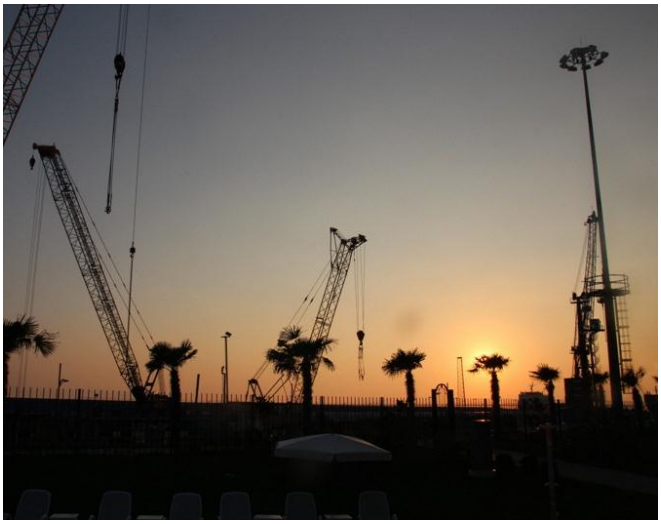

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Policy Conference
September 2013

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NEW APPROACHES TO RESEARCH AND SECURITY IN EURASIA

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PONARS Eurasia is an international network of academics that advances new policy approaches to research and security in Russia and Eurasia. PONARS Eurasia is based at the Institute for European, Russian and Eurasian Studies (IERES) at the George Washington University's Elliott School of International Affairs. This publication was made possible by grants from Carnegie Corporation of New York and the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation.

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Russia G20 Summit. A view of the second working session of the G-20 summit at the Konstantin Palace in St. Petersburg, Russia. (AP Photo, Dimitar Dilkoff, Pool, Friday, September 6, 2013)

Sochi in Summer. Work continues after sunset as cranes stand on a lot adjoining the athletes' village in a coastal area of Sochi, Russia, host of the 2014 Winter Olympics. (Kyodo via AP Images, August 6, 2013)

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Foreword

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The George Washington University

This collection of policy memos is an accompanying volume to the 2013 annual conference of the Program on New Approaches to Research and Security in Eurasia (PONARS Eurasia), held at the George Washington University's Elliott School of International Affairs on September 23-24, 2013. The twenty-eight contributions cover a variety of topics, including strategies and structures of rule in Vladimir Putin's third presidential term; the motivations and mechanisms of protest in Russia today; Russian relations with the EU, NATO, Iran, and China; the politics of the 2014 Sochi Winter Games; the future of the EU-Russia common neighborhood; the future of Russian energy; and the need for a new agenda for Central Asia after 2014.

We know you will find these policy perspectives informative and thought-provoking. Many individuals were instrumental in the production of this volume, as well as the organization of the 2013 PONARS Eurasia Policy Conference. In addition to all authors and conference participants, we would like to especially thank Managing Editor Alexander Schmemann; Program Coordinator Olga Novikova; Graduate Research Assistants Julian Waller and Daniel Heintz; IERES Executive Associate Caitlin Katsiaficas; and IERES Director Peter Rollberg.

PONARS Eurasia is a network of over 90 academics, mainly from North America and post-Soviet Eurasia, who advance new policy approaches to research and security in Russia and Eurasia. Its core missions are to connect scholarship to policy on and in Russia and Eurasia and to foster a community, especially of mid-career and rising scholars, committed to developing policy-relevant and collaborative research.

PONARS Eurasia, together with the George Washington University's Elliott School of International Affairs, expresses its deep appreciation to the International Program of Carnegie Corporation of New York and the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation for their support.

A New Explanation for Russian Foreign Policy
THE POWER OF INFORMAL PATRONAGE NETWORKS

PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo No. 274

Kimberly Marten*
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When most analysts look at Russian foreign policy today, they treat Russia as if it is a unified state with a meaningful strategy and clear goals. They focus on Russian national interests, state security concerns, relative power in the international system, or the cultural identity and tendencies of the Russian nation. Sometimes they focus on Vladimir Putin as an authoritarian leader, and foreign policies are assumed to reflect Putin's personality or personal ideology. Even then, though, the assumption is that Putin leads the state and has a strategy to achieve clear state-based goals.

