being too supportive of Georgia. Specifically, the statement denounced Georgian aggression against Abkhazia and criticized Georgia’s unilateral infringement of earlier agreements. It warned that the treaty would provoke negative reactions in the North Caucasus, and argued that Russia should not assist in forming Georgia’s armed forces.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² Borovoi, speaking at a forum on Russian foreign policy transcribed in “Russia’s foreign policy should be multidimensional”, *International Affairs*, Moscow, vol.40, no.2 (March 21, 1994), pp.79-92, p.85.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p.82-3.

¹⁰⁴ Leonid Mlechin, *Izvestiya*, December 28, 1993, p.3.

¹⁰⁵ M. Razorenova, “Gruziya v fevrale 1993”, *Politicheskii monitoring*, no.2 (Moscow: IGPI, 1994), p.2.

After Yeltsin ignored parliament and signed the treaty, a group of Russian parliamentary deputies led by Konstantin Zatulin, the Chair of the Duma's Committee on CIS Affairs and Relations with Compatriots, cautioned Yeltsin that the treaty was premature and could destabilize the entire Transcaucasus. Zatulin, who was a key participant in the Duma debates about Transdnistria, argued that the treaty was "an attempt to unilaterally arm the Georgian government".¹⁰⁶ He believed that there was no reason to trust that the Georgian side would hand over its weapons or fulfil its treaty obligations. Instead, Zatulin emphasized the need to first define the political status of Abkhazia and to prevent volunteers from the North Caucasus from crossing into Abkhazia. On 2 June 1994, the Federal Council rejected a presidential request to deploy Russian troops to Abkhazia as part of a joint CIS peacekeeping force because it did not want troops to be sent outside a legal framework. However, as is shown below, Yeltsin ignored the parliament which was forced *post facto* to back the proposals. Thus, although parliament may often have been unsuccessful in countering executive-led policies, it did set a new cautionary tone.

Despite such setbacks, parliament continued to criticize government policy, support the Abkhaz and search for a final solution to the conflict. In July 1994, in an effort to strengthen Russian ties with Abkhazia, Zatulin led a fact-finding mission to the separatist region.¹⁰⁷ From 1994 to 1996, the Russian Duma continued to host delegations from Abkhazia, most of which had been invited to participate in the sessions of the Congress of the Compatriots in Moscow. During these sessions, the Abkhazians followed the lead of the separatist Transdnistrians and called for referendums to reunite their territories with Russia.¹⁰⁸ However, it is significant that troop withdrawal from Georgia was not considered seriously during these years.

In January 1996, the Russian parliament challenged the CIS decision to impose sanctions on Abkhazia.¹⁰⁹ In April 1996, a Duma delegation visited Abkhazia following several outbreaks of violence which were assumed at the time to be tied to the upcoming Russian presidential elections in June with both sides attempting to gain the attention or

¹⁰⁶ See his committee's statement in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, February 5, 1994, p.3.

¹⁰⁷ *Russian Information Agency*, July 1, 1994.

¹⁰⁸ Georgy Kobaladze and Aleksandr Koretsky, *Kommersant Daily*, September 16, 1994, pp.1, 3.

¹⁰⁹ *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, SU/D2519/B, January 26, 1996.

sympathy of the Russian public and the presidential candidates. The Communists continued to take a pro-Abkhaz line and expressed support for what they termed their “kith and kin” in Abkhazia (although they condemned the involvement of the Chechen rebels).¹¹⁰ The Communists considered the Abkhaz their “brothers” primarily because of their nostalgia for the Soviet Union. As mentioned above, the Abkhaz had continually expressed their wish to re-unite with Russia and re-create the Soviet Union, and Abkhazia was home to a Russian diaspora (whose significance was exaggerated in order to criticize government policy). However, at this stage the Duma as a whole believed that the Abkhaz problem could be solved within the boundaries of Georgia. Duma Speaker Gennady Seleznyov stated that Russia should continue to be involved in the negotiations and to support the territorial integrity of Georgia.¹¹¹

ii) The Shift in Official Position

After his initial involvement, Yeltsin retreated somewhat from policy-making towards the Georgia-Abkhazia conflict. A government decree in August 1993 meant that the MoD monitored the ceasefire while the MFA coordinated the negotiations with the UN.¹¹² Neither a weakened Georgia nor an independent Abkhazia were seen to be in Russia’s interest. By October 1993, the MFA and MoD also agreed that Russia should use its military influence (and take advantage of events in the conflict) in order to persuade Georgia to join the CIS and its collective security system and to retain Russian military troops and bases in the area. By late 1993, when the Georgian government became more accommodative due to its weak position from the internal conflicts and its economic crisis, Russian policy began to support Tbilisi and to isolate Abkhazia.

¹¹⁰ Appeal by the Creative Intelligentsia of Russian in Support of Zyuganov as a Candidate for President of the Russian Federation, *Pravda Rossii*, March 26, 1996, p.1. “We, the heirs and continuers of the great Russian culture, cannot look on indifferently as our Russia perishes and our people die out. Many of us have lost near and dear ones – some in the Transdnistria war....”

¹¹¹ Pavel Kuznetsov, *Itar-Tass*, February 16, 1996.

¹¹² “Decree of August 5, 1993”, *Federatsiya* (August 14, 1993).

In 1994, Kozyrev defended Russia's role in the conflict and criticized the West and specifically the United Nations for its failure to send peacekeeping troops to Abkhazia.¹¹³ Most significantly, and directly counter to his earlier liberal westernizing stance, Kozyrev openly and frequently advocated the use of military means to protect Russia's strategic interests there.¹¹⁴ Kozyrev repeatedly defended the idea of sending Russian troops to Georgia on peacekeeping missions: "...if we refuse to live up to our geopolitical role, someone else will try and clean up the mess in our home".¹¹⁵

The Russian MoD now openly advocated the defence of Russia's security interests in Georgia. In February 1993, Minister of Defence Grachev stated that Russia had strategic interests on the Black Sea Coast and that every measure would be taken to ensure that Russian troops remain there.¹¹⁶ He also proposed that Georgia retain its territorial integrity, but guarantee effective autonomy to the Abkhazian, South Ossetia and Adzharian regions. Then, in mid-September 1993, Grachev openly linked the removal of the Russian troops in Georgia with peace in Abkhazia, but refused to grant Georgia military aid until it joined the CIS.¹¹⁷ This policy was similar to the one which linked support for the Moldovan government against the Transnistrian separatists to Moldova's entrance into the CIS. It is fairly clear that once again the MoD was attempting to take advantage of a separatist conflict to secure Russia's interests.

While earlier Russian forces had acted independently, the MoD now had regained strong operational control over Russian military action and peacekeeping operations in Abkhazia.¹¹⁸

¹¹³ In 1994, Mr. Vorontsov, Russian ambassador to the UN, argued that Russia and the other CIS states were forced into a peacekeeping role because of the lack of action on the part of the UN. See "Provisional verbatim record of the 3398th meeting of the Security Council", UN Document, S/PV.3398 1994, p.3. Also, "Press Briefing by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs", Official Kremlin International News Broadcast, April 19, 1994 (Lexis-Nexis).

¹¹⁴ "Andrei Kozyrev on Russia's Peacekeeping Role in the CIS", Nezavisimaya Gazeta, September 22, 1993, p.1.

¹¹⁵ Leonid Bershidsky, "Georgia Peaceforce Riles Duma", The Moscow Times, June 18, 1994, p.3.

¹¹⁶ BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, February 22, 1993, SU/1622.

¹¹⁷ Fiona Hill and Pamela Jewett, "Back in the USSR": Russia's Intervention in the Internal Affairs of the Former Soviet Republics and the Implications for the United States Policy Towards Russia (Harvard: Harvard Strengthening Democratic Institutions Project, January 1994).

¹¹⁸ Pavel Baev argues that Russia's military presence in Georgia was negotiated primarily through military channels and that it was Deputy Defence Minister Georgy Kondratyev who finalized the details of the June 1994 launch of Russia's peacekeeping operation in Abkhazia. Pavel Baev, Russia's Policies in the Caucasus (London: RIIA, Former Soviet South Project, 1997), p.27.

However, minor incidents of inconsistent policy-making still occurred. For example, on 13 September 1994, Russian Deputy Defence and General Georgy Kondratyev, on his own initiative, announced to a gathering of Georgian refugees that Russian peacekeepers would support their mass repatriation to Gali the very next day. Yeltsin himself then had to counter this announcement and managed to delay the return of the refugees.¹¹⁹ This is a minor example of the MoD attempting to independently manoeuvre Russian policy. It is also an example of the difficulties in creating consistent policies when there was an urgent need to act in a complex conflict which involved many different actors and institutions.

While it was focusing on creating a settlement to the conflict, the Russian government was influenced by a growing perception among the MFA and parliament that the Transcaucasus was an area of great economic importance to Russia.¹²⁰ Georgia, in particular, held a promising position at the Eurasian transit crossroads of transportation, oil and gas pipelines, and this became more significant as normalization of economic ties and the unblocking of transportation and other lines of communication became a Russian priority. It was also generally considered that Russia could use Georgia to exert influence over the entire Transcaucasus. For example, through Georgia's port of Batumi, oil and other goods could reach Armenia and via Armenia pressure could be kept on Azerbaijan. And, as a director within the Russian MFA responsible for the CIS States admitted in 1997, "The oil factor, the problem of security of states, and the settlement of conflicts prove to be interconnected in one way or another"... [Russia] "... cannot remain indifferent there because at stake are our vital, long-term interests rather than sky-high ambitions, or a desire to follow an imperial policy".¹²¹

Finally, at the All-Caucasian summit of 3 June 1996, Vladimir Priakhin, from the MFA, outlined a "new Russian policy on the Caucasus".¹²² It was agreed that from that point

¹¹⁹ See Nodar Broladze, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, September 16, 1994, p.1 and Nodar Broladze, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, September 17, 1994, p.1.

¹²⁰ A. Zaitsev, Director of the 4th Department of the CIS Countries of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia, in "Russia and Transcaucasia", *International Affairs*, Moscow: vol. 43, no.5 (1997), pp.180-187, p182.

¹²¹ Russian trade with Georgia in 1996 was 4.3% of its 1991 level. The quote is from A. Zaitsev, Director of the 4th Department of the CIS Countries of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia, in "Russia and Transcaucasia", *International Affairs*, Moscow, vol. 43, no.5 (1997), pp.180-187, pp. 184-5.

¹²² The summit included the presidents of Russia, Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia, as well as the participation of leaders from the North Caucasian republics and regions.

on Russia would follow a policy which regarded the Caucasus as a single political, geographical and economic region. This would allow “a single composite strategy of regulating the conflicts in the region”, with the participation of Middle Eastern neighbours such as Turkey and Iran, and in which Russia would play a leading role. According to Priakhin, within the new framework “The component of force remains unconditionally necessary for supporting the balance of interests in the region”.¹²³ He concluded that “all the peoples of the Caucasus and Transcaucasus are interested in consolidating Russia and the Russian presence there”.¹²⁴

iii) The Policy

Russian policy and military action at this time was in line with the dominant pragmatic nationalist foreign policy ideas (both within the debate and official government position) that Russia should retain influence, end the war, continue military ties and protect its interests. In the short term, Russian policy successfully followed this “road map”: the fighting subsided and, only six months after Grachev’s statements were made, a strong Russian-Georgian military relationship had been forged. The first round of negotiations to resolve the conflict began under the auspices of the United Nations (and with the participation of the CSCE) in May 1993, and resulted in a temporary cease-fire. Russia negotiated a tentative peace in Abkhazia, and achieved two other important (at least in the short term) gains: close military relations with Georgia and Georgia’s entry into the CIS. Georgia was encouraged to abandon the use of military force against Abkhazia and the Abkhaz to allow a return of Georgian refugees. Georgia, however, continued to refuse to discuss the political status of Abkhazia.

The second round of negotiations, the so-called "Sochi Talks", led to the an Agreement signed on 27 July 1993 which included a cease-fire, the creation of a trilateral Georgia-Abkhazian-Russian control group to monitor and enforce the cease-fire, and the stationing of

¹²³ Vladimir Priakhin, “Russia: Peace Efforts in the Transcaucasus”, *International Affairs*, Moscow, vol.42, no.4 (1996), pp.64-70, p.65. Priakhin was the deputy director of the Fourth Department of the CIS Countries of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

¹²⁴ *Ibid*, p.68.

international observers and peacekeeping forces to separate the two sides.¹²⁵ It also promised the withdrawal of the Georgian army from Abkhazia, the demilitarisation of Georgia and Abkhazia and the creation of a “legal government” in Abkhazia.

Within a matter of weeks, however, on 15 September 1993, Abkhazian forces took advantage of the brewing civil war and launched a massive and successful offensive to capture Sukhumi and drive the Georgians out of Abkhazia. There is considerable evidence that the Abkhazian offensive in July 1993 had the support of Russian troops which also provided arms to the supporters of Georgia's ousted President Gamsakhurdia.¹²⁶ However, it is difficult to know whether this was part of official Russian policy or was simply profiteering on the occasion. Certainly, it seems that (as in the other CIS states) the incentive to earn money through the sale of weapons was significant. Officially the Russian government responded by condemning the Abkhaz' actions and then refusing to send in troops to disengage the parties.

Georgian President Shevardnadze was forced to ask for Russia's help due to the deteriorating military situation on the ground. It was at this point that Russia began to officially support Shevardnadze's side. Then Russian troops switched to officially supporting the Georgian government's attempts to end the offensive. They went to the rescue of the Georgian government and by mid-November with their help the Georgian government troops had regained control. The result was that Georgia, which had been unable to resolve the separatist conflict by its own military means, was forced to enter into a relatively close partnership with Russia which, in the short run, imposed specific limits upon its sovereignty.

¹²⁵ The UN at this point refused to intervene.

¹²⁶ There are indications and evidence of such collusion, especially during the Abkhaz offensives in the autumn of 1993. "It is highly unlikely that ethnic Abkhaz, who number some 100,000 locally, and who have no formal army or weapons, could maintain sustained military superiority over the Georgian forces, drawn from an ethnic population of about 4 million, without military assistance from Russia". Human Rights Watch also argues that owing to their location, Russian troops could not have been oblivious to the extensive movement of troops and artillery in the days leading to the offensive. George Hewitt calls this analysis simplistic and stresses that the Russian support was not as great as normally contended, that any which existed did so unofficially and that the Abkhazian forces were stronger than they have been given credit for. See Erika Dailey, "Human rights and the Russian Armed Forces in the Near Abroad", *Helsinki Monitor*, vol.5, no.2 (1994), p.14; and George Hewitt, "Abkhazia, Georgia and the Circassians (NW Causasus)", *Central Asia Survey*, vol. 18, no.4 (1999), pp.463-499, footnote 3, p.498.

On 3 February 1994, Georgia signed a Treaty of Friendship, Neighbourliness and Cooperation with Russia, as well as 24 other agreements which included provisions for the right to establish five Russian military bases, the stationing of Russian border guards along Georgia's borders with Turkey and trade and cultural cooperation agreements.¹²⁷ All of these documents reiterated Russia's recognition of Georgian territorial integrity. On 4 April 1994 in Moscow, the parties to the conflict signed the "Declaration on Measures for a Political Settlement of the Georgian-Abkhaz Conflict".¹²⁸ This declaration drew the lines for a future common state which would include Georgia and Abkhazia and established a 3-kilometer demilitarised zone between Georgia and the Abkhazian forces. Shevardnadze, who had originally wanted the peacekeepers deployed on the border between Russia and Abkhazia as opposed to the internal border between Georgia and Abkhazia, acquiesced. On 10 May, Shevardnadze and Ardzinba formally requested the CIS to deploy peacekeeping troops on those terms.¹²⁹

In return for Georgia's concessions, Russia began to help it create a new army, transferred military equipment to the Georgian side, and reinforced links between the two states' security establishments. Russia also increased political and economic pressure upon Abkhazia, allowed the return of Georgian refugees and urged Abkhazia to agree to some type of federation with Georgia. Unsurprisingly, these pressures led to a gradual worsening of relations between Russia and Abkhazia.

However, in September 1994, Russia's special envoy to Georgia, Feliks Kovalev, admitted that Russia had "no intention of considering ratification" of the Russia-Georgia friendship treaty of 1994 – i.e. of withdrawing its military until the final resolution of the Abkhaz conflict. In this context, Georgian Ambassador to Russia Valerian Avdadze's response does not seem to have been unjustly exaggerated: "Georgia's independence depends to a great extent on Russia's position. Georgia will be independent if Russia wants it [to be]".¹³⁰ On 22

¹²⁷The Russian-Georgian Treaty of Friendship, Neighbourly Relations and Cooperation was reprinted in *Moskovskiye Novosti*, no.5 (January 30- February 6, 1994), pp.2-3.

¹²⁸The agreements signed in Moscow can be found in George Hewitt, *Post-war Developments in the Georgia-Abkhazia Dispute* (London: Parliamentary Human Right Group, June 1996) Appendix 3 and Annex 2.

¹²⁹Georgian-Russian military ties are examined in "The Armed Forces of Georgia – an update", in *Jane's Intelligence Review*, vol.8, no.2 (February 1996), pp.69-70.

¹³⁰ Valerian Advadze, *Obshchaya Gazeta*, no.10 (September 24, 1993), p.6.

October, 1994 Georgia signed the CIS agreements. The very next day, Yeltsin ordered the deployment of Russian troops to the region in order to guard Georgian railways. Thus, Russia succeeded in persuading Georgia to join the CIS membership and Russia retained its military influence in the region. Subsequent peace negotiations ensured that peace in Abkhazia would be guaranteed by the presence of Russian peacekeepers and that Russia would continue to play a decisive role in forging a political agreement between Georgia and Abkhazia.¹³¹

By 1996, Russian foreign policy in Georgia was attacked for being both too much involved and too little involved. Yeltsin, however, continued his policy of guarding Russian interests in the region by retaining strong ties with Georgia. On 19 January, Shevardnadze persuaded the other CIS leaders to enforce economic sanctions and impose a full blockade on Abkhazia, and diplomacy between Russia and Georgia became more active.¹³²

Only after mid 1993 did Russian troops play a more neutral role. Although Russian troops were stationed in Georgia throughout the entire period, and had monitored a series of abortive cease-fires, they first appeared as official peacekeeping forces (in accordance with the Russian mediated agreement) on 14 May 1994.¹³³ By June 1994, Russian peacekeeping troops were taking up positions along the security zone between the two parties with Russian troops from the “Group of Russian Forces in Transcaucasus” forming the backbone of the peacekeeping force. Nevertheless, despite the relative peace since 1994, Russian

¹³¹ Dov Lynch explains Russian relations with Georgia since 1994 as the result of a “misconstrued bargain” made that year. He argues that the Georgian government acceded to Russian demands by joining the CIS and the collective security arrangement only because it believed that this would guarantee the cessation of Russian assistance to Abkhaz forces. Also, it understood that Russia would help in the long term to restore Georgian territorial integrity. However, in the Russian perception of the bargain, Russia only agreed to stop assisting the Abkhaz forces in exchange for Georgia agreeing to Russian security demands – and Russia had taken no responsibility for the restoration of Georgia territorial integrity. Dov Lynch, The Conflict in Abkhazia: Dilemmas in Russian “Peacekeeping Policy”, Discussion Paper 77, (London: RIIA, 1998).

¹³² In January 1996, the Sukhumi port was closed to all foreign ships coming and going. Also, Abkhaz passports were no longer recognized by Russia’s border and customs services and thus Abkhaz citizens were not able to leave the republic. The Abkhazian border with Russia over the river Psou had been closed for males of fighting age since the beginning of the Chechen war in 1994. Abkhazia had been under a Russian blockade since December 1994. Electricity was shut off periodically, the Sukhumi airport closed and deliveries of fuel, food products and medical supplies limited. In October 1995 on instructions from the Russian MFA Abkhaz ships were prohibited from going out to sea. Alla Barakhova, Nezavisimaya Gazeta, January 11, 1996, p.3.

¹³³ These troops were to serve on a voluntary contractual basis at an estimated cost to Russia of 2 billion rubles a year. Operational arrangements were confirmed in negotiations by Russian Defence Minister Grachev, Shevardnadze and Ardzinba. Other CIS members were supposed to have contributed troops to the peacekeeping force but the overwhelming majority has been Russian.

peacekeepers were accused of being partial to the Abkhaz because they did not facilitate the repatriation of refugees. In response to criticisms that Russian peacekeeping had not created conditions of security in the conflict zone and allowed the safe return of refugees, the commander of the peacekeeping forces, Lieutenant General Vasiliy Yakushev laid the blame on the political leaders and argued that a political solution was necessary before this could be done.¹³⁴ However, by 1996, the Abkhaz were criticising the CIS plans for ending the conflict as too favourable to Georgia.¹³⁵ Ardzinba continued to call for Georgia's recognition of Abkhazia's independence which Shevardnadze declared unacceptable.¹³⁶

4. Conclusions

Russia's key interests in the Georgia-Abkhazia conflict were conditioned somewhat by Tsarist and Soviet historical relations with the region. After 1991, Russia bordered the unstable and fractious area of the Caucasus, and inherited in Georgia a relatively small Russian diaspora and close economic ties. However, although this inheritance indicated why Russian foreign policy decision-makers were interested in reviewing Russian involvement, it clearly did not dictate a particular policy agenda towards it.