Yet when most serious analysts look at Russian *domestic* political and economic questions today, they instead see an opaque world of competing, overlapping, and evolving informal networks of individuals. In this world, people ensure their own futures by attaching themselves to powerful patrons. The resulting patron-client networks scrabble against each other for control over resources and cash flows, merging and splitting as circumstances warrant. In the political sphere, the transition from President Dmitry Medvedev back to Putin is sometimes seen as an indicator that the hardline *siloviki* (power ministry and former KGB) faction gained advantage over the more moderate and westward-leaning economic faction. The moderate faction may now be fueling the opposition, even though it earlier bought into the *siloviki*'s wealth-for-stability bargain. Meanwhile in the commercial sphere, Putin's Rosneft oil faction of Igor Sechin seems to be beating the Gazprom natural gas faction of Medvedev and his colleague Aleksei Miller, although the personal standing of Sechin has lately been called into question.

From this perspective, Putin is not simply an authoritarian state leader with normal state interests. He is instead the leading representative of a shady cohort of interconnected bosses who struggle to maintain their precarious positions at the top of the Russian pyramid. A sudden power shift might send Putin tumbling, too.

The argument of this memo is that Russia's foreign policy should logically be treated as an extension of domestic politics. If Russian political and business interactions reflect the interplay of opaque personal patronage networks, then foreign policy must flow from those interactions too. While network competition in the foreign policy realm

* I gratefully acknowledge the valuable research assistance of Matthew Michaelides.

is undoubtedly bounded by some shared sense of Russian national interests, concerns, and culture, it is patronage politics and network competition—not just "normal" state interests—that best describe Russian foreign policy today.

Individual personalities, not the official offices they occupy, determine influence over policy. These individuals are self-interested, and they seek to protect and expand their own network's power at every opportunity; ideology plays a backseat role at best. State resources will be used on behalf of important individuals and their clients, and individual network interests will sometimes outweigh the interests of the state itself. As Henry Hale has noted in his pathbreaking research on patron-client systems, powerful leaders must constantly signal their continuing strength to their internal audience, in order to hold their networked coalitions together.

Five major foreign policy implications result from this perspective on Russian politics. First and most obvious, Russian leaders cannot afford to be seen as capitulating to American pressure. The patron's strength determines the wellbeing of the network. Given Russia's Cold War and immediate post-Cold War history, strength will continue to be defined in terms of independence from Washington.

Second, while leaders will try to appear tough and even aggressive internationally, to prove that they are strong and ascendant, they will avoid high-risk foreign policy actions that might damage the state whose resources they are milking. Putin engages in bluster, easy shots across the bow, and even small aggrandizements—as in the nine-day Georgian border war of 2008—but he pursues a foreign policy that is fundamentally conservative and risk-averse.

An example is found in Russian-Iranian relations. While U.S. politicians sometimes accuse Russia of helping Iran's nuclear weapons ambitions, a review of the evidence indicates that this is unlikely. Three times in the Putin era Russia has voted in favor of UN Security Council sanctions against Iran, especially when Iran has thwarted IAEA inspectors. In 2010 Russia agreed to forego S-300 surface-to-air missile deliveries to Iran that might have helped Teheran defend suspected nuclear sites from airstrikes (apparently in return for a promise of Israeli drone technology sales to Moscow, to assist Russia's ailing defense industry). Putin has loudly asserted Russia's independence but has been careful not to undercut core U.S. security interests or the functioning of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT). He even seemed to rein in some assistance coming from Russia's nuclear defense science complex to Iran early in the 2000s. Russia did complete the civilian nuclear energy facility at Bushehr. While this cuts against U.S. unilateral sanctions, then-U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton made clear that the Obama administration did not object to the Bushehr facility in principle—only to the timing of Russia's support for it.

Third, even security-related foreign policy situations will be viewed through the lens of the economic interests of core patronage network members. The Bushehr project, for example, brought money into Russia's civilian foreign nuclear construction complex and helped maintain the contract-fulfilling reputation of Rosatom and its Atomstroyeksport affiliate for projects in other countries (including India, China, and Turkey, among others). Rosatom oversees both civilian and defense-related nuclear

matters in Russia, likely giving it connections to the *siloviki* faction. It is also telling that Gazprombank, which is 80 percent owned by Gazprom, was a primary source of loans for Rosatom in recent years (at one time owning a 49.8 percent stake in Atomstroyeksport). This indicates that Russian network interests in Bushehr extend beyond the *siloviki* and the nuclear complex to Medvedev's network, too. The timing of various delays in Bushehr's construction in the 2000s seem to reflect Iranian payments difficulties more than any other factor, again indicating the primacy of economic considerations.