Russia's paramount interest in the Georgia-Abkhazia conflict was strategic - to stop the violence and prevent the dissolution of the Georgian state. The threat of anarchy in the Caucasus was real. The proximity and close relations of Abkhazia with Russia's Northern Caucasus made the threat urgent. However, the extent of the threat to Russia itself was controversial and how to deal with it was not obvious. A small Russian diaspora existed in Georgia - but what it meant for policy development was contentious. Unlike in Moldova, the diaspora was not primarily located in the separatist region. Moreover, economic interests

¹³⁴ For Lieutenant General Yakushev defence of the Russian peacekeepers, see "Russian commander: "Peacekeepers are not police", Tbilisi Contact Information Agency, January 25, 1995.

¹³⁵ To quote Abkhazia's Foreign Minister, Leonid Lakerbai, "The plan calls for giving police functions to the CIS peacekeeping forces and drawing Russia into a new broad-scale war in the Caucasus" – i.e. the Russian peacekeepers would not only assist in the return of refugees but also disarm the Abkhaz armed forces. Lakerbai quoted in Temuri Kadzhaya, Nezavisimaya Gazeta, January 11, 1996, p.3.

¹³⁶ Natalya Gorodestksya, Segodnya, February 21, 1996, p.2.

were less significant than either security or the diaspora, and Georgia's economic benefit to Russia was decreasing and little debated.

From 1991-1996, perceptions of these three main interests differed among Russian political groups, and ideas about what to do about them evolved over time. When war broke out in Georgia in August 1992, there was no elite consensus over how Russia should react. The environment conditioned but did not constrain Russia's actions. As in the case of Moldova, there were significant gaps between Russia's real and perceived interests and there was, therefore, the potential for foreign policy debates to impact on foreign policy in a significant way.

When we examine Russia's debates and policies in the same chronological stages in both the Georgia and the Moldova case studies, we see that the dominant foreign policy ideas were similar in each stage. In stage one, from August 1991 to March 1992, there was very little debate about either Georgia or Moldova as neither of the conflicts had yet become violent and during this very short and tumultuous stage there was little public knowledge about events in those states. The dominant foreign policy ideas expressed both in the debate and in official statements by the government were liberal westernist. Russian policies meanwhile showed a general neglect of the area as Russian troops were being withdrawn from the Transcaucasus. At the same time, however, Russia continued the former Soviet policy of actively pursuing peace in South Ossetia.

In stage two, the beginning of the Moldova-Transdnistria war in March 1992 instigated discussions about Russia's relations with other former republics including Georgia. These debates gave voice to an array of foreign policy ideas - the most strident of which came from the fundamentalist nationalists. Both communists and nationalists were quick to vocally support the separatist Abkhaz over the Georgian government just as they had supported the Transdnistrians over the Moldova government. Despite the fact that Abkhazia had a significantly smaller Russian diaspora than Transdnistria, calls were made in Russia to "save our diaspora". Undeterred, the government promised to support Georgia's

territorial integrity. Thus, when the Georgia-Abkhazia war began in August, a whole spectrum of foreign policy ideas was already being expressed.

This second conflict continued to generate a significant controversy about Russian foreign policy and urgency about what Russia's response should be. The Russian government responded reasonably quickly, having abandoned its liberal westernist orientation with the beginning of the Moldova war, and having "learnt" that neglecting to take an active stance would bring domestic criticism. As in the case of Moldova, the official policy was one of active negotiation to bring about peace. On the ground meanwhile, the Russian troops in the region and Russian citizens in the North Caucasus were drawn into the conflict on the side of the separatists.

In stage three (October 1993-June 1996) Russian policy and military action in Georgia were in line with the dominant foreign policy mix of ideas that Russia should retain influence, end the war, and continue its military ties. Officially the government began to actively support Georgia (and unofficial support for the Abkhaz ended) after Georgia was pressured into making concessions which gave Russia greater military and political influence in the state.

To conclude, sympathy for the Abkhaz was subject to lobbying from different political groups and the debates were politically motivated. But factors other than ethnicity and raw politics also played significantly into the arguments. While the debates were not very complex because the period examined was relatively tumultuous and politicians had little time to develop coherent approaches to the subject, strategic factors were considered of utmost urgency by most members of the elite. The initial Russian military involvement in Georgia occurred during a period of great confusion when Russian policy was not centralized or coherent and was being carried out by various actors with disparate goals. However, over time, Russia's ^{actions} fell in line with the development of an official policy which supported ending the conflict and upholding the territorial integrity of Georgia. Uncertainty during this time of crisis increased the importance of broad, general foreign policy ideas in the determination of government policy. Pragmatic nationalism helped to define Russia's foreign policy goals and

became a significant force driving Russian foreign policy. Thus, one can argue that the evolution of ideas and debates was consequential.

Chapter Seven: The Russian Political Debates and Military Involvement in the Tajik Conflict

Following the pattern of examination of Russian foreign policy changes towards the separatist conflicts in Moldova and Abkhazia, this chapter analyses the evolution of political debate and policy towards the third conflict in the former Soviet space in which Russia became active militarily: the civil war in Tajikistan. Russia was politically and militarily involved in the Tajik civil war from its inception in May 1992 and throughout the negotiations that followed.

The first section of the chapter begins with a brief historical overview of the origins and evolution of the Tajik civil war and outlines the involvement of Russia, Uzbekistan and Afghanistan. It then identifies and examines Russia's key interests in the conflict, specifying the material incentives facing Russia's decision-makers and the extent to which the interests were legacies of Tsarist and Soviet history. In the case of Tajikistan, there was considerable consensus about what Russia's practical interests were and therefore a close relationship between ideas in the debates, policies and military action on the ground. The second section of the chapter identifies and provides a chronological analysis of the two stages in Russia's debates and policies toward the conflict. Within each stage, the dominant ideas, policy positions and military actions are examined in order to establish a comprehensive analysis of the various factors at work in the crisis.

1. Civil War in Tajikistan

A new wave of Russian political debates and policy-making took place within the context of the Tajik civil war, and the involvement of other states in the conflict, during the period under investigation. Similar to events in many other republics within the former Soviet Union in the late 1980s, a power struggle emerged in Tajikistan over who would rule and how much of the old communist system would be preserved.¹ The initial struggle began

¹ For a history of the civil war see Muriel Atkin, "Tajikistan's Civil War", *Current History*, no. 612 (October

as a reaction against the old establishment and its political elite who were blamed for Soviet dominance. However, ethnic, regional, religious and political issues all soon became involved and a civil war ensued. The outside involvement of Russia and Uzbekistan, as well as the unresolved political situation in Afghanistan fuelled the conflict.

When the Soviet Union collapsed, Tajikistan was less prepared than any other republic for dealing with the new realities. The ruling Communist party had little power as it had never really managed to replace the country's regional clan political structure, and only a feeble Tajik intelligentsia had emerged to support democracy. At the same time, a Muslim awakening, in the form of the Islamic Renaissance Party, was occurring in the countryside. The leadership of this party favoured a secular state. It cooperated with the much smaller Democratic Party composed of the Tajik secular intelligentsia as well as with the Tajik nationalist movement (the Rastokhez).² Together these parties formed the bulk of the political opposition which was united in the pursuit of a democratic and anti-communist political agenda, but divided (as was the Communist Party itself) by many inter-clan feuds.

In November 1991, Rakhmon Nabiev, the former Communist Party leader (of the Leninabad-based Khojand clan) won the presidential election. In the spring of 1992, the opposition responded by initiating two months of anti-communist demonstrations and violent clashes in Dushanbe. Nabiev was forced to create a coalition government on 6 May 1992. This solution satisfied neither side and led to the violence which escalated into a civil war in late May 1992.³

In September 1992, a coup led by opposition units forced Nabiev from the capital and by November the coalition government had crumbled, leading to a counter-offensive by the communist "Popular Front".⁴ In December 1992, a precarious stability returned when the communist forces, now supported by Russia and Uzbekistan, pushed the fighters of the "Islamic-democratic" opposition and tens of thousands of refugees into Afghanistan. They

1997), pp.336-340.

² Timur Kadyr, *Megapolis-Express*, September 16, 1992, p.20.

³ Alexandr Karpov, *Izvestiya*, September 8, 1992, p.1. Also see James Wyllie, "Tadjikistan – A Strategic Threat to Regional Harmony", *Jane's Intelligence Review*, vol.5, no.3 (March 1993), p.133.

⁴ Nabiev at the time explained "My residence has been seized by armed people and I am not allowed to work in the Supreme Soviet". Interview with Nabiev by Aleksandra Lugovskaya, *Izvestiya*, September 4, 1992, p.1.

installed a government dominated by Kulabis and the old guard of the former Communist Party, headed by Emomali Rakhmonov. Most remaining leaders and active members of the various opposition movements fled the country in response to the government's intensive crackdown against the opposition and the people associated with it.⁵ Guerrilla campaigns continued, with armed opponents of the communist regime operating from the rugged mountains in the east and southeast of the country and across the border in Afghanistan.⁶ These events added to the Russian perception that the Tajik-Afghan border was dangerously vulnerable.

Attempts to resolve the power struggle in Tajikistan by negotiation with Russia's help took place from 1992 through to 1996. UN sponsored peace negotiations began in April 1994, and an agreement on cessation of hostilities was signed on 17 September 1994 in Tehran.⁷ Elections followed and on 6 November 1994, Rakhmonov was elected president of the republic. The conflict reached a temporary status quo and peace was imposed but "without real reconciliation" – that is, without a unification of the regions and populations of Tajikistan.⁸ The result was a weak, authoritarian state dependent on Russian troops and financial subsidies.

Russia was militarily involved in the Tajik civil war from its inception in May 1992. As indicated in the previous case studies, Russian troops began unofficially supporting one side in the conflict – this time the former communists. However, in this case, as the situation

⁵ See, "Tajik Refugees in Northern Afghanistan – Obstacles to Repatriation", UNHCR REFWORLD Country Information, vol.8, no.6, May 1996.

⁶ Within the regime, the northern Khojand (from Leninabad) lost to their junior Communist party partners the Kulyabi (based in Dushanbe and protected by the Russian 201st Motor Rifle Division) from the south by the fall of 1992. The clans in the east (the Pamiri, Garmi) and south-east (Gorno-Badakshan) became involved in efforts against the regime. Timur Kadyr, Megapolis-Express, September 16, 1992, p.20.

⁷ On December 16, 1994, the UNMOT (United Nations Mission of Observers to Tajikistan) was created to monitor adherence to the Tehran agreement. "International Support to Peace and Reconciliation in Tajikistan", UNHCR, September 1997, p.4.

⁸ An estimated 50,000 people lost their lives during the hostilities. Hundreds of thousands fled the turmoil with an estimated 500,000 economic émigrés and 600,000 internally displaced persons. As many as 70,000 Tajiks took refuge across the border in Afghanistan. By the end of 1996, 43,000 refugees had been repatriated to their homes, leaving an estimated 20,000 in Afghanistan and many more in other neighbouring states and the Russian Federation. "Request for Allocation from the Voluntary Repatriation Fund for the Return of Tajik Refugees in Northern Afghanistan", UNHCR Memorandum, June 12, 1997 (PRL 19/97/MA04/M/026). Also, UNHCR Report on Tajikistan, January 1993 - March 1996, UNHCR, 1996, pp.10-15.

progressed, Russia troops continued to support the same side officially. In fact, there was little controversy over their role in the conflict. Russian troops played a significant role in the outcome of the Tajikistan war and helped to bring stability to the region. Their presence ensured Tajikistan's territorial integrity and the protection of its borders.

In Tajikistan, much more than in the military conflicts in Moldova and Georgia, states other than Russia also played key roles and influenced Russian perceptions of the conflict.⁹ Most significantly, the involvement of Afghanistan and Uzbekistan highlighted the vulnerability of borders in the area and contributed to a Russian fear that any future withdrawal of troops would lead to a dangerous security vacuum which might be exploited by other states. Russians feared the possibility that there would be a spread of political instability or Islamic fundamentalism across the region and right up to Russia's borders.

Russian perception of the vulnerability of the Tajik-Afghan border was enhanced by the Tajik opposition hiding in Afghanistan as well as the highly unstable political order in Afghanistan itself. The Tajik opposition formed refugee and training camps, as well as support bases and liaisons with local warlords, on Afghan territory. The leader of the Afghan Islam Party, Gulbeddin Hekmatyar, provided training camps for Tajik guerrillas.¹⁰ In April 1992, soon after Tajikistan gained independence, a military force led by the Afghan Tajik mujahidin took control of Afghanistan's capital, Kabul. This event, as well as the large number of refugees fleeing to Afghanistan, ensured the Afghan mujahidin a role in the Tajik conflict. According to the text of a FIS Report presented by Primakov in September 1994, Afghanistan's destabilizing effect on the Central Asian states was intensifying and threatening the state security of a number of countries, in particular Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. "Russia's FIS has information to the effect that there are forces in Afghanistan that want to break the north away and that are striving to create on that basis a Farsi-speaking state incorporating Tajikistan".¹¹ Russian fears increased even further when it became more

⁹ As seen in Chapter Five, Romania's history with Moldova influenced Russian perceptions and even policy in the first years after the collapse of the Soviet Union. With time Romania became less of a factor in the development of Russian policy. However, Romania was never directly militarily involved in the Moldova-Transnistria conflict – as Uzbekistan was in the Tajik Civil War.

¹⁰ Igor Rotar, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, September 23, 1992, p.1.

¹¹ The report continued on to state that Islamic extremism has had a "highly negative effect" on the crisis

clearly understood that the Tajik opposition was supported by the Afghan mujahidin as well as other mujahidin from different radical Islamic groups in countries such as Egypt and Algeria.¹²

Uzbekistan's involvement in the Tajik conflict also demanded Russian attention and vigilance in the area. The Uzbek military backed the coup which led the communist leader Rakhmonov to power in December 1992. Tashkent had been the headquarters of the old Soviet Central Asian Military District and inherited much of the military equipment. Later, Uzbek troops both helped to train Tajik troops and fought alongside the Tajik government irregular militias. Uzbekistan also took a lead in orchestrating CIS reaction to the Tajik civil war. However, while it supported Russian involvement in the conflict, Uzbek officials also complained that Moscow used its political and military control over Tajikistan to apply pressure upon Uzbekistan.¹³

It was not in Russia's interest to allow the political instability and Islamic extremism threatening Tajikistan to flow into Uzbekistan. It was also in Russia's interest to curtail Uzbekistan's regional ambitions in Tajikistan – for example by opposing the traditionally pro-Uzbek elite in Khojand.¹⁴ Uzbekistan was home to 700,000 Tajiks¹⁵ and had an economic interest in keeping stability along the rich arable lands of the Feragana valley which crosses both states.¹⁶

situation on CIS territory. "Text of FIS Report Presented by Primakov", in Rossiyskaya Gazeta, September 22, 1994, pp.1, 6.

¹² Semyon Bagdasarov (Chief expert at the Asian Strategic Studies foundation), "The Military-Political Situation in Tajikistan", in Nezavisimoye voyennoye obozreniye (independent military review) supplement to Nezavisimaya Gazeta, April 22, 1995, pp.1-2.

¹³ Russia's relations with Uzbekistan increased and both became guarantors of the existence of the current Tajik regime. Vitaly Partnikov, Nezavisimaya Gazeta, March 3, 1994, p.2.

¹⁴ Lerman Usmanov, Nezavisimaya Gazeta, January 6, 1994, p.3.

¹⁵ Although depending on how Uzbeks are distinguished from Tajiks this number may be extended to 3 million.

¹⁶ For centuries, Tajiks and Uzbeks lived together in Turkestan (made up of present-day Uzbekistan and Tajikistan). Both ethnic groups were bilingual and shared a common history and culture. The historical Tajik cultural centres of Samarkand and Bukhara were given to Uzbekistan after Soviet power took control of the independent khanates, and the Tajiks continue to harbour strong resentment for this act. During Tajikistan's civil war, there was great tension and numerous attacks carried out between Tajiks and Uzbeks – with Uzbeks attacking Tajik refugees and the Tajik government attacking Uzbeks in Tajikistan.

"Return to Tajikistan – Continued Regional and Ethnic Tensions", vol. 7, no.9 (May 1995), UNHCR REF WORLD - Country Information, (Geneva: UNHCR, 1998, pp.14-17).

2. Russia's Key Interests in Tajikistan

As in Moldova and Georgia, Russia's political debates and relations with Tajikistan after 1991 were based upon the many perceptions and assets which it inherited from the period of Tsarist and Soviet domination of the area. Once again Tsarist and Soviet policies had left Russia with a history of involvement and thus a context in which Russia's foreign policy decisions had to be made. As in the cases of Moldova and Georgia, Russia inherited a Russian diaspora and strong military presence in the area. However, Tajikistan was more politically unstable and economically dependent on Russia. It had an especially fragile and fractured national identity. Uniquely, Tajikistan also bordered a highly precarious state which until very recently had been at war with the Soviet Union and had a history of vulnerability to Islamic fundamentalism.

The focus of the next section is to discover whether Russian security, political and economic interests were "real" or "perceived" and whether the combination of interests and historical legacies left room for conflicting ideas and debate among the political elite about how to react to the Tajik Civil War after 1991. Each of the key interests is examined in turn. However, first Russia's interests in Tajikistan must be placed within the larger focus of the region of Central Asia.

Historically, Central Asia¹⁷ was considered to be within the "sphere of influence" of both the Russian and Soviet empires. However, at the same time, the area's little understood Islamic traditions were the object of widespread ignorance and fear. There was also a general ambivalence among Russians towards the region in comparison to other parts of the empire.¹⁸

¹⁷ The Central Asia states are Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgystan and Tajikistan.

¹⁸ See Seymour Becker, "The Russian Conquest of Central Asia and Kazakhstan: Motives, Methods and Consequences", in Hafeez Malik (ed.), Central Asia: Its Strategic Importance and Future Prospects (London: Macmillan, 1994), pp. 21-38. Books on Post-Soviet Central Asia have obviously only recently begun to appear. The most recent and comprehensive book focusing on Russia's relations with the Central Asian and Asian states after 1991 is Gennady Chufirin (ed.), Russia and Asia: The Emerging Security Agenda (Sweden: SIPRI/Oxford University Press, 1999). Another edited collection focusing specifically on the Central Asian states is Touraj Atabaki and John O'Kane (eds.), Post-Soviet Central Asia (London: I. B. Tauris, 1998). Also, Edward Allworth (ed.), Central Asia: 130 Years of Russian Dominance, A Historical Overview (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1994), and Yury Kulchik, Andrey Fadin and Victor Sergeev (eds.), Central Asia After the Empire (London: Pluto Press, 1996).

These paradoxical perceptions of Central Asia continued to resonate in post-Soviet Russia, and, as shall be shown below, broadly informed the search for Russia's policy towards the Tajik civil war.

During the years 1991 to 1996, Central Asia was generally of lesser concern to Russian foreign and security policy than the Transcaucasian region. Recall that the greater interest in the Transcaucasus was largely because of its proximity to Russia's Northern Caucasus republics, as well as the fact that all three Transcaucasian states were involved in armed conflicts after 1991. Georgia's economic outlet to the Black Sea gave the Transcaucasian states an economic and geostrategic advantage over the Central Asian states which depended entirely on overland routes for transport and communications. However, the larger Russian diaspora in Central Asia (although it is relatively small in Tajikistan), the great oil and gas resources of Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, its position at the crossroads of historically strategic routes, as well as the civil conflict in Tajikistan and the vulnerability of their external borders meant that the region continued to be of long-term importance to Russia. Nevertheless, from 1991 to 1996 Russia partly withdrew from its involvement in the Central Asian states. The significant exception was in Tajikistan where the outbreak of civil war helps to explain Russia's major involvement.

a) The Threat of Islamic Fundamentalism

Russian politicians and decision-makers were concerned with the overall future of Central Asia at least partly because of Russia's close historical relations with Tajikistan. In order to understand Russian perceptions of the "Islamic threat" and Russian interests in limiting it, it is necessary to examine Russian history. The history of Tajikistan is one of continually shifting cultural and political boundaries.¹⁹ The Tajiks differ from their Central

¹⁹ The most recent and comprehensive book specifically on Tajikistan is Mohammad-Reza Djalili, Frederic Grare and Shirin Akiner (eds.), *Tajikistan* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 1998). The original inhabitants of most of Central Asia were Persian speakers (present-day Tajiks), however they became a minority with the successive waves of Turkic immigrants into the region. The population of Tajikistan is 5.4 million. More than 4 million Tajiks live in northern Afghanistan (over 1.5 million more than in Tajikistan itself). Another million live in Uzbekistan. It is thus unsurprising that the main foreign actors deeply involved in the civil war in Tajikistan have been Russia, Uzbekistan and Afghanistan.

Asian neighbours because of their predominantly Persian as opposed to Turkic heritage. The area was once part of the Persian empire and the Tajik people speak a language similar to Persian or Farsi. They are also unique among the Central Asian states in their predominantly Sunni Muslim faith.²⁰

Imperial Russia conquered what is present-day Central Asia between 1865 and 1884.²¹ The area of the current Republic of Tajikistan came under Russian control in approximately 1868.²² When Tajikistan declared its independence in September 1991, it had therefore been dominated by imperial Russia and then the Soviet Union for 123 years. As a result, many Russians in the early post-Soviet period were predisposed to think of Tajikistan as a natural part of their territory – although the emotional identification with Tajikistan was significantly weaker than towards the Great Russian heartland of the Slavic states and Kazakhstan.²³

Under Soviet domination, present-day Tajikistan became part of Soviet Turkestan. Tajikistan achieved the status of an autonomous republic within the Uzbekistan Soviet Socialist Republic in 1924. Five years later, in 1929, it became the Tajik Soviet Socialist Republic. Stalin's decision to turn Tajikistan into a fully-fledged Union Republic was partly

²⁰ The main identity is that of territorially based regions, sometimes referred to as “clans”. The six main “identity regions” are Kulyab, Gharm, Gorno-Badakhshan (or Pamir), Kurgan-Tyube, Leninabad and Hissar. However, there are several other traditional divisions among Tajik society: north vs. south, mountainous vs. valley Tajiks, Tajiks vs. non-Tajiks, and town vs. village. Timur Kadyr, *Megapolis-Express*, September 16, 1992, p.20.

²¹ Tajik historians believe that the Tajiks formed as a unique national group under the Samanid dynasty (909-993 AD). The Samanid dynasty was centred in Bukhara and ruled some of the region of present-day Tajikistan. After the period of Samanid rule, were the Mongol invasions in the 13th century, the conquest by Tamerlane, and a series of rule by the Turkic khans. Subsequently, the Emirate of Bukhara ruled the Tajiks.

²² Russia annexed the northern part of Tajikistan in 1868. Fears of British incursions from India led Russia to annex the entire Pamirs region that then came under control of the governor-general of Turkestan. The border between Tajikistan and present day Afghanistan and Pakistan was drawn in March 1884 when an Anglo-Russian Boundary Commission was set up with the aim of preventing the new Russian frontier from being contiguous to India. In 1894, the border of the Khanate of Bukhara with Afghanistan was guarded by Russian soldiers who set up customs posts. The border was never watertight. See Ahmed Rashid, *The Resurgence of Central Asia: Islam of Nationalism* (London: Pluto Press, 1994), p.166.

²³ The Russian subjugation of the Kazakh steppes occurred a whole century earlier than Russia's domination of the other Central Asian states. The theory of “Heartland” refers to the envisioned Russian control over the Eurasian landmass as the “pivot of world politics”. Sir Halford Mackinder introduced the term in 1904. See Mackinder, “The Geographical Pivot of History”, *Geographical Journal*, vol.20, no.4 (April 1903), reprinted in *The Scope and Methods of Geography and the Geographical Pivot of History* (London: The Royal Geographical Society, 1951), pp.30-44, p38.

based upon an interest which continues to inform post-Soviet Russian policy towards Tajikistan today: he wanted a Persian-speaking Republic to help influence the large region of Persian cultural influence which extended from Iran to India.²⁴ It will be shown that later in post-Soviet Russia, there also continued to be a widespread belief that Russia ought to retain influence in the region by protecting the Tajik-Afghan border.

The reaction of the Russian political elite to the Tajik civil war was significantly conditioned by how the “Islamic factor” had been regarded and dealt with in the Tsarist and Soviet periods. Under these earlier regimes the Central Asian region was generally perceived as a potential threat, largely due to its little understood Islamic traditions. Of all the Central Asian states, Tajikistan was perceived as the most vulnerable to Islamic extremism. Despite Soviet efforts, Islam remained, and remains, central to the lives of the Tajiks.

With the break up of the Soviet Union, the idea of the “Islamic threat” continued to inform Russian policy, and the impact of the “re-emergence” of Islam in the former Soviet Union was debated by the academic and policy elite in Russia, as well as by the rest of the Western and Muslim world.²⁵ Russian fears increased with the victories of the fundamentalist Taliban in Afghanistan in the 1990s and were considered real and legitimate. However, they were also often exaggerated by members of the Russian political elite (as well as in Uzbekistan and the Tajik governments) which tried to use them to justify their support for the former communist (Khojand-Kulyabi) rulers, as well as to legitimise the presence (and, to some extent the involvement) of Russian troops in the region.

b) The Russian-Speaking Diaspora

Another legacy of imperial Russian/Soviet rule which formed a specific Russian interest in this conflict was the presence of a Russian-speaking diaspora in the area. During

²⁴ To meet the requirement that Union Republics had to have a population of at least one million, the Soviet government moved the district of Khujand in the Feragana valley from Uzbekistan to Tajikistan. See Barnett Rubin, “Russian Hegemony and State Breakdown in the Periphery: Causes and consequences of the civil war in Tajikistan”, in Barnett R. Rubin and Jack Snyder (eds.), *Post-Soviet Political Order* (New York: Routledge, 1998), pp. 128-16, p.138. Stalin also believed that breaking up the relations among the different ethnic groups within Turkestan would make its easier to consolidate Soviet influence.

²⁵See for example, Zulfiye Kadir, “Muslim Political Movements in Russia”, *Eurasian Studies*, vol.3, no.2 (Summer 1996), pp.48-56.

the Soviet period, as in the former Soviet republics of Georgia and Moldova, the mass migration of Slavs into Tajikistan was encouraged. These “Russian-speakers” typically held the most important positions in industry, the professions, the security services and the military, although not in the cultural professions nor in the republican Communist Party and state apparatus.²⁶ By 1989, there were 388,000 Russians in Tajikistan, forming approximately 6% of the population.²⁷ Although, as shall be shown below, this percentage decreased after 1991, the diaspora issue was still debated during discussions of Russian involvement in the conflict. However, historically, by comparison with Moldova and Georgia, the policies of “Russification” and the forced migration of Russians and Slavs in Tajikistan were relatively minor – with the result that the diaspora issue was also comparatively less significant in this conflict.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union the Russian political opposition, and later the Russian government, argued that the Russian diaspora in Tajikistan, as well as the diasporas in the other CIS states, had to be protected (by a variety of means including force). However the fact that the diaspora in Tajikistan was comparatively small and that its population was rapidly decreasing – reduced the justification for a policy of the use of military force. Russians had settled in Tajikistan relatively recently and had little feeling of belonging compared to Russians in Ukraine, Kazakhstan or the Baltics. By 1996, the diaspora had decreased to less than 100,000, approximately 2% of the population.²⁸ Nevertheless, members of the Russian political elite were concerned with the fate of the Tajikistan diaspora and they expressed apprehension about the potential outflow of hundreds of thousands of refugees back into Russia.²⁹

²⁶ Edward Allworth, “Commensals or Parasites? Russians, Kazakhs, Uzbeks, and Others in Central Asia”, in Beatrice F. Manz (ed.), Central Asia in Historical Perspective (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1994), pp.185-201.

²⁷ All-Union population census 1989 [Vsesoyuznaya perepis' naseleniya 1989] (Moskva: Gosudarstvennyi Komitet SSSR po Statistike, 1990).

²⁸ Russians in Tajikistan (as in the other former Soviet republics) have always been mostly concentrated in the large cities. Shahrbanou Tadjbakhsh, “National reconciliation: the imperfect whim”, Central Asian Survey, vol.15, no.3/4 (December 1996), pp.325-348.

²⁹ This began in early 1992. See Olga Gorshunova, Rossiyskiye Vesti, September 22, 1992, p.3.

The members of the Tajik Russian-speaking diaspora themselves had little direct impact upon the development of Russian policy. The emigration of approximately 300,000 ethnic Russians from 1991 to 1996 meant that neither the emigrants nor the tiny Russian population of 80,000 left in Tajikistan could wield any real political influence. This was unlike the situation of the Russians in Transdnistria where they formed sizable proportions of the separatist areas. Moreover, since Russians had only settled in Tajikistan relatively recently, they lacked deep historic roots or feeling of belonging.³⁰ Most of those who stayed were elderly or disabled and did not have enough money to leave.³¹ Clearly the diaspora was of relatively insignificant interest in Russia's continued involvement in the Tajik conflict.³²

c) Russian Strategic Interests

Of much more significance to Russian national interest than the diaspora was the border between Tajikistan and Afghanistan. The importance of the border was conditioned by Soviet involvement in Afghanistan. The Soviet Union had withdrawn its troops from Afghanistan only in February 1989 and continued to aid the government it had installed there until the end of 1991.³³ Obviously the protracted and brutal war, which had ended in Soviet withdrawal, contributed to the perception of the significance of the border between Tajikistan and Russia.³⁴ The border was vulnerable both in terms of the proximity of Islamic extremism in Afghanistan and Afghanistan's support for the Tajik opposition group.³⁵ Other border threats included terrorism, illegal migration, narcotics and the arms trade. These were all

³⁰ Vadim Belykh and Nikolai Burbyga, *Izvestiya*, September 15, 1992, p.1

³¹ Gulnara Khasanova, *Izvestiya*, May 6, 1995, p.3.

³² Interview with Rakhmonov on National Issues and Ties with Russia by Sergey Ovsinko, in *Rossiyskiye Vesti*, January 26, 1995, p.1.

³³ For a comprehensive analysis of Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan see: Sarah E. Mendelson, *Changing Course: Ideas, Politics and the Soviet Withdrawal from Afghanistan* (Princeton N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1998).

³⁴ The "Afghan syndrome" (the bitterness of the blood shed in vain in the Afghan war, kept alive by the disabled veterans and the families of the dead, as well as the inevitable social problems) continued to be a highly emotional issue although one whose influence upon the new Russian federation has been paradoxical. On the one hand, the Afghan war, like the later Chechen war, exposed Russian military weakness and eventually led to pressures for Russian withdrawal from conflicts in the near abroad. On the other hand, those who advocated Russian involvement in these conflicts could easily exploit it.

³⁵ The issue of having to gain the release of former Soviet servicemen from captivity in Afghanistan was also a constant topic in the Russian press. See Vyacheslav Yelgin, *Segodnya*, October 28, 1993, p.3.

“real” threats which Russia could defend only through a military presence. Tajikistan lacked the finances, equipment and organization to protect the border itself.³⁶

The other major threat to Russia’s security concerned the question of what would happen if Russia withdrew from the region – perhaps other states would fill the vacuum. Already with the end of the Soviet Union other regional and global powers had developed an interest in the Central Asian region because of its great mineral wealth. It was quite possible that historic rivalries over the region might be recreated. In the first years after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Russia had already partly withdrawn from its involvement in the other four Central Asian states. Therefore, to guarantee its foothold in the region in general, as well as to discourage the involvement of other states, it was believed important that Russia continue close military relations with Tajikistan.³⁷

Perhaps most significantly, a Russian military presence was needed within Tajikistan to provide a measure of political and economic stability, to guard Tajikistan’s territorial integrity and to prevent anarchy from developing and negatively affecting its Central Asian neighbours. As in the cases of Moldova and Georgia, Russia inherited a heavily militarised region in Tajikistan. Under the Soviet regime Tajikistan had been a border republic “... with difficult topography, and with a substantial number of deportees and politically unreliable elements, as well as forced labour camps, (which) required a high concentration of security forces, MVD (Interior Ministry) Border Guards – specifically charged with safeguarding Soviet frontiers”.³⁸ In 1979, the capital Dushanbe became one of the major bases for Soviet troops on their way to invade Afghanistan.³⁹ After the Afghan war, Soviet security forces in Tajikistan remained to guard the Afghan border.

When the Soviet Union disintegrated, it was unclear to whom the various military forces in Tajikistan would report, or what doctrine they should follow. The Russian force

³⁶ Kazakhstan, Kyrgystan and Uzbekistan also sent contingents under CIS command to help guard the border. However, these were largely symbolic.

³⁷ V. Skosyrev, *Izvestiya*, October 8, 1991, p.6.

³⁸ Teresa Rakowska-Harmstone, *Russia and Nationalism in Central Asia: The Case of Tadzhikistan* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1970) p.118

³⁹ Tajik troops initially took part in the Afghan war alongside other Soviet troops but were withdrawn after the Red Army became worried by their growing fraternization with the Tajik Mujahidin in Afghanistan.

consisted mainly of the 201st Motorized Division based in Dushanbe (approx. 6000 men) which had previously been part of the 40th Army in Afghanistan. With the end of the Afghan war in 1989 it had been withdrawn to its pre-war base in Tajikistan, and when the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991 the forces passed first to CIS and then to Russian control.⁴⁰ The much smaller 191st motorized regiment in Kurgan-Tyube and a motorized regiment in Kulyab also remained stationed in Tajikistan when the Soviet Union disintegrated.⁴¹ Thus, as in Moldova and Georgia, there was no need for any strategic reassessment by the Russian government or military to justify stationing troops in Tajikistan. Most of the conscripts of the 201st Division were local ethnic Tajiks⁴² but the unit had not been integrated into the new Tajik state as a national army.⁴³

Finally, left over from the Soviet period was an indeterminate number of Interior Ministry (OMON) troops and 2000-2500 border guards.⁴⁴ These border guards were formerly under the jurisdiction of the KGB, and then came under the Russian Ministry of State Security. Until 1992, the Eastern and Central Asian Border Districts controlled the borders of the five Central Asian republics. Their abolition or “nationalization” in 1992 created a vacuum in regional border security. This was rendered more acute by political instability and threats from neighbouring states. In the case of Tajikistan, by placing the border guards under

⁴⁰ The unit was at the time under the command of a Garmi Tajik, Major General Mukhriddin Ashurov, who kept the unit out of the early clashes. Michael Orr, “The Russian Army and the War in Tajikistan”, in Mahammad-Reza Djalili, et al (eds.), *Tajikistan: The Trials of Independence* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 1998), pp.151-160, p.151.

⁴¹ Later, the CIS Joint Peacekeeping forces arrived as reinforcements to the 201st Division, along with a unit of paratroops. James Sherr, “Escalation of the Tajikistan Conflict”, *Jane’s Intelligence Review*, vol.5, no.11 (November 1993), pp.514-516

⁴² The conscripts were given work contracts. According to V. Povolyaev, secretary of the Writer’s Union of Russia, conditions in Tajikistan were such that the best way to survive was by finding employment with the Russian military. “...the pay was decent and, if necessary, they will be provided with a roof over their heads... And the most important thing is that through working under a contract as employees of the Russian army, they will be able to get Russian citizenship”. V. Povolyaev: “Outcasts: How Thousands of Russian Families Have Become Misfits Today” in *Central Asia Today*, (Moscow: Moscow State University: Institute of Asian and Studies, 1994).

⁴³ Only in the late autumn 1992, after President Nabiev had been deposed and the communist Emomali Rakhmonov returned to power, did the government create the Armed Forces of Tajikistan and establish a Ministry of Defence.

⁴⁴ Catherine Poujol, “Some Reflections on Russian Involvement in the Tajik Conflict, 1992-1993” in Mahammad-Reza Djalili et al. (eds.), *Tajikistan: The Trials of Independence* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 1998), pp.99-118, p. 101.

Russian jurisdiction in August 1992 and not withdrawing them, Russia took a fateful step that would ensure its continued presence in the region. Over 80 percent of these troops were (and are) also ethnic Tajik conscripts who continue to guard the 1,200-km long, mountainous border between Tajikistan and Afghanistan.⁴⁵

By the end of 1992, there were 10,200 Russian commanded troops (including the 201st Motorized Division and the Russian Border Guards) based in Tajikistan. This figure grew to 18,000 in 1993 and then to 21,000 in 1994. By 1996, there were over 25,000 Russian-commanded troops in Tajikistan as part of an operation nominally commanded by the CIS.⁴⁶ The peacekeeping forces were financed by Russia and manned solely with volunteer servicemen or conscripts who went through special training.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, by the end of the period under consideration, 1991-1996, Russia became more inclined to relinquish the excessive economic, political and military burden of responsibility for Tajikistan and to search more seriously for a compromise agreeable to both sides of the conflict.

d) Russian Economic Interests

Finally, historic ties also helped to determine Tajikistan's dependence upon Russia's limited economic interests in the region. Despite its other failings, the Soviet regime did stimulate economic growth in Central Asia. The collectivisation of agriculture and the construction of an extensive irrigation system, which permitted intensive cultivation of cotton, were especially significant.⁴⁸ Light industry was also developed. As a consequence,

⁴⁵ Dr. Irina Zviagelskaya, *Author's Interview*, June 8, 1999. (Zviagelskaya is at the Institute of Oriental Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences and has been involved in the Tajik negotiations).

⁴⁶ About 8000 belonged to the 201st Motorized Rifle Division of the Russian MoD and the rest belonged to the Border Security Forces answering to the office of the Russian Presidency. In September 1993, the Russian 201st Motorized Rifle Division was designated a peacekeeping force. Both the border and peacekeeping troops include largely nominal contributions from the other Central Asian states, except Turkmenistan. The United Nations Mission of Observers in Tajikistan (UNMOT) currently monitors these forces. See *The Military Balance, 1997-1998* (London: IISS, Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 110.

⁴⁷ This is according to General Kondratyev. "The collective peacekeeping forces include the 201st Motorized Infantry Division. The 27th Guards Motorized Infantry Division and the 45th Guards Motorized Infantry Division as well as a separate paratroop battalion were detached from the Russian Army to perform peacekeeping activities. See Kondratyev quotes in Nikolai Burbyga, *Izvestiya*, March 23, 1994, p.2.

⁴⁸ Beginning in the 1920's, hundreds of thousands of mountain Tajiks were moved en masse to the newly irrigated areas on the plains where the cotton fields were cultivated. "Tajikistan", *EIU Country Report*, 4th quarter (1997), pp.19-31.

the healthcare and the education systems were improved. These achievements once again underlay the “imperialist” perception of many Russians that the Soviet Union had brought “civilization” to Tajikistan (and to the other former republics), at a considerable cost to Russians, and for which the Tajiks ought to be grateful.

Despite large subsidies from Moscow, by the end of the 1980’s Tajikistan’s living standard was the lowest of all the Soviet republics.⁴⁹ Moscow’s main economic interest in the region from the beginning had been the enforcement of cotton production. The region in turn became dependent on Moscow for food – which it still is today. Thus, many of Tajikistan’s current economic problems, which have aggravated the internal conflict, are largely the result of decades of imperial rule. With independence, Tajikistan lacked food supplies, fuel and housing, and continued to be dependent upon Moscow. The civil war exacerbated these conditions – a fact which Russia has both exploited and attempted to alleviate.⁵⁰

Russia had few economic interests in Tajikistan after 1991 and even these were of very minor importance in the debates about Russia’s involvement in the civil war. Although Tajikistan has great mineral wealth, especially in gold, aluminium and uranium, and the potential to generate hydroelectric power, these have remained unexploited because of the civil war.⁵¹ The issue, which did eventually become increasingly important, was the economic burden which Russia had accepted in order to support the Tajik government and to finance its military. Until May 1995, the Russian rouble was still used in Tajikistan and the subsequent new Tajik rouble remained dependent upon Russia’s Central Bank.⁵² Significantly, Tajikistan’s budget continued to be financed almost solely by Russia⁵³ and from

⁴⁹ International Support to Peace and Reconciliation in Tajikistan (Geneva: UNHCR, June 1997).

⁵⁰ At the end of 1996, Tajikistan’s GDP was estimated to be 40% of the 1991 level and its unemployment rate estimated at 40% by the World Bank - the highest of any CIS country. *Ibid.* p.5. With a per capita income of USD 330, Tajikistan ranks among the 20 poorest countries in the world.

⁵¹ “Tajikistan”, EIU Country Report, 4th quarter 1997, pp.19-31.

⁵² Russian newspapers reported that a group of Russian advisors influenced Tajikistan’s decision to pull out of the rouble zone. Apparently this was because of the growing financial price for its pursuit of “primarily geopolitical interests in the Central Asian region”. “In addition to non-cash credits, the Russian Central Bank has already made 120 billion cash roubles available to the Tajikistan National Bank and there were plans to provide another 20 billion. The price of political interest, however, has proved too high for Moscow, and therefore it effectively prompted the Tajikistan parliament to adopt the decision to introduce a national currency in the republic”. See Konstantin Levin, Kommersant-Daily, April 12, 1995, p.1.

⁵³ Yury Golotyuk, Segodnya, February 22, 1997, p.2.

1992 to 1997, trade with Russia continued to expand.⁵⁴ As alluded to above, by 1995-96 the costs of remaining involved in Tajikistan (especially the financing of the border troops) was increasingly criticized by politicians across the political spectrum. Many members of the political elite began to favour Russian withdrawal from the region.

With time, the negative economic situation became one of the major factors which led to the shift in Russian foreign policy thinking and, subsequently, to a new search for a political, as opposed to a military means to solve the conflict.

3. The Debates and The Policies: Russia's Military Involvement in Tajikistan 1991-1996

This section examines the Russian domestic debate and policies towards Tajikistan concerning the civil war. As in Georgia and Moldova, political discussions about how Russia should act militarily in Tajikistan revealed a disparate variety of views. However, in the case of Tajikistan there was arguably more consistency – largely due to a common perception of threats emanating from the vulnerable Afghan-Tajik border and the severe dependence of Tajikistan upon Russia. This consensus was largely due to the fact that these were consistent, “real” or “objective” interests which could not be ignored. On the other hand, the diaspora and economic interests in the Tajik case existed but were comparatively minor.

Russia's involvement in the Tajik conflict did not begin until mid-1992 after debates concerning both the Moldova-Transdnistria and the Georgia-Abkhazia conflicts were underway. By then the Russian political elite had united around the pragmatic nationalist ideas of retaining influence in the near abroad and taking responsibility for ending the conflicts. There was, therefore, already a strong constituency lobbying for Russia to take firm action in Tajikistan.

The stages of debate and policy in the Tajik case are different than those used to examine the Moldova-Transdnistria and Georgia-Abkhazia conflicts because the Tajik civil

⁵⁴ By the end of 1996, Tajikistan's GDP was at 20% of the level attained before the civil war broke out. “Tajikistan”, *EIU Country Report*, 4th quarter 1997, pp.19-31, especially pp. 20 and 31.

war did not begin until May 1992 and also because Russian policy neglected all the Central Asian states until 1993. Stage one, therefore, covers the period August 1991 to October 1992. In stage two, October 1993 to June 1996, the political elite became more divided, positions formed and debate intensified. Policy discussions became urgent. By the end of the second stage, in early 1996, evidence of a subsequent shift in policy was appearing.

a) Stage One: The Atlanticist Period (August 1991-October 1992)

i) The Debates

From the end of 1991 to the fall of 1992, there was a great deal of ignorance among the Russian political elite about the situation in Tajikistan – just as there had been about the crises in Georgia and Moldova. The information was often unclear and how Russia should react was not obvious. The lack of understanding that Yeltsin and his government had about the situation characterized their initial misinformed criticism of the Tajik communist government. In the beginning, they sympathized with the Tajik democrats' struggle against the communist regime and opposed Russia's interference in the developing conflict. In an interview with the author, Russian academic and participant in the Tajik negotiations, Irina Zviagelskaya, declared that this was a "thought-out ideological policy".⁵⁵ In other words, the Russian government wanted democracy to flourish in the CIS states and believed that the communist Tajik nomenklatura was a threat to democratic government in Russia and to the new Russian elites.

Most of the Russian political elite at the time was unaware of the Islamic element in the Tajik opposition and was not especially concerned about the so-called "Islamic threat".⁵⁶ Moreover, little was understood in Russia about the complicated nature of the struggle for power among the regional groupings or clans. This caused many initial misperceptions of the situation. For example, while the Soviet Union still existed, Yevgeny Ambartsumov, then Chair of the USSR Supreme Soviet Foreign Affairs Committee, argued that the government

⁵⁵ Author's Interview with Irina Zviagelskaya, June 8, 1999.

⁵⁶ R. Zaripov, *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, May 20, 1992, p.1.

should support the Tajik anti-communist forces under the widely-held assumption that the Tajik democrats were the primary opposition.⁵⁷ Anatoly Sobchak, head of the Democratic Reform Movement, went to Tajikistan to discover a basis on which to unite democratic forces across the state. “The goal of our movement is to unite democratic movements in the republics with the national democratic movement, thereby creating a common movement. I believe that there is a good basis for the development of this movement in Tajikistan and we are prepared to contribute and provide assistance in organising it.”⁵⁸

After the break-up of the Soviet Union, the popular Russian youth weekly, Sobesednik, was one of the first Russian newspaper to argue that there was nothing “democratic” about the Tajik opposition in October 1992 and called for Russia to send in troops to support the opponents of Islamic fundamentalism.⁵⁹ However, the Russian government’s initial anti-communist stance, its concern not to tarnish relations with the West, and the belief that the CIS states were economic burdens to Russia, meant that relations with Tajikistan were neglected. Of course, Russia’s relations with the other Central Asian states were also neglected and there was a widespread belief that they might drift away from Moscow towards Turkey and Iran. The liberal westernists in charge of foreign policy made several assumptions about the area. They believed that Russia could find natural resources elsewhere; that Central Asia would continue to be a source of instability beyond Russia’s control; that geopolitically Russia’s priorities should be towards Europe and not Asia; and that Central Asian belonged to a different civilization because of its Islamic culture. Such liberal westernist ideas dominated foreign policy decision-making even though a stable national consensus was not reached about what precise policies to take.

Meanwhile, representatives of Russia’s nationalist and communist political parties advocated the use of force to protect the Tajik communist regime. From the beginning of the war they were in favour of Russia reasserting its influence in the region and specifically they sided with Russia’s traditional communist allies – i.e. the Tajik regime.⁶⁰ Thus, as in the

⁵⁷ See Svetlana Lolaeva, “Tajikistan in Ruins”, Democratization, vol.1, no.4 (1993), pp.32-43, p.40.

⁵⁸ Igor Rotar and Oleg Panfilov, Nezavisimaya Gazeta, October 8, 1991, p.3.

⁵⁹ Kirill Svetitsky, Sobesednik, October 16, 1992, p.4.

⁶⁰ Later when the communist President Rakhmon Nabiev was forced to resign he immediately sent a telegram

case-studies of Abkhazia and Transdniestria where there were bonds between separatists and many members of the Russian political elite, at this early stage there was vocal support by Russians who held fundamentalist nationalist ideas (particularly the communists) for the Tajik communist government. The Tajik government itself also often spoke out in favour of the Russian communists.⁶¹

However, unlike in the previous conflicts, after the initial hesitation Russian politicians across the political spectrum (not only extremists) united in their support of the communist regime. A widespread perception rapidly developed that the Tajik opposition was the greater potential danger to Russia – largely due to its promotion of Islam. Deputy Foreign Minister Shelov-Kovedyaev was the first member of the MFA to acknowledge publicly Tajikistan as a priority issue. He advocated immediate, peaceful action in the form of a signed treaty to secure relations between the two states. “If, on the other hand, we delay any further, it cannot be ruled out that we would soon lose Tajikistan as a state close to Russia, for which there is no justification”.⁶²

By the summer of 1992, articles appeared in Russian newspapers of all political persuasions sympathizing with the “tragic fate” of the Russian border guards along the Tajik border, their poor pay, isolation and the uncertainty of their position squeezed on the border between two unstable foreign states.⁶³ Most of the articles concluded that these border guards were necessary because of the influx of weapons and narcotics along the porous Tajik-Afghan border. They reasoned that since Tajikistan did not yet have its own army, Moscow had no choice but to defend its border. Otherwise, it was thought that it could prove to be the “first major breach among the outposts of the collapsed empire”.⁶⁴

expressing his displeasure to the Russian parliament. Oleg Panfilov, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, September 22, 1992, p.3.

⁶¹ Shabdolov, Chairman of the Communist Party of Tajikistan in Vladimir Kostyrko, *Pravda*, February 19, 1994, p.2.

⁶² Interview by Aleksandr Gagua with Shelov-Kovedyaev, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, July 30 1992, pp.1,5.

⁶³ According to Dr. Irina Zviagelskaya, the majority of those killed had been border guards (80% of which are ethnic Tajik) and not from the 201st army. Therefore, it seems that the sympathy of the Russian public on behalf of “their Russian boys” in the Tajik army was based somewhat upon a misconception. *Author’s Interview*, with Zviagelskaya, June 8, 1999.

⁶⁴ Igor Rotar and Andrei Abrashitov, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, August 15, 1992, p.3.

Russian perceptions were also coloured by the rise of anti-Russian sentiments in Tajikistan. These were largely the product of calculated and politically motivated propaganda by both the Tajik government and the Tajik opposition to draw Russia into the conflict. For example, the Tajik government promised to allow Russians to hold dual citizenship and to elevate Russian to second state language. The government did not follow through on either promise. Russians in Tajikistan were also angered when, despite amnesty laws that had been adopted earlier, the Tajik special services conducted an active search for Russians involved in the People's Democratic Army, which had been formed during the time of the coalition government.⁶⁵

The diaspora's opinions were published in Golos Tajikistana, the newspaper of the Communist Party of Tajikistan as well as, ironically, Charogi Ruz, a private and independent newspaper established by Tajik intellectuals and journalists in March 1991 in Tajikistan.⁶⁶ Charogi Ruz was banned in December 1992 and after July 1993 was published in exile in Moscow. Although the Russian diaspora in Tajikistan was supportive of the communist regime, this newspaper was sympathetic to their plight and tried to influence Russian thinking to their side by reporting about this issue. The concerns of those Russians who remained in Tajikistan were given voice to by two organisations: Migratsiya (Migration) led by Galina Belgorodskaia and Russkaya Obshchina (Russian Community).⁶⁷

Generally the Russian-speaking population in Tajikistan understood communism to be the only defence against the Islamic movement and strongly opposed the Tajik democratic factions.⁶⁸ However, there seems to have been little mutual understanding between the indigenous population and the "outsiders" on this point or on other issues. Although the diaspora expressed nostalgia for the Soviet past and in particular bemoaned the disappearance of the unitary state, the most pressing issue for Feliks Dvornik, head of the

⁶⁵ Many articles in the Russian press detailed the rise of anti-Russian sentiments and prejudices in Tajikistan. See for example Oleg Panfilov, Nezavisimaya Gazeta, July 10, 1993, p.1; Albert Plutnik, Izvestiya, July 17, 1993, p.8.

⁶⁶ For example, Golos Tajikistana, March 31-April 6, pp.1-2.

⁶⁷ Lidiya Grafova, Literaturnaya Gazeta, December 18, 1991; Rossiyskaya Gazeta, December 24, 1992.

⁶⁸ Igor Rotar, Nezavisimaya Gazeta, October 5, 1991, p.3. Igor Rotar wrote about hearing the following statement: "I am a staunch anticommunist. But it's better for me that this street by called Lenin Prospect than, say, Islamic Revolution Prospect". Quote from Igor Rotar, Nezavisimaya Gazeta, September 24, 1991, p.3.

Russian community in Tajikistan, was the normalization of daily life – i.e. to get electricity, water and gas supply systems working properly and to guarantee the personal safety of citizens.⁶⁹

The diaspora's fate, as in Moldova and Georgia, was often exaggerated by newspapers of all political persuasions. In lengthy reports about discrimination and attacks against the Russian population in Tajikistan, newspapers warned that in Tajikistan "... the chief danger of the situation is that anti-Russian sentiment has become a mass phenomenon".⁷⁰ *Izvestiya* quoted a Russian woman in Tajikistan as saying "We are living in terror, not knowing what will happen to us tomorrow. People are actually being hunted down... We are all hostages here. But where are we to go? What we have acquired over the years has been plundered. And it's hardly likely that anyone is awaiting us in Russia".⁷¹

In order to quell the panic over a probable mass departure of Russians from Tajikistan, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* released a poll, which predicted that the threat of an influx of migrants to Russia would turn out to be exaggerated.⁷² Ruslan Khasbulatov, Chairman of the Supreme Soviet, wrote on behalf of the parliament to the acting President Iskanderov expressing his concern about the conflict. Khasbulatov called for a cease-fire and dialogue between the two warring parties. He appealed to the Tajik government to guarantee the security of the Russians living in Tajikistan.⁷³

The Russian political elite's early perceptions of the Islamic factor also influenced its policy positions towards Russian military involvement in the Tajik civil war. The adoption of Islamic slogans by small and independent grass root Tajik movements was interpreted as a potential threat to the integrity of the Russian state and its large Muslim population. Although this view broadly influenced policy it was based largely on ignorance of the reality.⁷⁴ Decades of division among the different ethnic groups and the development of

⁶⁹ Olga Gorshunova, *Rossiyskiye Vesti*, September 22, 1992, p. 2.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁷¹ Vadim Belykh and Nikolai Burbyga, *Izvestiya*, September 15, 1992, pp.1,3.

⁷² Natalya Zorkaya and Lev Gudkov "A Poll of the All-Russia Center for the Study of Public Opinion", *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, July 31, 1992, p.5.

⁷³ Khasbulatov's letter was published in *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, September 30, 1992, p.1.

⁷⁴ V. Skosyrev, *Izvestiya*, October 8, 1991, p.6.

political parties divided along ethnic lines meant that it was unlikely that Islam would become a politically unifying force (at least in the near future) in Tajikistan or in the rest of Central Asia. Moreover, the Tajik Islamic-Democratic coalition did not actually support the creation of an Islamic state but instead advocated a democratic political system based on a new constitution and the maintenance of close relations with other Islamic states.⁷⁵

Nevertheless, in an attempt to gain foreign support (especially from Russia, Uzbekistan and the West) the Tajik government continually exploited the religious element in the opposition and stressed the “threat of Islamic fundamentalism”. The fact that the Russian media widely reported the fear of Islamic fundamentalism among the Russian diaspora combined with the general atmosphere of “anti-Russian hysteria” outlined above, influenced the views of Russian politicians and foreign-policy makers.⁷⁶ For example, Russian Foreign Minister Kozyrev’s early foreign policy thinking derived from his expressed fear of Islamic fundamentalism and encirclement. Anatoly Adamishin, First Deputy Foreign Minister and Chief Negotiator to the Tajik conflict, told the author that Kozyrev believed that Russia had to contain this potential threat to regional security.⁷⁷ In contrast, other foreign policy participants such as Aleksandr Rutskoï, Ruslan Khasbulatov and Alexei Mitrofonov stressed Russia’s common interests with the Islamic world and warned that hyping up the “Islamic threat” would likely have negative consequences on Russia’s large Muslim population.⁷⁸

In this early period, therefore, the debate concerning Tajikistan was characterized by ignorance about events in Tajikistan and, as awareness of a potential threat from Islamic fundamentalism developed, a general agreement that Russia should support the communist

⁷⁵ In Mesbahi’s analysis of Tajik-Iranian relations, he explains the anti-Islamic and anti-Iranian orientations of the pro-Communist Tajik factions as stemming from either “ideological conviction, the inertia of Soviet socialization, or political convenience”. Mohiaddin Mesbahi, “Tajikistan, Iran, and the international politics of the “Islamic factor”, *Central Asian Survey*, vol.6 no.2 (1997), pp.141-158, pp.143-44. Also see Dilo Hiro, “Tajikistan: The Rise and Decline of Islamists, in Dilo Hiro (ed.), *Between Marx and Muhammad: The Changing Face of Central Asia* (London: Harper Collins Publishers, 1994), pp.189-227.

⁷⁶ See for example the FIS Report on Russia and the CIS published in *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, September 22, 1994, pp.1, 6.

⁷⁷ *Author’s Interview*, Anatoly Adamishin, June 9, 1999. Also *Author’s Interview* with Mikhail Astafiyev (Rutskoï’s deputy in charge of international relations and foreign policy), June 25, 1995.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

government there. The debates focused on precisely how and to what extent and what form the support should take.

ii) The Policy

During this early period, few Russian policies of substance were developed towards Tajikistan although two particular steps did foreshadow the continuation of a close relationship. In January 1992, Russia delivered 30 billion rubles in cash to the newly independent Tajikistan while all the other former republics were denied similar financial aid.⁷⁹ On 21 July 1992, a protocol of intentions was signed between the two states.⁸⁰ Only then was Russian Vice-Premier Aleksandr Shokhin, (who at the time favoured economic integration with Tajikistan) sent by President Yeltsin to Dushanbe to discuss, for the first time, the status of the border guards as well as the constitutional and legal protection of the Russians in Tajikistan.⁸¹ However, generally, by September 1992 so little had been done in terms of building relations between the two states that there was still no Russian embassy in Dushanbe, and not even a single Russian diplomatic employee in Tajikistan.⁸² In fact two years after the break-up of the Soviet Union, Foreign Minister Kozyrev still had not once visited any Central Asian state. Meanwhile these states drifted away from Russia – introduced their own currencies and joined international organizations.

The government's lack of an official position also reflected the great confusion over what exactly was happening in Tajikistan. To quote Yegor Gaidar:

We received information that the more radical wing of the Islamic forces was planning to use local Russians as hostages. The trouble was that we couldn't necessarily rely on the information our sources were giving us about the Tadzhikistan situation. The security ministry, as usual, had nothing concrete, the intelligence service's information was unreliable, and from our recently established embassy in Dushanbe we continued to

⁷⁹ The Russian State Committee on Economic Co-operation with the CIS confirmed this figure after the Ostankino news program aired a story on the exchange of old ruble for new Russian rubles in Tajikistan. Ivan Zhagel, *Izvestiya*, January 11, 1992, p.2.

⁸⁰ *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, August 1, 1992.

⁸¹ Natalya Pachegina, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, July 28, 1992, p.3.

⁸² Oleg Panfilov, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, September 22, 1992, p.3.

receive, with several days' delay, utterly contradictory reports.⁸³

Thus, no coherent policy existed and the Russian military was once again left on its own to respond to events in Tajikistan. When the Soviet Union disintegrated, the Russian Border Troops remained in charge of the Afghan border and the 201st Motor Rifle Division remained in Dushanbe. Both became involved in Tajik internal affairs. When the civil war broke out in May 1992, Russian-led troops in Tajikistan attempted to follow a neutral course. However, by the fall of 1992, while the forces were still officially neutral, they became engaged on the side of the communists. This one-sided support soon became a source of political stability in the country. The Russian military helped to prop up the communist government and to guard economic infrastructure (e.g. hydro-electric stations) and thus provided a semblance of political order in Tajikistan.

Paramilitary groups operated throughout the country and the Tajik government was dependent upon Russia because it had no regular army of its own. Tajikistan was the only Central Asian state that had gained almost nothing from the division of the former Soviet army. Under the Soviet Union, Tajikistan had had no military district of its own but was part of the Central Asian Military District centred in the Uzbek capital of Tashkent. Also, the apprehension that an independent Tajik Army would split and opposing groups might attack each other (as had happened in Transdnistria in Moldova) meant that Russia decided not to officially hand over weapons to the Tajik government. It was thus unsurprising that many Tajik military professionals joined the Russian border forces or the 201st Division.⁸⁴

The 201st division acted at the Tajik government's request to separate opponents, to protect refugees and guard communication sites.⁸⁵ Recently there has been an increasing amount of evidence that the Russian army was actively involved on the side of the Tajik communists from the beginning of the Tajik conflict although the 201st Motorized Infantry

⁸³ Yegor Gaidar, Days of Defeat and Victory, Jane Ann Miller (Trans.) (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2000) p. 177.

⁸⁴ Mouzaffar Olimov, "The policy of Russia in Central Asia: a perspective from Tajikistan", in Gennady Chufirin (ed), Russia and Asia: The Emerging Security Agenda (Sweden: SIPRI/Oxford University Press, 1999) pp.110-122, p.116.

⁸⁵ See, Aleksandr Karpov, Izvestiya, September 18, 1992, p.1.

Division denied this at the time.⁸⁶ Russian soldiers have now admitted to having used their tanks and armoured vehicles in the July and September 1992 clashes.⁸⁷ In October, some of the 201st soldiers also helped to defend Dushanbe. However, largely because of Moscow's lack of official policy objectives, the intervention on behalf of the communist regime was haphazard and unorganised. The Russian soldiers were preoccupied with trying to protect themselves and were not able to prevent the fighting. According to Col. Dzhurabek Aminov, First Vice-Chairman of Tajikistan's National Security Committee, the border guards were too weak to stop the opposition groups from returning to Tajikistan from Afghanistan or to prevent arms smuggling. Col. Aminov declared that 10% to 15% of the weapons used in the conflict were coming across the border from Afghanistan and the rest were the property of the Russian Army headquartered in Tajikistan.⁸⁸

The actual decision to involve the Russian troops directly seems to have been made by mid-level and junior military officers of the 201st Russian division, and also as a result of the coordination between the Tajik government and local Russian commanders.⁸⁹ Most of the 201st division officers were ethnic Russians (as opposed to the troops who were mainly Tajik) from the former Turkestan Military district of the USSR (which became the Ministry of Defence of Uzbekistan). These officers fought on the side of the Tajik communist regime because they identified themselves with the Russian-speaking residents of Tajikistan. The Russian officers also interpreted the opposition's drive to oust the government by force as a threat to their own existence. The majority of the officers of Russian troops in Abkhazia and Transdnistria were also ethnic Russian which explains why early on in the conflict, they were especially sympathetic towards the Russian diaspora in Transdnistria and comparatively less sympathetic towards the Abkhaz.⁹⁰

⁸⁶ Oleg Panfilov, Nezavisimaya Gazeta, September 22, 1992, p.3.

⁸⁷ Charogi Ruz, no.1, 1994.

⁸⁸ Col. Aminov explains that Russian border guards reported border crossings and also earned money by allowing weapons smuggling. "The methods of barter transactions are also very interesting: According to information from military intelligence, the Afghans will gladly exchange a Kalashnikov assault rifle for one electric immersion heater and three assault rifles for one household air conditioner, and two guns for one bag of flour". Oleg Panfilov, Nezavisimaya Gazeta, September 22, 1992, p.3.

⁸⁹ Itar-Tass, August 5, 1992.

⁹⁰ See Chapters Five and Six.

However, unlike Transdniestria and Abkhazia, the involvement of Russian military forces was soon clearly and officially supported by the senior command of the Russian military. By mid-1992 the military once again also had the support of the Russian Supreme Soviet and influential politicians such as Yevgeny Ambartsumov. Significantly, by actively choosing sides in the conflict, the initial Russian military action once again set the broad parameters within which future Russian debate and policy had to take place.

b) Stage Two: Achieving Consensus (October 1992 - June 1996)

i) The Debates

By late 1992, members of Russia's political elite had begun to criticize the government's lack of policy towards Tajikistan (as they had in the cases of Moldova and Georgia). Members of the political, military and industrial elite across the political spectrum denounced Yeltsin for failing to defend Russia's traditional interests in Central Asia as well as for allowing the deaths of Russian soldiers in the Tajik conflict. This diverse alliance was too vocal and too powerful for the government to ignore. Many politicians were in favour of eurasianist views – i.e., that Russia's foreign policy should be oriented towards the South, not only towards the West, and that this was preordained by geography, history, culture, the Russian diaspora in Central Asia and Russia's economic needs.⁹¹ Others adopted broader pragmatic nationalist foreign policy ideas: i.e., that Russia should preserve its interests in Central Asia including protecting the security of its southern borders, preserving its trade and economic relations and taking an active part in preserving peace in the region both to protect its Russian diaspora and to prevent other states from taking advantage of regional instability.⁹²

The Communist faction was against Russian military withdrawal and continued to verbally support the Tajik government. That support was reciprocated.⁹³ At a session of the

⁹¹Eurasianism was examined as a key idea in Russian foreign policy in Chapter 3. See Sergei Stankevich, *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, June 23, 1992; Elgiz Pozdnyakov, *Voennaya Mysl'*, no.1 (1993).

⁹² Yevgeny Ambartsumov, *Megapolis-Express*, May 6, 1992.

⁹³ The day before the storming of the White House in Moscow, Tajik newspapers sided with the Russian political opposition. One paper compared the actions of Russia's democrats with the "evil deeds of the

Council of the Union of Communist Parties (which includes the communist parties in the former republics of the USSR), the Communist Party of Tajikistan put out a statement that “The Russian Communist Party should be a uniting force...Tajikistan’s Communists have not lost hope for the revival of a single Communist Party throughout the entire territory of the Soviet Union”.⁹⁴ The Russian communists argued that Russia was responsible for the fate of Tajikistan: “Since Russia has declared itself the legal successor of the Union, it certainly should show some concern about the most vulnerable parts of the Union that it destroyed”.⁹⁵ Communists also believed that Russia now had the chance to make up for the Soviet defeat and to redeem the Russian army’s defeat in Afghanistan through military victory in the near abroad.⁹⁶ Moreover, preserving ties with Central Asian states was seen as a way to restore the Soviet legacy. Others in favour of a strong military presence included Afghan veterans,⁹⁷ members of the Russian military-industrial complex who were critical of the dismantling of the Soviet military and strategic space, as well as members of the Russian diplomatic and military community in Dushanbe. They all believed that Russia’s military presence would both reassert hegemony and protect their personal interests.

Nationalist extremists such as those in Vladimir Zhirinovskiy’s Liberal Democratic Party (LDPR) agreed that Russia had to strive to bring Tajikistan back under Russian control but thought that the best means to achieve this was through Russian withdrawal of assistance to Tajikistan. “We stop our aid, including military aid, to Tajikistan, and Rakhmonov will run

democrat-Islamists”, and spoke of Aleksandr Rutskoi, as the “acting President of Russia”. Quote from the weekly *Tadzhikiston ovozi*, cited in Oleg Panfilov, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, October 19, 1993, p.1. For the next two weeks, Tajik radio, television and newspapers kept quiet about the events in Moscow. However, then Rakhmonov sent a telegram to Yeltsin describing his move to dissolve the Supreme Soviet as an action that “will lead to the establishment of constitutionality, peace, order and legality”.

⁹⁴ Shabdolov, Chairman of the Communist Party of Tajikistan in Vladimir Kostyrko, *Pravda*, February 19, 1994, p.2.

⁹⁵ Igor Lensky, *Pravda*, July 20, 1993, p.2.

⁹⁶ “The Russian character cannot tolerate defeat or unfinished business. Isn’t it these *feelings* that are making Afghan vets *rehabilitate* themselves on the fronts of ethnic conflicts, this time on the territory of their former fatherland?” Yuri Vladimirov and Vladimir Dzhckhangir, *Pravda*, February 13, 1993, p.3.

⁹⁷ “Rising above the darkness that has engulfed the country are the in many ways contradictory but socially significant figures of Rutskoi, Lebed, Aushev, Ochirov and other Afghan vets who dragged their friends out of burning vehicles and shielded them with their own bodies, never asking what nationality they were. Doesn’t the future of our vast country and its unity lie with them? The Afghan experience should not go unheeded...” Yury Vladimirov and Vladimir Dzhakhangir, *Pravda*, February 13, 1993, p.3.

to Moscow, getting there by any means of transportation, and ask: Admit us Russia, admit us as the Dushanbe Gubernia, I implore you....”⁹⁸ Zhirinovskiy also envisioned future Russian military expeditions to end the threats emanating from Russia’s southern borders. In his book, The Final Drive to the South, he famously wrote that Russia’s destiny is to reach the shores of the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea: “I dream that any platoon of Russian soldiers will be able to establish order anywhere”.⁹⁹ Alexei Mitrofonov, in charge of LDPR foreign policy, told the author that the LDPR position was that Tajikistan was a failed state which needed Russian aid and that Russia’s military should remain there in order to ensure stability.¹⁰⁰

Members of Russia’s military elite compared the role of Russia’s army in Tajikistan to that of the Soviet Army in Afghanistan.¹⁰¹ According to Yuri Shatalin, former commander of the Fifth Guards Division which entered Afghanistan in 1979, the mission in Soviet times was to place “units on the borders of Afghanistan and to protect the borders with Iran and Pakistan”.¹⁰² The former goal remained, the border had simply receded. Only now a new political language was used: “humanitarian aid” instead of “internationalist assistance”, “peacekeeping forces” for “limited contingents”, “new world order” instead of “internationalist assistance”.¹⁰³ In another similarity to the Soviet era, the fundamentalist nationalist newspaper Den’ argued that once again the government had overestimated its military capabilities. However, the key difference was that unlike Russian soldiers today, Soviet soldiers had believed in the necessity and importance of their actions in terms of their geopolitical and ideological goals.¹⁰⁴

⁹⁸ Much later, in 1998, to counter the flow of Russian refugees from the CIS states back to Russia, Zhirinovskiy proposed that Russia should retaliate by expelling their indigenous nationalities living in Russia. Interview with Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, Izvestiya, November 30, 1998, p.1.

⁹⁹ Zhirinovskiy, Poslednii brodok na yug (Moscow: LDPR, 1993), pp.63-4.

¹⁰⁰ Author’s Interview, June 20, 1995.

¹⁰¹ Boris Gromov, the former commander of the Soviet 40th Army in Afghanistan made this observation. See Igor Rotar, Nezavisimaya Gazeta, November 20, 1993, pp.1,3.

¹⁰² Shatalin quoted at a roundtable on Soviet intervention in Afghanistan at Den’’s editorial offices. Den’, February 14-20, 1993, p.3.

¹⁰³ Yury Vladimirov and Vladimir Dzhakhangin, Pravda, February 13, 1993, p.3.

¹⁰⁴ Den’, February 14-20, 1993, p.2.

The loss of Russian lives in Tajikistan, much greater than in Abkhazia or Georgia, similarly provoked a debate specifically over the need for Russia to guard the border.¹⁰⁵ The most widely reported incidents were on 12 and 13 July 1993, when an armed group of militants (comprising approximately 200 Afghan mujahidin) based in Afghanistan crossed the Afghan-Tajik border and attacked Russian border outpost no.12. Twenty Russian border guards were killed.¹⁰⁶ Such raids had been common since December 1992 when the current Tajik government ousted the opposition forces from Dushanbe.

The cumulative effect (as in the cases of Moldova and Georgia) strengthened Russia's proponents of a more militarised policy. Immediately after the July 1993 incidents, Defence Minister Pavel Grachev flew to the area for the first time. There he declared that Russia's response ought to be to reinforce its border guards with units from Russia's 201st Motorized Infantry Division.¹⁰⁷ Russian Deputy Minister of Defence, General Konstantin Kobets, agreed with this proposal and in a visit to the Russian parliament introduced the subsequent debate over Russian military involvement in Tajikistan. In parliament Kobets declared that the withdrawal of Russian troops would have "disastrous results" and asked for permission to give the 201st division the right to provide full-scale assistance to the border guards. Apparently Yeltsin was aware of, and supported, this appeal to parliament by the Defence Ministry (which was necessary in accordance with Article 4 of the Law of Defence in which mandatory authorization by the Supreme Soviet is needed for the use of Russian troops abroad).¹⁰⁸

A debate took place in the Supreme Soviet on 14 and 15 July 1993 over the correct response to the situation on the Tajik-Afghan border.¹⁰⁹ The most vocal politician was the Chairman of the Supreme Soviet, Ruslan Khasbulatov, who in response to Konstantin Kobets' speech, complained that there had been "a cautious attempt to draw the Supreme

¹⁰⁵ As of March 22 1994 Russian troops performing peacekeeping functions in Tajikistan suffered 53 dead and 77 wounded compared to Transdnistria with 16 dead and 25 wounded and to Abkhazia with 6 dead and 15 wounded. Nikolai Burbyga, *Izvestiya*, March 23, 1994, p.2.

¹⁰⁶ James Sherr, "Escalation of the Tajikistan Conflict", *Jane's Intelligence Review*, vol.5, no.11 (November 1993), pp.514-516, p.514.

¹⁰⁷ Aleksandr Karpov and Viktor Litovkin, *Izvestiya*, July 15, 1993, p.1.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ Ivan Rodin, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, July 16, 1993, pp.1,3.

Soviet into this conflict, which may be serious.”¹¹⁰ He went on to claim that he personally could solve the problem through his contacts within the central Afghan government in Kabul. According to him, they had promised that they would settle the situation in the northern part of the country. Later Khasbulatov revealed that these contacts had been broken off because of Andrei Kozyrev’s disapproval. However, he continued to call for state-to-state talks with the leadership of Afghanistan.¹¹¹

Concurrently, a Russian parliamentary delegation (reported in Segodnya to be already inclined towards demanding greater participation in protecting the “common” border against the “destabilizing Islamic factor”) flew to Tajikistan to form an “on the spot opinion of the situation” in order to make appropriate recommendations to the Supreme Soviet.¹¹² Upon the delegation’s return to Russia, the Supreme Soviet (obviously influenced by Khasbulatov’s statements) voted overwhelmingly in favour of Kobets’ proposals, called for talks with Afghanistan, and appealed to the Central Asian states to provide military assistance to Tajikistan. The Supreme Soviet also instructed the Russian government to take “the necessary measures for the protection and safety of our compatriots with means appropriate to the circumstances”.¹¹³

The Supreme Soviet’s sanctioning of the build-up of armed forces and weapons along the Tajik-Afghan border occurred against the background of other similarly aggressive parliamentary resolutions. For example, only a short time before, parliament had passed a resolution which pressed Russian territorial claims against the Ukraine, and had also taken the unilateral step of increasing the military budget. The editors of Izvestiya argued that the Supreme Soviet was now running Russian politics and chastised Yeltsin for silence.¹¹⁴ In Yeltsin’s defence, Vyacheslav Kostikov, the Russian President’s Press Secretary, issued a statement blaming the Russian parliament for Russia’s lack of action and claimed that the government had always supported a more forceful policy.¹¹⁵ Similarly, although he continued

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Pavel Felgangaer, Segodnya, July 16, 1993, p.1.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ “The Editors’ Point of View”, Izvestiya, July 24, 1993, p.1.

¹¹⁵ Kostikov quoted in Ivan Rodin, Nezavisimaya Gazeta, July 16, 1993, pp. 1,3.

to defend the MFA's lack of immediate response to the crisis, Special Ambassador Valery Sukhin now adopted the political opposition's argument that the fate of the Russian-speaking population in Tajikistan was "a subject of priority attention and practical work for us...".¹¹⁶

An article in Izvestiya which claimed that the parliament had no choice now typified the general political and public opinion in Russia: "But what else can we do... Withdraw all Russian troops from Tajikistan... Allow the outside aggressors to satisfy their territorial claims? But what would happen to the Russian-speaking population and the entire civilian population? And how about those who are in power today, who are not simply oriented toward Russia but may be propped up by Russian bayonets?".¹¹⁷ However, the question remained whether Russia was being dragged into another Afghanistan. And withdrawing from Tajikistan was made more complicated than withdrawal from Afghanistan by the presence of 200,000 ethnic Russians and the fact that if Russian troops withdrew they would have to build another border which could have taken decades.¹¹⁸

Nevertheless, despite the growing broad consensus over Russia's security interests there remained fundamental differences in politicians' perceptions of the "Islamic threat". Khasbulatov continued to argue (against Kozyrev) that the Islamic threat had long been exaggerated and that Russia's one-sided support of the Rakhmonov regime was detrimental to Russia's interests and the development of favourable relations with Islamic states. Moreover, he claimed that this one-sided policy simply forced the Tajik opposition into the arms of Muslim radicals and increased anti-Russian feelings in the region.¹¹⁹ Key government leaders, such as Russia's former Minister of Justice Nikolai Fedorov, also criticized Kozyrev's policies upon this basis – that they would destroy Russia's relations with the Islamic world and the result would be the wrongful use of Russian force against Russia's real allies – the Tajik opposition.¹²⁰

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Albert Plutnik, Izvestiya, July 17, 1993, p.8.

¹¹⁸ Aleksandr Aleksandrov, Rossiskiye Vesti, July 22, 1993, p.1.

¹¹⁹ See Igor Rotar, Nezavisimaya Gazeta, November 20, 1993, p.1; Igor Rotar, Nezavisimaya Gazeta, November 19, 1993, p.3.

¹²⁰ Nikolai Fedorov, Rossiyskaya Gazeta, May 14, 1993, p.4. Also see Vladimir Koznechevskiy, Rossiyskaya Gazeta, August 6, 1993, p.1.

Finally, the outcry of the 20 million plus Muslim population in Russia itself also influenced foreign policy thinking about the conflict.¹²¹ Official and unofficial Muslim leaders were uneasy about the effect of the war on Russia's (and Central Asia's) Muslim population. The intensive propaganda about the "evil deeds of the Islamic Fundamentalists" widened the circle of Muslims in Russia, Central Asia and the Caucasus which already sympathized with the Tajik refugees and supported the Tajik opposition. The involvement of Russian troops in attacks against opposition Tajik groups further increased their anger. The "Volga Region Muslims" appealed to Yeltsin to stop defending the Communist regime in Tajikistan. They warned Yeltsin that Russian Muslim sympathy for the Tajik opposition was increasing with the growth of anti-Islamic rhetoric and the flood of Tajik refugees into Russia.¹²²

Mukaddas Bibarsov, leader of the Interregional Administration of Muslims of Saratov, Volgograd, and Penza Provinces made a public appeal to President Boris Yeltsin expressing his concern over the government's handling of the Tajik conflict. "The latest events have shown that the red and brown forces are well organized nearly everywhere. We are very sorry that the Russian government continues to support the fascist-Communist regime in Tajikistan". Although the position of Russia's Muslims may have influenced the development of more sympathetic views among members of the Russian political elite towards the Tajik opposition, it also highlighted the need to stabilize the Tajik conflict in order for it not to "spill over" and affect Muslim regions in Russia and the other Central Asian states. Russian Defence Minister Pavel Grachev's only response was that measures to restrain the Tajik opposition would protect the safety of Russia's Muslims.¹²³ However, along with the resurgence of Islam in Central Asia Russian foreign policy participants had to

¹²¹ As early as 1991, the Muslim clergy expressed dismay at the situation in Tajikistan. Although they generally professed not to interfere with politics, their invitations for example to Afghan opposition leaders to speak at mosques at least indicate Muslim thinking and preferences. To quote Sheik Ravil Gainutdin, President of the Islamic Center in Moscow, "The clergy's task is to lead the people away from bloodshed". Interview conducted by G. Bilyalitinova, *Pravda*, December 3, 1991, p.3.

¹²² Mukaddas Bibarsov, leader of the Interregional Administration of Muslims of Saratov, Volgograd, and Penza Provinces made a public appeal to President Boris Yeltsin published in Oleg Panfilov, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, October 22, 1993, p.3.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

take into account the fact that the Central Asian states were moving closer together politically and establishing a new grouping within the CIS.

Throughout 1994 and 1995, Russian deputies travelled to Dushanbe in order to exchange views and to establish further co-operation between Tajikistan and Russia. Many, such as Konstantin Zatulin, Chairman of the Duma's Committee on CIS Affairs and Liaison with Compatriots, continued to argue that "any expenses are warranted to preserve this southern outpost".¹²⁴ Similarly, in an article stressing the importance of Russian interests in the near abroad, Russian academic Sergei Kolchin argued that Central Asia, and especially Tajikistan, was of special interest for the development of Russian security policy. "If Russia withdraws, the country's disintegration, the transfer of Islamic fundamentalism to the territory of neighbouring republics, and sharp negative changes in the balance of power from Russia's viewpoint, are quite possible here".¹²⁵

However, many deputies were also now adopting more nuanced positions which seemed to signal the inception of a policy shift away from the continuation of military presence.¹²⁶ This did not stop the Tajik opposition paper from blaming Russia's military and MFA for following various half-hearted policies, and lacking a nuanced understanding of the situation: "...they seriously repeat the fairy tales of border-troop commanders who claim that some field commander has declared a jihad against all Russians. Everyone talks about impartiality and objectivity, but they write only what they hear from military and border troop commanders". In 1995 Vladimir Lukin, Chairman of the State Duma's Committee on International Affairs, along with Nikolai Bezborodov, the Deputy Chairman of the Committee of Defence, continued to argue that Russia's relations with countries in the post-Soviet space should be strengthened. However, he also worried about the absence of money with which to pay the existing border guards.¹²⁷

¹²⁴ Zatulin made this statement on May 5, 1995. Quoted in Igor Rotar, Nezavisimaya Gazeta, September 17, 1995, p.3.

¹²⁵ Sergey Kolchin is the head of the section on the "CIS States" at the Institute of International Economic and Political Research of the Russian Academy of Sciences. Sergey Kolchin, Mirovaya Ekonomika i Mezhdunarodnaya Otnosheniya, April 1995.

¹²⁶ Dododzhoni Atovullo, Charogi Ruz, excerpts in Izvestiya, April 13, 1995, p.5.

¹²⁷ Mikhail Karpov, Interview with Vladimir Lukin, Nezavisimaya Gazeta, March 14, 1995, pp.1-2.

A general view among the political elite evolved along the lines that Russia was in a no-win situation.¹²⁸ Russian forces could not leave Tajikistan because that would weaken Russia's influence overall in Central Asia and leave the Tajik-Afghan border open. However, at the same time the official military line was that Russia could neither financially nor politically solve the Tajik war and Russia's involvement would make her the enemy of all Islamic countries.¹²⁹ There was elite anxiety that the Tajik civil war would likely continue for decades and result in the deaths of many Russian soldiers.¹³⁰ Izvestiya reasoned that most Russian-speakers had already left Tajikistan, and that with every month of armed struggle Tajik support for Islamic fundamentalism was growing and increasingly adopting an "anti-Russia cast". Thus, according Izvestiya, Russia should solve the issue in a peaceful manner and withdraw (even if it didn't have the finances to build a new fully-fledged state border with Kazakhstan) because it would have to leave sooner or later anyway.

Other early proponents of Russian military involvement in Tajikistan also espoused increasingly isolationist policies while continuing to locate Tajikistan within Russia's sphere of vital interests. Duma deputy Andrannik Migranyan, for example, proposed to relocate Russians in Tajikistan back to Russia in order to strengthen Russia's ethno cultural unity and to improve its demographic situation. Without the presence of a Russian population in Tajikistan, Migranyan reasoned, Russia could withdraw from protecting the Afghan-Tajik border. Migranyan also believed that Russia's military presence in 1994 was not to protect Russia from aggression by Afghanistan but amounted to "direct involvement in a civil war, in which it will inevitably encounter opposition from many contiguous Muslim countries."¹³¹ Thus, he proposed that Russia withdraw its military but find the means to prevent third countries from intervening in the region. In contrast, Boris Titenko, member of the Duma Committee for Federation Affairs and Regional Policy argued that Russia should remain in Tajikistan. "We are not talking about a Russian expansion but about the

¹²⁸ According to my readings of the Russian press at the time and my interview with Valery Solovey (Gorbachev foundation) who has written on the communists and is currently preparing a book on the Russian nationalist movements. Author's Interview with Solovey, June 1, 1999.

¹²⁹ Anatoly Ladin and Vitaly Strugovets, Krasnaya Zvezda, April 11, 1995, p.1.

¹³⁰ Leonid Mlechin, Izvestiya, April 22, 1995, p.1.

¹³¹ Migranyan, Nezavisimaya Gazeta, January 18, 1994, pp.4-5, 8.

strengthening of co-operation with our brethren who were brought together by history several decades or hundred of years ago". Titenko was a member of a Duma delegation that visited Tajikistan and which included Gennady Zyuganov, leader of the Russian Communist Party and Yekaterina Lakhova, head of the Women of Russia faction.¹³²

The notion of an enemy was used both to support Russian military involvement in the region and to encourage its withdrawal. The Russian press popularised the image of an enemy at the gates by printing stories about alleged Arab mercenaries fighting in Tajikistan and an imminent "clash between Islamic South and Christian North."¹³³ Russian news agencies termed the Tajik opposition's attacks on Russian border guards as a "jihad" against Russia.¹³⁴ During this period, there were also attempts to spread rumours that various states were threatening Russian interests in Tajikistan. For example, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Economic Relations denounced the decision to establish an intergovernmental coalition among the five Central Asian states (to be known as the Central Asian Regional Union (CARU)). CARU was described as a pan-Turkic strategy designed to impede Russia's economic and political relations with its southern neighbours. "One of the chief aims of this strategy is to draw Russia into a protracted war in Tajikistan on the side of Uzbekistan... and thereby to put Russia at loggerheads with Afghanistan, China and Pakistan".¹³⁵

During 1996 the political debate over Russian military involvement in Tajikistan continued, and the debate became more of an issue of party politics than it had been previously. The controversial question of Russian troop withdrawal from Tajikistan was brought to the attention of the Duma Committee on Geopolitics in July 1996 by Liberal Democratic Party member Aleksei Mitrofonov. The Liberal Democratic Party dominated the debate and the committee concluded that the government needed to radically change its

¹³² Galina Gridneva, *Itar-Tass*, April 29, 1994.

¹³³ Oleg Panfilov, *Novaya Yezhednevnyaya Gazeta*, August 31, 1995, p.1.

¹³⁴ See for example Boris Vinogradov, *Izvestiya*, April 11, 1995, p.1. Much of this hysteria was brought on by more attacks on the border guards. Russian border troops were attacked 30 times in the first 3 months of 1995, resulting in the death of 10 Russian servicemen. Andrei Smirnov, *Kommersant-Daily*, April 13, p.4.

¹³⁵ The ministry also accused Uzbekistan of attempting to expand its territory with the support of Turkey and of having plans to intervene militarily in Kyrgystan. Vladimir Yurtayev and Anatoly Shestakov, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, May 13, 1993, p.4.

policy but still remained divided over how this should be done.¹³⁶ This debate polarized those who were for withdrawal versus those for military involvement.

In review, stage two of the debate was characterized by an assertive rhetoric and similar criticisms of government policy towards Tajikistan by members of the Russian elite across the whole political spectrum. The most vocal were the fundamentalist nationalists who argued for the use of military force. There was a consensus that a military presence was, and would continue to be needed in order to protect Russian interests. However, by the end of this period, this consensus came to be increasingly questioned.

ii) The Official Position

During this period official rhetoric towards the Tajik conflict fell in line with Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev's developing interest in the other former Soviet states.¹³⁷ In the spring of 1993, Kozyrev officially acknowledged for the first time the need for Russia to maintain close relations with Tajikistan. He declared that Russia had a "zone of special responsibility and special interests" in the region.¹³⁸ This statement signalled the government's decision to maintain Russian control over Tajikistan, to take responsibility for resolving the conflict and to act as regional leader. As a result of this decision, Tajikistan (as in the previous cases of Georgia and Moldova) was officially highlighted as an area important to Russia's national security interests. Kozyrev even suggested the possibility of using missile strikes against the Tajik opposition in Afghanistan since most of the weapon stockpiles and terrorist training camps were there.¹³⁹

Then, on 4 August 1993, in an article in Izvestiya, Andrei Kozyrev for the first time explicitly listed Russia's national interests in Tajikistan – interests that he had only acknowledged the existence of a few months before. These "real" interests included: the security and legitimate rights of the Russian community in the region, the need to "...put up

¹³⁶ Ekaterina Sytaya, Nezavisimaya Gazeta, October 15, 1996; Ekaterina Sytaya, Nezavisimaya Gazeta, October 18, 1996, p.3. The debate continued and in the spring of 1997 several Duma factions united around a proposal for "a gradual withdrawal of Russian troops from Tajikistan".

¹³⁷ See Chapter Four, as well as the Moldova and Georgia case studies – Chapters Five and Six.

¹³⁸ Oleg Panfilov, Nezavisimaya Gazeta, April 29, 1993, p.3.

¹³⁹ See Kozyrev's comments in Segodnya, July 30, 1993, p.3. and Izvestiya, July 27, 1993, p.1.

a barrier to regional-clan and Islamic extremism in Central Asia” and to “ensure security in Western and Southern Asia”.¹⁴⁰ He called for co-operation with other CIS states as well as with other “clear-thinking forces” in the Muslim world, the UN and the CSCE. Kozyrev also legitimately criticized the Supreme Soviet for hypocritically using loud rhetoric about defending Russian interests and the Russian-speaking population while at the same time withholding its consent both to allocate additional contingents of border and peacekeeping forces and to ratify the Collective Security Treaty.¹⁴¹ However, when speaking to an international audience, Kozyrev contradicted his own statements by stating that Russia did not link the Tajik problems with the situation of the Russian-speaking diaspora.¹⁴² This demonstrates how government rhetoric was chosen to suit its particular audience.

At a conference of Central Asian and Russian heads of state, participants viewed the Tajik-Afghan border as “part of the common CIS border” and signed documents declaring the inviolability of the border.¹⁴³ Thus, the vulnerability of the Tajik-Afghan border was finally officially acknowledged. It was clear that Russia was the only state which could guard the Tajik-Afghan border, and knew that if it withdrew there would no longer be a manned border all the way from the Russian Federation to Afghanistan (Russia had no defensive borders to the South except the old Soviet ones – there are no manned borders between Russia and Kazakhstan, and Kazakhstan and Tajikistan). As Yeltsin put it: the Tajik-Afghan border was “in effect Russia’s”.¹⁴⁴ Deputy Foreign Minister Adamishin, supported by many liberal experts in Moscow such as Sergei Blagovolin¹⁴⁵, also argued that Russian involvement in the conflict was necessary to curb the “instability and terrorism fuelled by Islamic fundamentalism”.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁰ Andrei Kozyrev, *Izvestiya*, August 4, 1993, p.4.

¹⁴¹ As seen in Chapter Four, the major multilateral document, the May 15 1992 Tashkent agreement on collective security, was significant in that it legalized Russian military presence within many CIS states as well as the joint use of military force to repel aggression. Ivan Novikov, “Duma ratifies CIS Collective Security Treaty Protocol”, *Itar-Tass*, 5 November 1999.

¹⁴² Kozyrev speaking with Douglas Hurd, quote in Maksim Yusin, *Izvestiya*, 29 October 1993, p.3.

¹⁴³ “Press Briefing by Grigory Karasin, from the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs”, *Official Kremlin International News Broadcast*, August 10, 1993 (Lexis-Nexis)

¹⁴⁴ “The Empire Strikes Back”, *The Economist*, August 7, 1993, p.36.

¹⁴⁵ Sergei Blagovolin *Moskovskiy Novosti*, no.31 (1 August 1993).

¹⁴⁶ *Author’s Interview with Adamishin*, June 9, 1999.

However, this was not a signal that a common great-power imperial drive was motivating politicians across the political spectrum, the parliament and the government. Rather, there was an expressed consensus that the military presence in Tajikistan was vital to Russia in order to defend a border which was threatened by Islamic radicalism, terrorism and trade in drugs and arms. Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Georgy Kunadze, in charge of Russia's relations with the Central Asian states, defined Russia's interest in Central Asia as a "specific geopolitical interest – to prevent the explosive charge of Islamic extremism (by no means fundamentalism) from penetrating into Russia. His understanding of Russia's practical interest was expressed as – "if we leave this frontier, then we must decide where we are going to build a new border, and in what time period".¹⁴⁷ An alliance with a weak Tajik state supported by Russian troops was seen therefore as the least risky way to ensure the defence of the border. The issue of the poorly armed border was also used to legitimise the views of those who wanted to increase Russian presence in the region.

Kozyrev's position continued to harden. At the beginning of the inter-Tajik talks in 1995 he declared that Russia "will not tolerate the deaths of its servicemen on the Tajik-Afghan border" and if necessary will use "all means at its disposal" to protect the southern borders of the CIS".¹⁴⁸ This emphasis on the use of force was similarly repeated at a meeting of the Foreign Policy Council but this time concerned the problem of the Russian-speaking population outside the Russian Federation. Aleksei Vasil'ev, a Middle-East expert, proposed a set of actions to prevent the violations of the rights of Russians abroad, including the use of direct force.¹⁴⁹ This interest in the fate of the Russian soldiers and diaspora in Tajikistan was part of Russia's increasingly assertive position.

The emphasis of the official rhetoric shifted with the appointed of Yevgeny Primakov as foreign minister in early 1996. Earlier at a forum on NATO expansion in 1990, Primakov had argued that the Islamic threat was exaggerated. He criticized the West and its

¹⁴⁷ Interview with Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Georgy Kunadze in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, July 29, 1993, pp.1,3.

¹⁴⁸ Leonid Velekhov, *Segodnya*, April 20, 1995, p.5.

¹⁴⁹ Vasil'ev was director of the Russian Academy of Science's Institute of Asian and African Studies. Dmitry Gornostayev, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, April 19, 1995, p.1.

undifferentiated labelling of political Islam as religious fundamentalism.¹⁵⁰ In other words, Primakov interpreted the Islamic movement in Tajikistan not as a threat but as a “legitimate” political phenomenon – a return to Islamic roots and traditions characteristic of the Islamic revival in most of the Muslim world. His tolerant and realistic perspective of Islam contributed to a shift in foreign policy. Those officials responsible for Tajikistan at the MFA were replaced.¹⁵¹ He placed emphasis on political, as opposed to military, instruments in order to end the civil war. By 1996 Russia was “vitaly interested” in seeing the situation stabilized and called for negotiations to be stepped up.¹⁵² Of course, this also reflected the position of Rakhmonov who was now calling for negotiations with the Islamic opposition to “forgive joint injuries and build a new Tajikistan together”.¹⁵³

iii) The Policy

The foreign policy debates seen above, which responded to events in Tajikistan and Central Asia as well as Russian domestic politics, prompted a change in Russian policy in 1993. The relative agreement in perception among the members of the political elite, military and the executive about Russia’s interests in Tajikistan made Russian policy more stable than towards the Transdnistria and Abkhazia conflicts. In line with its new position, on 23 May 1993 the Russian government signed a “Treaty of Friendship, Co-operation and Mutual Assistance” with Tajikistan as well as an agreement on the status of Russian Federation border troops and military formations in Tajikistan. The agreement stipulated that Russian border troops would remain in Tajikistan until the Tajik government could deploy its own border troops. Russia was now committed to continuing to protect the Tajik-Afghan border as well as defending the incumbent Tajik government.¹⁵⁴ Its involvement was finally institutionalised.

¹⁵⁰ Interfax, April 5, 1996.

¹⁵¹ In February 1996, Deputy Foreign Minister, Boris Pastukov, became the Russian envoy to Tajikistan, and in July 1996, Yevgeny Mikhailov was appointed the new special representative of President Yeltsin to Tajikistan.

¹⁵² Leonid Velekhov, Segodnya, January 30, 1996, p.3.

¹⁵³ Umed Babakhanov, “Dushanbe’s Road to China”, Focus Central Asia, no.2 (February 1996), pp.51-54, p.53.

¹⁵⁴ See Keith Martin, “Tajikistan: Civil War without End?”, RFE/RL Research Report, vol.2, no.23 (August 20, 1993), pp.18-29, p.27.

After the series of border shootings described above, Yeltsin reasserted his control over foreign-policy making and took a key step in coordinating its implementation. On 27 July 1993, he appointed Andrei Kozyrev as the President's special representative for the settlement of the conflict and charged Minister of Defence Pavel Grachev with the overall day-to-day responsibility to coordinate the manpower and resources of the various ministries.¹⁵⁵ The very next day, in keeping with decisions previously made by parliament, Yeltsin signed a decree "On Measures to Settle the Conflict on the Tajik-Afghan Border and to Normalize the Overall Situation on the Russian Federation's Borders".¹⁵⁶ This decree assigned different tasks to the various Russian government ministries in order to provide social services and, in effect, prop up the Tajik state.

There followed a period of "shuttle diplomacy" in which Russia reasserted its interests in Central Asia. The then Director of Russia's Foreign Intelligence Service, Yevgeny Primakov, was sent on a trip to Afghanistan and Iran. Adamishin visited Tajikistan and the Central Asian states.¹⁵⁷ The rise of Islam in Central Asia as a whole explains (along with the economic crises) why the Central Asian elite began to increase bilateral and multilateral co-operation with Russia in 1993.

Yeltsin also asserted his control over the Tajik situation by firing Viktor Barannikov, the Security Minister and head of the Russian Border troops on 28 July 1993. Although Barannikov was officially accused of "violation of ethical norms and shortcomings related to his leadership" of the Border Troops, it seems more probable that the real reason for his firing was his criticism of the Security Council.¹⁵⁸ A new Security Council was formed whose authority remained in question. Its new Secretary, Yevgeny Shaposhnikov, confirmed that the Security Council lacked any real influence and when asked how the situation in Tajikistan was being dealt with he replied, "The President is on vacation".¹⁵⁹ Thus Yeltsin's

¹⁵⁵ "Nothing Will Change for the Better", *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, July 28, 1993, p.3.

¹⁵⁶ It was reported in the Russian media that the President believed the exacerbation of the situation was a threat to Russia's vitally important interests and its security, and that the low level of readiness to repel armed attacks on border-troops was leading to unjustified casualties. Viktor Litovkin, *Izvestiya*, July 29, 1993, p.2.

¹⁵⁷ Nikolai Paklin, *Izvestiya*, August 3, 1993, p.1; Aleksandr Karpov, *Izvestiya*, July 31, 1993, p.1. Also, *Author's Interview* with Adamishin, June 9, 1999.

¹⁵⁸ *Rossiyskiye Vesti*, July 28, 1993, p.1, *Izvestiya*, July 29, 1993, pp.1-2.

¹⁵⁹ Interview with Yevgeny Shaposhnikov in Mikhail Ivanchikov, *Megapolis-Express*, no.29 (July 29,1993),

control of foreign policy was seen as paramount (and more effective than at this stage in the Transdnistria and Abkhazia conflicts) – even if his leadership was at times lacking.

Finally, in August 1993, the Russian government began to advocate political as well as military solutions to the conflict. That month for the first time, Russia, followed by Uzbekistan, exerted pressure on the Tajik leaders to conduct political negotiations with the leaders of the opposition. Significantly, the Russian government also committed itself to increasing the number of border troops in Tajikistan and promised additional military, economic and humanitarian aid.¹⁶⁰ Also for the first time, Russia began to actively seek the involvement of the United Nations in the settlement of the conflict.¹⁶¹

Meanwhile, the government's Popular Front's military forces continued to attack opposition supporters and rival ethnic groups in the countryside. By mid 1993, most of Tajikistan was under its control. However resistance continued and the conflict turned into a guerrilla war with the opposition forces concentrated in refugee camps across the Afghan border. Soon after the July 1993 attacks on Border Post no.12, at Tajikistan's request Russia assumed the burden of peacekeeping in August 1993, making its involvement in the conflict official. A CIS peacekeeping force was formed mostly drawn from the Russian 201st division with token contingents from Kazakhstan, Kyrgystan and Uzbekistan. Even this minor involvement of other CIS states showed Russia's willingness to develop relations within the CIS framework.¹⁶²

From 1994-96 Russian policy supported the inter-Tajik negotiations and maintained a military presence.¹⁶³ During these years, the Russian MFA actively promoted Russia's role as mediator in the negotiations between the Tajik regime and its opposition while supporting the

p.13.

¹⁶⁰ This occurred at the Central Asian-Russia Summit on Tajikistan on 9 August 1993. See RFE/RL News Briefs, vol.2, no.33 (August 9-13,1993), p.8.

¹⁶¹ During the UN General Assembly in September 1993, Kazakhstan and Russia asked the UN to give the CIS armed forces in Tajikistan (the 201st Division) a mandate to operate as a UN peacekeeping force. Dmitry Gornostayev, Nezavisimaya Gazeta, September 30, 1993, p.1.

¹⁶² This CIS force was deployed in October 1993 and commanded by Russian Colonel-General Boris Pyankov.

¹⁶³ See Semyon Bagdasarov (Chief expert of the Asia Strategic Studies Foundation), in Nezavisimoye voyennoye obozreniye, supplement to Nezavisimaya Gazeta, April 22, 1995, pp.1-2. There was a widespread feeling that it was time that "Russia's interests" were served rather than those of an individual or department.

Rakhmonov regime. Negotiations under UN aegis began in Moscow in April 1994, during which three main issues were discussed: measures to reach a political settlement of the conflict in Tajikistan; repatriation of refugees; changes in the constitution; and the integration of the Tajik people.¹⁶⁴ The negotiations resulted in a temporary cease-fire agreement on 17 September 1994, which came into effect that October with the arrival of UN observers.¹⁶⁵

Immediately after the cease-fire, Yevgeny Primakov, then the director of Russia's Federal Intelligence Service, presented the 1994 FIS Report which stated that "... the neutrality of the Russian forces involved in resolving conflicts is guaranteed by the pledges made by the Russian Federation when coordinating the terms and framework of the peacekeeping operations with all the interested parties".¹⁶⁶ Russia's other policy priorities at the time were to bring about early presidential and parliamentary elections in Tajikistan as well as a referendum on a new Tajik constitution which would legitimise the regime in the eyes of the international community.¹⁶⁷ However, because only Rakhmonov and Abdumalik Abdulladzhonov contested the presidential elections in November 1994, and predictably Rakhmonov's power was confirmed, many analysts have dubbed Russian political support as one-sided. Western analyst Lena Jonson, for example, argues that the election was a serious example of Russian interference in Tajikistan.¹⁶⁸ Similarly, in the parliamentary elections of February 1995, the Tajik opposition was prevented from participating.

Russian policy at the same time continued to advocate close military relations with Tajikistan. In 1995, Russian Deputy Prime Minister Aleksei Bolshakov negotiated an accord in which Russia would provide the Tajik state with Russian military equipment. The attempt to create a Tajik army made little progress, however, leaving internal and external security in

¹⁶⁴ Mekman Gefarly, Segodnya, April 14, 1994, p.5.

¹⁶⁵ A Joint Commission was set up in accordance with the 1994 cease-fire agreement. See UN Document, S/1994/1102, annex 1.

¹⁶⁶ "Text of FIS Report Presented by Primakov", in Rossiyskaya Gazeta, September 22, 1994, pp. 1,6.

¹⁶⁷ See Lena Jonson, The Tajik War, A Challenge to Russian Policy (London: RIIA, 1997), p. 9.

¹⁶⁸ Allegedly both the chairman of the Russian delegation at the inter-Tajik talks, Alexander Oblov, and Deputy Foreign Minister Albert Chernyshev, confirmed that Yeltsin actually gave orders for the elections and the referendum to be carried out in order to allow Rakhmonov to remain in control. Oleg Panfilov, Nezavisimaya Gazeta, May 17, 1996, p.3; Arkady Dubnov, Izvestiya, November 2, 1994, p.3; Oleg Panfilov, Nezavisimaya Gazeta, March 2, 1995, pp.1-2.

Russian hands and prompting General Grachev to declare in 1995 that the 201st division would remain in Tajikistan at least until 1999.¹⁶⁹ Grachev thought that the army should protect the border, whereas Andrei Nikolaev, Commander in Chief of the Border troops, believed that this was the job of the border troops.¹⁷⁰

Russia's key goals of providing peace and stability remained elusive. Although the 1994 ceasefire declaration stated that future negotiations would consider the state's political and constitutional structure, there was no accommodation over power-sharing. Neither did the Peace negotiations progress much during 1995 and meanwhile the Tajik opposition advanced militarily into the interior of Tajikistan.¹⁷¹ Then, on 25 May 1995, an agreement of Co-operation and Mutual Assistance was signed in Moscow between the conflicting parties.¹⁷² This agreement called for mutual respect of national sovereignty and territorial integrity, peaceful resolution of conflicts and non-use of force, equal rights and non-interference in each other's internal affairs.¹⁷³

In spite of the 25 May agreement, the civil war progressed. Russia's 201st Division was drawn further into the conflict and there is substantial evidence that it helped the former-communist Tajik government remain in power. Some analysts have gone so far as to claim that Russia "never pursued a policy of trying to limit the conflict and forcing the warring clans to negotiate".¹⁷⁴ However, although Russia's military role was at first ill defined and biased, it also helped to guard key economic installations and later assisted with humanitarian aid and the migration of refugees. Most significantly, it acted (or attempted to act) as guarantor of agreements between the warring parties.

¹⁶⁹ Andrei Smirnov, Kommersant-Daily, April 13, 1995, p.4.

¹⁷⁰ Igor Rotar, Nezavisimaya Gazeta, September 17, 1994, p.3.

¹⁷¹ In a sign that this was of concern to Moscow, Dmitry Ryurikov, aide to Yeltsin on international affairs, was sent to Tajikistan. Oleg Panfilov, Nezavisimaya Gazeta, November 23, 1995, p.3.

¹⁷² The text of this agreement was printed in News of the Parliament, Dushanbe, no.14 (1993), p.148.

¹⁷³ In the winter of 1995-96, Tajikistan decided to join the CIS Customs Union and signed other bilateral agreements with Russia on trade and economics. However, virtually none were implemented and, by the end of 1995, Tajikistan was the last CIS member obliged to leave the rouble zone. The Customs Union was formed on January 20th 1995 between Belarus, Kazakhstan and Russia. Kyrgystan joined in May 96. See Elmira Akhundova, Literaturnaya Gazeta, no.23 (June 5, 1996), p.2.

¹⁷⁴ William Odom and Robert Dujarric, Commonwealth or Empire?: Russia, Central Asia and the Transcaucasus (Indianapolis: Hudson Int., 1995), p.256.

However, despite the numerical and technical superiority of the Tajik government forces aided by the Russian troops, poor lines of communication gradually undermined Russia's control of the region.¹⁷⁵ Russian garrisons inside Tajikistan did not manage to maintain peace in the countryside but only in most of the large cities and towns (with the exception of Gorno-Badakhshan where local warlords dominated). A large segment of the population joined paramilitary units and thus the Russian troops and "peacekeepers" had to engage them as well as guerrilla incursions from Afghanistan.¹⁷⁶

Some analysts are inclined to view Tajikistan's civil war as the first drug war on the territory of the former USSR, waged primarily with the aim of carving out permanent paths for narcotics from the "Golden Crescent" to the CIS states and Europe. It seems that throughout the post-Soviet space, local wars, separatism and the narcotics business have been interconnected. Extremist forces needed money to continue their wars and this was readily available if they form liaisons with the drug mafia. Moreover, the area was characterized by ideal conditions for the drug trade: a wealth of raw materials for narcotics, the easy penetrability of borders, the absence of strong and well-organized special services, political instability, corruption and poverty. Deputy Foreign Minister and Chief Negotiator to the Tajik crisis, Anatoly Adamishin, went so far as to say that drug trafficking was responsible for most events in Tajikistan.¹⁷⁷

Officially, the Russian border troops were not supposed to intervene in the internal Tajik conflict but simply seal the border. However, since the border played such an important role in the conflict, the border guards became party to the conflict by their very presence.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁵ An article in *Izvestiya*, written from the Tajik-Afghan border, detailed a July 13, 1993 attack on Russian border guards and blamed the lack of communications, which the reporter said have "changed little" from the time of the Russian Civil War. "...all hope rests on a telephone with a hand-held receiver and a wire that can easily be cut..." Vadim Belyk, *Izvestiya*, July 17, 1993, pp.1,8.

¹⁷⁶ Yulia Goryacheva, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, May 5, 1993, p.6.

¹⁷⁷ *Author's Interview* with Adamishin, June 9, 1999. There have been rumours in the media that elements within the Russian military had been involved in the drug trade and that large amounts of arms and munitions were freely distributed by the Russian army to political groups or sold for food and alcohol supplies. See Yulia Goryacheva, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, May 5, 1993, p.6.

¹⁷⁸ In Tajikistan, the Russian Group of Border Troops represents the largest force operating outside Russia. A series of deaths of Russian border guards in Tajikistan in June 1993 seen above led Yeltsin to overhaul the intelligence and security organs in late December 1993. In August 1993 Col. General Andrei Nikolaev became Commander of the Border Troops as well as deputy minister for National Security. Richard Woff, "The Border

Similar to the Russian and CIS “peacekeeping” troops, they also at times acted in support of the Tajik government against the military units of the Tajik opposition.¹⁷⁹ Of course, often this was in self-defence since they were repeatedly attacked and harassed¹⁸⁰ and they were unable to seal the border effectively.¹⁸¹

The general stability during this period which allowed the beginning of peace talks, may have been partly due to the presence of the CIS peacekeepers. However, since there was little success in the forming of a Tajik army or contingent of border guards, the burden of the war continued to rest upon the Russian Border Guards and the 201st division. The CIS force was in no position to ensure the victory of either side. It basically followed its mandate which was to support the border guards and prevent rebels from Afghanistan from crossing the border into Tajikistan. These tactics helped Russia to support the Tajik government but could not solve the problems or bring long-term peace. The war reached a stalemate.¹⁸²

Then, consistent with the appointment of Primakov as Foreign Minister in early 1996 and the stalemate in the war, a distinct change in Russian policy became discernible. At the January 1996 CIS summit meeting Russia began to pressure Rakhmonov into reaching a compromise with the political opposition in order to bring the conflict to an end.¹⁸³ The costs of the war were becoming such that withdrawal was starting to look like a serious option. At this time, the Tajik government also received assistance from the IMF, thus relieving some of the responsibility for Tajikistan’s problems from Russia’s shoulders. Also, Rakhmonov seemed to be losing authority, which made Russia’s one-sided support of the regime even more tenuous. Therefore, the Tajik government was warned by Russia that the CIS

Troops of the Russian Federation”, *Jane’s Intelligence Review*, vol.7, no.2 (February 1995), pp.70-73.

¹⁷⁹ Anatoly Adamishin acknowledged this in a conversation with the head of the Tajik’s opposition delegation, Hajji Akbar Turadzhonzoda. See interview with Turadzhonzoda in Arkady Dubnov, *Izvestiya*, March 10, 1993, p.3.

¹⁸⁰ Human Rights Watch/1997 Helsinki Overview in UNHCR, *REFWORLD Country Information*, 1998.

¹⁸¹ Nassim Jawad and Shahrbanou Tadjbakhsh, *Tajikistan: A forgotten Civil War* (London: Minority Right Group, 1995), p.22.

¹⁸² To quote Michael Orr, “Thus Russia is leading a CIS intervention which falls between two stools; it is too compromised by its support for one party in the dispute to be accepted as a peace-keeping force, but not sufficiently committed to fight a counter-insurgency campaign”. Michael Orr, *The Russian Army and the War in Tajikistan* (Camberly: CSRC, February 1996), pp.6-7.

¹⁸³ Yuliya Ulyanova, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, January 13, 1996, p.2.

peacekeeping force's mandate would not be extended indefinitely. Then in a shift from previous policy, during the June 1996 inter-Tajik talks Primakov met for the first time with the leaders of the Tajik opposition.¹⁸⁴ He now took a more neutral position in finding a political solution to the war.

4. Conclusions

As in the Moldova-Transdnistria and Georgia-Abkhazia conflicts, Russian interests in the Tajik civil war were influenced by Soviet and Tsarist history in the region. Russia inherited a relatively small diaspora in Tajikistan, a large military presence and a history of Tajik economic dependence. Its key interest was in security: to protect the Tajikistan-Afghan border in order to ensure stability in Tajikistan and prevent the spread of Islamic fundamentalism.

The security interest (particularly protecting the border) allowed little room for debate over policy options. It also dictated that continued military presence would be the obvious means to achieve this goal. The questions of whether or not Russia should protect its tiny diaspora or preserve its economic ties were more debatable, but also much less important in the perception of the Russian elite. Since significant material interests in Tajikistan were easily identified by the political elite both inside and outside of government, the debates over Russia's involvement were far less controversial than in the other two case studies.

In the first stage, August 1991 to October 1992, the Russian government and political elite began by supporting the Tajik opposition which they believed to be the "democratic" side. This was reflective of their liberal westernist general foreign policy ideas which consisted of rebuttals of legacies of the Soviet era legacy and focus on the West.

¹⁸⁴ The result (outside the time frame of this thesis) was an agreement between Rakhmonov and Abdullo Nuri signed on December 23, 1996 which created the Council of National Reconciliation. Already by October 1996, the issue of defending the porous Tajik-Afghan border (from the rebels) was a secondary issue. The Tajik opposition had already moved the majority of its fighters into central Tajikistan, and aware of increased Russian attention on this area, was attempting to avoid conflict with CIS forces. "Summary of Inter-Tajik Peace Talks (1996-97) and Prospects for Voluntary Repatriation to Tajikistan" in UNHCR Memorandum, April 1, 1997, 97/MA04/M/07.

After some initial confusion and hesitation, the key issues discussed became fear of the spread of Islamic fundamentalism and the fate of the Russia diaspora, border guards and troops. This led relatively quickly to elite consensus that Russian involvement was necessary to bring peace to the region and that supporting the Tajik communists would best serve Russia's strategic interests. In this case, by the time Russia's military became officially involved in Tajikistan, liberal westernist ideas had already been discarded in political debates. Meanwhile, however, no official policies were developed towards the mounting conflict in the area. The Russian army on the ground at first independently became involved on the ground in its support of the Tajik communists. Thus, after initial hesitation and until the end of 1992 the dominant pragmatic nationalist ideas expressed in the Russian debates were in line with the involvement of the Russian army even though no coherent policy was announced.

By the beginning of the second stage, from October 1992 to January 1996, Russia was already militarily involved in the Moldovan and Georgian conflicts. Due to experience from these two situations, and a consensus in debates over foreign policy in general, a broad agreement developed across the political spectrum that Russia should remain involved in Tajikistan and protect its interests through military means if necessary. This position was backed up by many of those who favoured eurasianist views and was even dominant in the debates before an official Russian policy developed. The attacks on Russian border guards (in particular the incidents in July 1993) brought the Tajik issue to a broader Russian audience, encouraged official rhetoric to be more forceful, and brought about increasingly sophisticated political debates. Considerable differences in the details of policy positions began to emerge - for example, over how great the threat was from Islamic fundamentalism and how long Russia could afford to remain involved in Tajikistan.

Meanwhile, foreign policy positions in this period became more coherent and co-ordinated. They reflected the dominant foreign policy ideas in the political debates as there was an official acknowledgement of the border as an issue of paramount concern and Fundamentalist Islam as a threat. Across the political spectrum, the issue of the Russian

diaspora (which was of little objective concern) was used to convince the public of the need for Russian military engagement. Following the "road map" which had been outlined in the debates, Russia institutionalised its role as a peacekeeper in the conflict and provided official support for the communist government.

A study by RAND concluded that Russian policy in Tajikistan "was not based on assessments of long-term Russian interests in the region, but on ad hoc evaluations, as well as on personal preferences and antipathies".¹⁸⁵ This contention is disputed by the present analysis which has shown that Russian foreign policy was broadly in line with a pragmatic assessment of Russian interests. The shift in policy in 1993 when an agreement was signed that Russian troops would remain in Tajikistan and Russia committed itself to protecting the Tajik-Afghan border and the partial shift in 1996 when efforts were initiated to reach an impartial political solution to the Tajik war, were preceded by a change in the thinking of the political elite. By 1996, the high costs (financial and in terms of human lives), the emigration of the Russian diaspora from Tajikistan, and the intractability of the conflict encouraged a shift in thinking towards a political solution and the possibility of withdrawal. Once again, ideas and their evolution in political circles along with the events in the field were important in the development and support of Russian foreign policies.

¹⁸⁵ Arkady Dubnov, "Tadjikistan" in Jeremy Azrael and Emil Payin (eds.), US and Russian Policymaking with Respect to the Use of Force (Santa Monica: RAND, 1996).

Chapter Eight: Conclusions

This thesis aimed to provide a detailed and nuanced interpretation of the pattern of interests, ideas/debates, policies and actions concerning Russia's political and military involvement in specific CIS conflicts. It began by asking what the dominant ideas expressed in Russia's foreign policy debates were, and whether they were reflected in Russia's policies towards specific military conflicts in the CIS states from 1991 to 1996. To answer this, the dominant ideas were identified, the major stages in the debates and policies were traced, and a comparison was made between Russia's political debates, policies and actions towards the Moldova-Transnistria, Georgia-Abkhazia and Tajikistan conflicts.

Several avenues of inquiry were pursued – a study of how ideas may influence policy choice, detailed evidence from primary sources and personal interviews concerning the range of foreign policy views of members of the political elite, distinctions between Russia's "real" and perceived interests (including the facts of their historical development), and a carefully documented examination of debates, policies and actions specific to the three case studies. In reviewing the evidence, the general finding of the thesis was that broad foreign policy ideas and orientations provided the framework or context within which debates occurred and policies were formulated and pursued. In all three cases, the ideas and debates helped to define the parameters of acceptable foreign policy options. On the whole, there was congruence between the dominant ideas within the debates and the foreign policies enacted towards the specific conflicts. Debates and policies were both developed within, and conditioned by, the domestic environment in Russia and in response to particular events in the near abroad. Military actions tended to start independently as local initiatives, but later fell in line with government policy.

1. Content

First, the thesis identified the broad, dominant ideas about foreign policy and showed how they set the parameters for both the general foreign policy thinking of the Russian

political elite and also the narrower, more specific policy orientations and proposals concerning the near abroad. When the new post-Soviet era began, several different options were debated concerning how to define Russia and its future policies. A matrix of ideas helped to shape the political elites' perceptions, motives, commitments and approaches to specific issues.

The ideas expressed by members of the political elite as they sought to define a new national identity for Russia – a new state mission, self-perception, geography, politics and economics – provided the policy options that were debated. These ideas acted as “focal points” which structured the three basic foreign policy orientations – liberal westernism, pragmatic nationalism and fundamentalist nationalism. These ways of thinking about foreign policy in turn suggested “road maps”, framed foreign policy issues and thus guided a range of foreign policy proposals towards the near abroad. Political parties' foreign policy proposals generally fit into these three orientations with the nationalists and communists essentially adhering to the fundamentalist nationalist view, the centrists to pragmatic nationalist views and the reformers or liberal democrats to liberal westernist views. Political parties affected the general foreign policy debates through their expression of general, and often relatively undeveloped and sometimes incoherent, ideas in their policy platforms and in the media, and impacted on the formulation of policy particularly through their involvement in parliament.

Second, the thesis indicated that foreign policy debates evolved in relation to shifts in the domestic political context. It linked the three broad foreign policy orientations to prominent foreign policy participants – paying particular attention to their views as articulated in the media. Three periods of historical importance in the evolution of debates and policy were traced: the Atlanticist period (August 1991 - March 1992), the period in which there was a battle of ideas (March 1992 - November 1993) and the period in which a consensus was formed (November 1993 - June 1996). Gradually over these three stages, pragmatic nationalist ideas became dominant in the debates; and the broad contours of foreign policy followed pragmatic nationalist prescriptions. This guidance was useful to

many members of the political elite in their search for (as well as justification of) concrete foreign policies.

Adoption of these ideas in the general political discourse of the elite and in the official government position occurred at a time when competing ideas and ideologies were relatively tarnished. Marxism-Leninism, with its emphasis on class conflict and its “zero sum” view of international politics, was in disrepute. Disillusionment with the liberal westernist views and the policy prescriptions they entailed set in relatively quickly. Foreign policy throughout the three stages was not based on a unifying idea like socialism, but rather on how the political elite conceived Russia and its role in the world, the actions of a government seeking legitimacy, and external events in international relations, particularly in the near abroad. Despite the fact that pragmatic nationalist ideas did not have the prescriptive value of a comprehensive ideology, they did provide a basis on which to create and develop general policy goals.

Pragmatic nationalist ideas affected foreign policy choices in the domestic political process by creating conceptual “road maps” which helped to steer foreign policy. Influenced by domestic and external events, pragmatic nationalism significantly influenced the broad foreign policy direction, was adopted in government rhetoric and official statements, institutionalised in official doctrine (the Foreign Policy Concept and Military Doctrine) and it was sometimes reflected in action. However, despite the overall congruence between the ideas within the debates and official policy towards the near abroad, pragmatic nationalism did not dictate all specific foreign policy outcomes primarily because of Russia’s limited financial resources and military means.

Third, the thesis detailed the evolution of Russia’s debates, official policies, and military and political actions towards the conflicts in three CIS states where Russia was militarily involved: the separatist war between Moldova and Transdnistria; the separatist war between Georgia and Abkhazia; and the civil war in Tajikistan. The case studies located the specific debates about Russia’s involvement within the context of internal and external events and Russian interests. All three case studies began with an examination of Russia’s

key security, diaspora and economic interests in the particular conflict and briefly showed how they were conditioned by Soviet and Tsarist Russian history.

In all three cases it was found that Russia inherited from Tsarist and Soviet history a geographical proximity that made the conflicts difficult to ignore and a large military presence. In 1991, the Russian Federation inherited the responsibilities and difficulties of dealing with these and other “remnants of empire”. However, the extent of Russia’s economic ties varied from case to case and so did the size of the Russian diaspora.

The uniqueness of Russia’s historical relations with Moldova, Georgia and Tajikistan also helps to explain differences in the debates about each conflict. For example, there were fewer disagreements over how to act in the case of Tajikistan partly because Tajikistan was, and continued to be, the most dependent of the three states upon Russia (economically and militarily). This reinforced the perception that Tajikistan’s stability and security was in Russia’s interest. The Soviet legacy in Tajikistan had left it with the poorest economy, the weakest sense of national identity and the highest number of Russian troops. Most significantly, it was perceived as the most vulnerable of the three states to pressures from other states and from Islamic fundamentalism.

However, these historical legacies did not dictate particular policies. There was a significant amount of controversy about their significance and whether and how to protect them. Members of the political elite’s perceptions of Russian interests also evolved over time as new events took place and more knowledge became available. Therefore, in each case, when the conflict broke out there was some room for debate about the direction of Russian foreign policy. In the case of Tajikistan, the environment was significantly more constraining and from the outset, therefore, there was greater consensus within the elite as to what needed to be done.

The thesis showed that the debates about Russia’s policies towards these specific conflicts often remained at a general or ideological level. Thus, the general political debates and the search for the principles of Russian foreign policy broadly informed more precise questions about what policy Russia should adopt towards the specific conflicts and helped to

define policy options. A consensus developed that Russia should attempt to develop close relations with the near abroad states, and should be involved in solving the conflicts on its borders (by political or even military means if necessary). This general consensus paralleled a shift in the debates and policies towards the specific conflicts: a reordering (or development) of foreign policy goals and priorities; the adoption of more assertive official rhetoric; a practical emphasis on defining and protecting Russian interests; and the continuation of Russian political and military involvement in bringing about peace and finding solutions to end the conflicts. Not surprisingly, this was a cyclical relationship in that the specific debates about the three conflicts also informed the more general debates and policy concerns towards the near abroad as a whole.

Pragmatic nationalism consisted of a set of broad, overarching ideas that were held by members of the political elite who also held various specific viewpoints. It thus formed the foundation for the adoption of policies. Foreign policy “involves the discovery of goals as much as it involves using decisions to achieve particular outcomes”.¹ The search for foreign policy goals was particularly significant in Russia because of the immense difficulty and need to rapidly define national interests in a new state undergoing tumultuous change. In a strategically complex situation, Russia was trying to maintain its power base and to define its position in the world while saddled with many of the ambitions, strengths, and burdens of the old Soviet Union.

The thesis also found that the ideas dominant among members of the political elite and those dominant within the state institutions did not always coincide. For example in early 1992, although there was little debate, the government’s liberal westernist ideas were not shared by the wider political elite. Neither did state officials hesitate to take the lead in giving impetus to certain ideas and use their authority to legitimise some of them over others, for example, pragmatic nationalism in late 1992 and 1993. Also, across the political spectrum, members of the political elite often used foreign policy for domestic ends.

¹ Paul A. Anderson, “What do Decision-Makers do when they Make a Foreign Policy Decision?”, in Charles Hermann, Charles Kegley and James Rosenau (eds.), *New Directions in the Study of Foreign Policy*, (London: Harper-Collins Academic, 1987), p.290.

2. The Role of Ideas in the Three Case Studies

In the three cases examined here, ideas helped to resolve policy dilemmas (to formulate Russia's national interests and translate them into goals). They played a role in the way members of the political elite "learned" from events, and suggested "pathways" which guided policy and made other policy options more or less likely.

Moldova

Russia's historical inheritance in Moldova, which included the initial threat that Moldova might join Romania, the presence of the 14th army in Moldova, a large Russian-speaking diaspora concentrated particularly in Transdnistria, and weak economic ties, ensured Russia's general interest in the war but did not dictate particular policies. In particular, there was controversy over the significance to Russian policy of the diaspora. There was, therefore, "room" for ideas to matter in the search to define Russia's national interests towards Moldova.

The Moldova-Transdnistria war was the first conflict in the former Soviet space in which Russia became militarily active. When fighting broke out in March 1992, it created a "window of opportunity" for the Russian political elite to express its concerns and for new ideas to be expressed. In an open debate, various options were proposed about how Russia should react and what Russia's future in Moldova and elsewhere in the former Soviet Union, ought to be. Members of the political elite who were most critical of Yeltsin's policies quickly learned that the emotional issue of Russian-speakers in the near abroad could easily be exploited to score domestic points. They exposed Russia's earlier policies towards the near abroad as non-existent at worst, and as hesitant and ineffective at best. This led to a widespread belief that the Russian government should publicly outline its policy and define its relations with Moldova and other states in the near abroad.

Subsequently, in mid-June 1992, in response to the debates and wider domestic development, and after the second major outbreak of violence in Moldova, there was a shift in the foreign policy ideas of Russia's decision-makers, particularly those of Yeltsin and

Kozyrev. This shift was part of a process of “learning” from the debates and events and paralleled a shift in thinking among the broader political elite. First, it became generally believed that Russia’s 14th Army’s success in capturing Bendery proved that the West would not criticise or intervene in response to Russia’s actions in the CIS states. Therefore, the earlier liberal westernist premise that the West might react to Russia’s involvement in the near abroad in a way that was harmful to Russia’s domestic or foreign interests was no longer of significant concern. Second, the 14th Army’s military success in Bendery seemed to confirm that military force might actually prove effective in solving conflicts and protecting Russian interests. Third, continuing tensions in Moldova, as well as the outbreaks of conflict elsewhere, showed that military bases in strategic areas of the near abroad could prove necessary in order to solve, or at least prevent, the spread of conflicts. These were all lessons which contributed to the adoption of pragmatic nationalist ideas and which were applied in the formation of official policy goals towards Moldova and subsequent conflicts.

The appointment of General Alexander Lebed to command the 14th Army also helped to introduce his way of thinking about the near abroad. Lebed’s words and actions popularised aspects of pragmatic nationalism: the need to define Russia’s interests in the near abroad and to be more assertive in protecting these interests – especially the right of the Russian speakers. Specifically, Lebed, along with Konstantin Zatulin, popularised the idea that Russia’s military should remain in Moldova in order to prevent further fighting and protect the local Transdnistrian population.

Before the war, generally only extreme right and left wing groups and their newspapers had been active in support of the diaspora communities that were trying to achieve autonomy. Now this cause was taken up by a broader political spectrum. After Bendery, Russian government rhetoric became similar to that of the majority of deputies in the parliament – sympathetic towards the Transdnistrians and concerned with the issue of discrimination and violence against the Russian population. Pragmatic nationalism became articulated in the official statements of Yeltsin and Kozyrev, and after 1992, Russian policy

continued to support Moldova's territorial integrity but became (for a time) more openly sympathetic to the separatists in terms of military support and in the negotiations.

Russia pursued a more engaged policy in which it helped to obtain peace in the region, establish a military presence and secure general economic interests. These policies (and the pragmatic nationalist ideas on which they were based) were in effect "institutionalised" in the July 21 cease-fire agreement that created a tripartite peacekeeping force and a commitment to the territorial integrity of Moldova and, in effect, preserved Transdnistria's *de facto* independence. Under economic and military pressure from Moscow, Moldova entered the CIS and Russia's military presence in Transdnistria continued.

Thus, after an initial period of hesitation - because of a high level of uncertainty, lack of information and confusion both within Russia and the near abroad - Russia's foreign policy developed along lines similar to the policy of most states. The consensus over pragmatic nationalism suggested that Russia would react in a pragmatic and ad hoc fashion in the pursuit of its perceived interests - just as policy makers do most of the time in most countries. Yeltsin's primary objective continued to be to ensure external conditions favourable to the political and economic reforms. Pragmatic nationalism did not mean discarding all liberal westernist ideas. It did, however, help to guide policy by providing a "road map" which advocated Russian active engagement in the conflict and sought to define and protect Russia's interests. This "road map" precluded (at this time) Russia's military withdrawal from Moldova and its neglect of the conflict - courses of action that the liberal westernist road map suggested. It also made less likely that Russia would attempt to use military force to impose Russian control over Moldova - a fundamentalist nationalist idea - quite apart from the key fact that Russia did not have the means to pursue such a strategy.

Georgia

In the case of Georgia, Russia inherited the unstable and fractious region of the Caucasus on her border, as well as a small Russian diaspora, a large military presence and

relatively strong economic ties. Russia's paramount interests in the conflict was strategic – to stop the violence and prevent the dissolution of the Georgian state. The threat of anarchy in the Caucasus was real and so was the threat that it would spread into the North Caucasus, part of the Russian Federation. However, the extent of the threat to Russia itself was controversial and how to deal with it was not obvious. Although there was a small Russian diaspora in Georgia, it was not clear what influence it should have on policy development. Therefore, when war broke out in August 1992, there was no elite consensus about how Russia should react. The environment conditioned but did not dictate Russia's specific actions.

Even before the war began in August 1992, political parties across the political spectrum were criticising the government for not acting to prevent the outbreak of a crisis. Particularly, but not only, the fundamentalist nationalists were putting into practice what they had learned from the Moldova war – that the government's lack of policy could be used to score domestic points. Since the violence in Georgia's South Ossetia affected Russia's North Ossetia, it was also becoming increasingly clear that turmoil in the Transcaucasus could spread into Russia and that it was, therefore, in Russia's direct interest to help maintain peace in the region. Nevertheless, as in the Moldova case, early Russian policy followed the officially articulated liberal westernist "road map" that neglected the growing unrest in Abkhazia and supported Georgia's territorial integrity and the withdrawal of many troops.

However, by October 1992 the Russian government, had "learned" from Moldova that neglecting to take an active stance would bring domestic criticism, and therefore it responded reasonably quickly. Members of the military, for its part, had realised by this stage that more should be done by Russia to retain its security interests in the near abroad – in the case of Georgia this included retaining Russia's bases in Abkhazia. Pragmatic nationalist ideas were officially adopted in government statements and Russia took relatively quick action to localise the conflict, prevent spill over into Russia and discourage the involvement of other powers. Military actions on the ground were less one-sided than in the Moldova case.

Later, the shooting down of a Russian helicopter helped to popularise the view that Russia should pursue the same self-interested policy that most other states would: that is, be actively involved in the pursuit of peace and the protection of Russian interests. In 1993 Grachev declared Russia to have strategic interests on the Black Sea Coast and began to link the removal of Russian troops to peace. Once again the official adoption of pragmatic nationalism precluded (at this time) neglect, withdrawal or forceful reintegration.

The political elite also learned from the Moldova crisis that the Abkhaz problem could be solved within the boundaries of Georgia, and by 1996 even many fundamentalist nationalists were in favour of finding a solution compatible with the maintenance of Georgia's territorial integrity. By now Russia itself was involved in a difficult war in Chechnya which also showed the dangers and financial costs of pursuing a policy based on force and introduced a new cautionary tone to the debates. At the same time, Russia's economic interests were growing as Georgia was increasingly perceived as an important Eurasian transit crossroad for oil and gas pipelines.

Thus, pragmatic nationalist ideas were dominant in the debate and in the government position, and once again provided a "road map" which suggested that Russia should retain influence, continue its military ties and protect its interests in the region. When Russian troops helped Shevardnadze regain control after an Abkhaz offensive, these ideas were, in effect, institutionalised in several ways – through a series of military treaties signed with Georgia; Georgia's entry into the CIS; the retention of Russian military bases and border guards in the region; and the introduction of Russian peacekeepers.

Tajikistan

In the Tajik case, ideas played a much less significant role in guiding Russian policy towards the conflict than in Moldova or Georgia. The reason was that in the case of Tajikistan, Russia had concrete interests which could not be ignored. Moreover, most members of the political elite, of all political hues, both inside and outside the government, agreed on what those interests were: to protect the Tajik-Afghan border in order to ensure

stability in Tajikistan and prevent the spread of Islamic fundamentalism – both of which were crucial to Russia's own security. These interests also demanded a continued military presence as the obvious means to achieve them. Diaspora and economic interests existed, but they were relatively minor.

Nevertheless, in the first stage, liberal westernist ideas dominated and, as a result, policy toward Tajikistan was neglected until October 1992 – longer than in the other two cases. Events and realities in Tajikistan were initially ignored because, once again, the Russian government was confused about events in the region. Its priority was Russia's relations with the West, and the former Soviet republics – especially those in Central Asia that were perceived as economic burdens – were neglected. However, as awareness of the possible threat from Islamic fundamentalism increased, and information about events in Tajikistan became more widespread, a general agreement was rapidly formed that Russia ought to support the communist Tajik government and protect the border. This meant that, although the military was at first left on its own to respond to events, it came under official control comparatively rapidly.

By October 1992, Russia was already military involved in the other two conflicts. Due to experiences from these involvements, and the consensus in debates over foreign policy in general, an agreement was soon reached among the political elite that the Russian military should remain in Tajikistan to protect Russia's interests. The close fit between ideas in the debate and Russia's desperate need to protect Tajikistan's vulnerable border indicate why Russian policy was comparatively more consistent towards this conflict than towards the other two and precluded other options at this time.

In the cases of Georgia and Moldova, it was mainly extreme nationalists and communists inside and outside the parliament who by 1993 pushed the debate towards sympathy for the Abkhaz and Transdniestrians. In the Tajik case it was not only fundamentalist nationalists and a few other key foreign policy participants who denounced Yeltsin for failing to defend Russian traditional interests in Central Asia. Criticism came from a far broader array of the political and military elite. Raids on Russia's border troops

and the death of Russian soldiers also popularised the view that Russia needed to define its policy and act. Russia's interests in Tajikistan were compatible with the consensus over pragmatic nationalism in the general debates that suggested that Russia should preserve its interests in Central Asia, secure the borders to Russia's south, protect its diaspora and stop other states from taking advantage of regional instability. However, differences in the details of policy positions emerged – especially over how great the threat was from Islamic fundamentalism and how long Russia could remain involved. In time, it was also understood that Russia had little choice – it could not leave and it was not financially or militarily feasible that a military victory would provide a quick solution to end the war.

Tajikistan was termed a zone of “special interest” as Russia agreed to take responsibility for the conflict, act as regional leader, guard the border and protect the diaspora. These ideas were institutionalised in the May 1993 Friendship Treaty in which it was decided that Russian troops and peacekeepers would remain in Tajikistan in the pursuit of peace. By 1996, as towards the other two conflicts and partly due to events in the near abroad, isolationist feelings were on the rise and there was more emphasis on political versus military instruments to solve the conflict. In the Tajik case, the high cost (in terms of finance and human lives), the emigration of the Russian diaspora and the intractability of the conflict were leading to a change of thinking. A shift in official rhetoric towards Tajikistan seemed to presage a new policy emphasis as Primakov advocated a more tolerant and realistic policy towards Islam, emphasised a less biased policy in relation to its support of the Tajik Communist government, and the possibility of military withdrawal.

3. Contributions of the Thesis to Understanding the Role of Ideas/Debates in Russian Foreign Policy

The thesis made several observations about the role of ideas in Russian foreign policy as illuminated by the various theoretical approaches.

First, ideas or underlying preferences helped the elite to structure policy options (seen in Chapter Three) and to discover foreign policy goals. This gives credence to the importance

of the role of ideas as described by the “psychological approach”. As the dominant ideas in the debates changed, so did the ways in which members of the political elite defined policy towards the conflicts. Second, the thesis also supports the research finding that ideas matter significantly in “non-routine” situations. In all three case studies, Russian policy developed within uncertain or even ambiguous situations and unanticipated events on the ground. This situation of uncertainty and crisis seems to have increased the significance of the debates and the clash of ideas in the formation of policy. Specifically, the condition of uncertainty and the lack of accurate and detailed information about the conflicts in early 1992 meant that broad ideas in the policy debates could provide policy direction.

Third, as mentioned above, a consensus over broad ideas developed and this guided the articulation of official policy goals. In this sense, the publicly articulated views of key political actors in parliament, foreign policy institutions and the media were influential. Of course, it is always going to be difficult to prove the exact role that ideas play in politics and in the making of policy. The three case studies examined here provide examples of policy preceding ideas, for example in the case of Moldova. They also show that policy contradicted a key idea underlying pragmatic nationalism: that Russia remains a great power. This was a myth designed to assuage policy-makers’ own pride and to help impose the regime’s legitimacy. However, Russia’s desire to be a great power could not be translated into policy because of the limited financial resources and military means available to policy-makers. Moreover, although the Russian government vocally supported the rights of Russians abroad, and used them as reasons to be involved in the solutions of the conflicts, no real actions were taken to protect the diasporas in these cases (just as there were no attempts to expand the borders of the Russian Federation). Nevertheless, on the whole, the pragmatic nationalist foreign policy orientation was congruent with the foreign policies in the three cases studied. Of course, if the consensus had been over the means rather than general goals, and if Russia had had adequate resources to finance its goals, it would likely have had more influence in directing specific policies.

Fourth, a process of “learning” occurred in which the debates and policies that responded to events in one conflict carried over to the next. The perceived successes and failures from the conflict in Moldova were useful in resolving the succeeding one in Georgia and later in Tajikistan. The composition of the participants in the specific foreign policy debates also changed and those involved in examining the Tajik conflict (for example, Primakov in 1996) brought with them new ideas about how Russia should react.

Fifth, the broad, overlapping consensus over pragmatic nationalism was eventually adopted by Yeltsin, the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the military and became a guiding principle in official doctrine. Also, the broad consensus that evolved concerning Russia’s policies towards each conflict was institutionalised through its ratification in treaties and by the continuation of military involvement in the form of army bases and “peacekeepers” in all three regions.

Finally, while it is easy to make generalisations about *supposed* relations among ideas, debates, politics and action, it is very difficult to be accurate about their relative weight in specific relationships. The task was made even more difficult because during the years studied in this thesis, Russia was a new state and the period 1991-1996 was one of tremendous internal and external flux. The three stages used in the case studies to analyse the debate were artificial; in reality, they blended into one another. Also, in examining the debates, it was impossible to be certain what politicians “really thought” or how they would have reacted if they had actually assumed power – especially as their views evolved over the period. It was observed that when given the chance to implement foreign policy decisions, Vice President Rutskoi’s actions were more moderate than his words had been. Thus, sometimes ideas and debates explained more of the process than the outcome, or more the style than the substance, of foreign policy-making. However, this is not to trivialise the importance of ideas, since process and style are often as important as objective conditions in foreign policy formulation. There are many factors, therefore, that indicate the need to be cautious in reaching generalisations.

Scholars who focus on the role of ideas in politics may benefit to consider carefully whether the origins and impact of the intellectual shifts they highlight are endogenous to the material environment. Moreover, while the examination in this thesis was confined to the individual and domestic levels, further research might find a more integrative approach which stresses the impact of “epistemic communities” (transnational networks of experts) and globalisation on Russia’s foreign policy, and gives more details of the economic costs of pursuing particular options, useful. Examining debates over issues other than those relating to military conflict (for example, economic relations with Belarus or diaspora relations with Kazakhstan) would also add nuance to the appraisal of the role of debates in foreign policy in general.

4. Summary

Ideas and debates in the three case studies helped to set the parameters for foreign policy choice and played a key role in shaping what policy actions were possible and which were probable. On the whole, there clearly was congruence between policy in the three cases and the overall shift to a pragmatic nationalist line of thought. The dominant pragmatic nationalist foreign policy orientation ultimately affected the way in which Russia defined its foreign policies because a broad consensus developed over these general ideas, the ideas were adopted by key foreign policy actors in their rhetoric and they were institutionalised in government statements, official doctrine, and sometimes actions.

Russia’s foreign policy ideas changed over time, and shifted with changes in the socio-economic context of the state and events outside the state. This thesis indicated how pragmatic nationalism influenced policy – by helping to resolve strategic dilemmas, by playing a role in the “learning” process of decision-making and by creating “focal points” and “road maps” in time of high uncertainty and instability. However, ideas played a less significant role when material interests were particularly significant (e.g. in Tajikistan), and the influence of ideas on policy was always constrained by Russia’s limited financial and military means.

In other words, shared, articulated views formed a backdrop or “framework of meaning” for political actors and foreign policy-makers. Key elements of this framework were manifested in Russian policies and actions towards the Moldova-Transdnistria, Georgia-Abkhazia and Tajikistan conflicts. Although the influence of ideas and debates often seemed elusive or intangible, there is little doubt that they exercised a powerful influence on the prospects for foreign policy towards these three conflicts. They exerted a pervasive, yet subtle, influence on the development of policy, serving to define the parameters of acceptable policy options.

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Appendix 1: Interviews

During my research I spent approximately one year in Moscow conducting interviews as well as visiting research institutions and the Duma library. I interviewed Russian politicians and academics involved in debating and creating Russian foreign policy over three research trips in 1995, 1996 and 1999. In the spring/summer of 1995 I was at the Moscow Institute for Political and Economic Studies with an internship at the Russian Federation Duma working for the office of the Press Secretary of the Yabloko political movement. In 1996, I spent five months at Moscow State University and Moscow Institute for Political and Economic Studies. My final research trip was in 1999 this time interviews were conducted through personal contacts in London (Prof. Margot Light, Dr. Chris Donnelly, and Dr. Roy Allison).

1995

20 June: Grigory Yavlinsky, (Head, Yabloko movement)

20 June: Alexei Mitrofonov, (LDPR number two, Chairman of State Duma's Committee on Geopolitics)

25 June: Mikhail Astafiyev, (Rutskoi's deputy in charge of international relations and foreign policy, member of the "All Russia's Right Center", part of the Motherland Movement)

28 June: Mikhail Mitiokov, (professor of law, First Deputy Chairman of State Duma, member of Democratic Choice of Russia, Head of the Constitutional Assembly)

28 June: Ivan Rybkin, (Speaker of the Duma)

11 July: Anatoly Chubais, (First Deputy Chairman)

15 July: Gavril Popov, (1991-2: Mayor of Moscow, since 92 –Chair, Russia's Movement for Democratic Reforms/President Moscow International University)

21 July: Tairpov Sharbad, (Deputy in State Duma, Democratic Choice of Russia, aid to Sakharov in human rights committee)

25 July: Prof. Aleksandr Sholov, (member Mothers of Soldiers of the Chechen War)

29 July: Sergey Magaril, (Chairman of International Commission of Social Democratic Party of Russia)

2 August: Anatoly Golov, (Chairman of Social Democratic Party of Russia);

17 August: the late Galina Staravoiteva, (advisor to Yeltsin on inter-ethnic issues, Co-Chair “Democratic Russia movement).

1996

8 June: Yusup Soslambekov, (President of the North Caucasus National Assembly)

14 June: Gennady Burbulis, (former Deputy Prime Minister, Yeltsin Advisor 92, co-ordinator Russia’s Choice)

28 June: Irina Khakamada, (1992-94 Secretary General of Economic Freedom Party, Duma deputy, head of “Common Cause,”

2 July: Gennady Zyuganov, (leader CPRF)

8 July: Gavrill Popov, (as above)

1999

21 May: Konstantin Borovoi, (independent Duma deputy, Head of “For Atlantic Group” in Duma)

21 May: Sergei Baburin, (Head, Russian Popular Union)

24 May: Dr. Tatiana Parkhalina, (Dept Director Institute of Scientific Information for Social Sciences (INION), Head of NATO Documentation Center for European Security Issues)

25 May: Dr. Dimitry Trenin, (Carnegie Moscow Center)

28 May: Dr. Andrei Zagorsky, (Vice Rector, MGIMO – Moscow State Institute for International Relations)

1 June: Dr. Valery Solovey, (Gorbachev Foundation)

2 June: Col. Rimarchuk, (Colonel in Russian Army, Headquarters of the CIS)

4 June: Fred Weir, (Journalist - Canadian Press, Hindustan Times)

8 June: Dr. Irina Zviagelskaya, (Institute of Oriental Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences; involved in Tajik negotiations)

8 June: Col. General Andrei Nikolaev, (Commander of the Border Troops and Deputy Minister of Security)

9 June: Anatoly Adamishin, (Deputy Foreign Minister/ Chief Negotiator to the Tajik conflict)

I also had the opportunity to consult with other prominent politicians and academics who visited the LSE, SEES and Chatham House in London as well as at the IISS where I worked in spring/summer 2000 as Programme Assistant on the Russia Military Reform Programme.

Key Interviews/Talks outside Moscow Used in Thesis

13 April 1995: Igor Zevelev (Deputy Director, IMEMO) Stanford

15 May 1996: Prof. Nodari Simoniya, (Deputy director, IMEMO) LSE

20 March 1998: Gen. Klaus Naumann (Chair Military Committee, NATO) Chatham House

22 June 1998: Karen Ohanjanian, (member of Nagorno-Karabakh parliament, co-ordinator of the Nagorno-Karabakh committee of "Helsinki initiative-92") LSE.

23 November 1999: Dr. Gyorgi Otyerba, (Deputy Foreign Minister of Abkhazia), LSE