Fourth, leaders will tend to view all actors, including foreign state leaders and officials, through the prism of individual and informal network-building or network competition. We know that decisionmakers everywhere tend to engage in "mirror imaging": people are hardwired to assume that other people face similar constraints and opportunities to their own. Russian leaders will likely assume that their foreign counterparts are also individuals at the top of competing patron-client systems. Every interaction will be seen as a network-to-network offer or payback and will be intensely personalized. This personalization of international interactions has been evident throughout the Putin era. Among the most infamous examples are Putin's refusal to negotiate with Georgia as long as President Mikheil Saakashvili was the primary representative of the Georgian state, and the Kremlin's undiplomatic hounding of U.S. Ambassador Michael McFaul, apparently over McFaul's prior academic publication and nongovernmental organization record.

More recently we have seen it at a quieter level in Putin's interactions with U.S. President Barack Obama. Most commentators have focused on the strained photos from their bilateral meeting at the June 2013 G-8 summit in Northern Ireland; Obama contributed to the strain by joking about both leaders' age-related sports disabilities (which undermined, intentionally or not, Putin's need to project strength at home). But there is a different story that helps to explain Russia's relative restraint in the Edward Snowden NSA leaker affair. Before their June meeting, Obama sent a personal letter to Putin, laying out areas of joint interest and potential resolution to the conflicts plaguing U.S.-Russian relations. Putin responded in kind, and Russian state news sources reported on the fact of this personal letter exchange. After the June meeting, Putin said in an interview that he thought Obama was sincere but not necessarily in control of his own domestic situation. In other words, Putin twice publicly indicated his desire to cooperate with and support Obama *as an individual*—even if this did not imply amity between Moscow and Washington as a whole, given Obama's lack of strength at home.

Snowden threw a wrench into this cooperative effort in July. Putin's desire to preserve the tie to Obama explains the otherwise puzzling stasis of Snowden's asylum bid. Much of the Russian public seemed to prefer that Putin admit Snowden as a political refugee. Pundits repeatedly predicted that such a decision was imminent, and loud voices in the U.S. Congress threatened various (rather non-credible) forms of revenge under the assumption that this was just one more round of Russian confrontation with the United States. Meanwhile, Obama indirectly let it be known that he might cancel his next summit meeting with Putin in Moscow if Snowden were

allowed to leave the airport. In other words, Obama threatened to symbolically disengage from Putin as an individual, and this explains why at every opportunity for several weeks Putin stalled for time. Putin couldn't maintain his reputation for strength if he were seen to be capitulating to American pressure, but he couldn't maintain his reputation for loyalty and good judgment if he first identified Obama as an individual worthy of his network's support, and then kicked sand in his face and squandered that network tie. Even when Snowden was eventually granted temporary asylum on August 1—a step that was probably inevitable—and Obama cancelled the summit as expected, the Russian reaction involved little fanfare and none of the grandstanding anti-Americanism that might have been predicted. Within days it was announced that Snowden's father would come to Moscow for the purpose of negotiating his return home to stand trial, and Obama said at a press conference that his personal relations with Putin remained good.

These first four implications help explain Russia's reaction to the Syrian civil war. Putin and Bashar Assad have had warm personal relations since Assad's first visit to Moscow in January 2005, when Putin wrote off huge Syrian debts to Russia and promised new arms sales. While Russia's actions toward Syria have been enormously frustrating to the Western community and to Israel, Putin has limited Russian risks by foregoing active intervention on behalf of Assad, despite the sometimes alarmist media coverage of an impending resumption of Cold War-type proxy military conflict. Moscow has repeatedly blocked potential UN Security Council inspections and resolutions against Assad, fulfilled contracts for advanced weapons, and even reportedly helped transport Hezbollah fighters from Lebanon to Syria. Yet the Russian naval ships that periodically appear at Russia's port facility in Tartus have thus far engaged in show, not military action. Some recent Russian deliveries to Syria of SA-17 surface-to-air missiles and advanced Yakhont anti-ship cruise missiles were immediately destroyed by Israeli airstrikes, yet this did not provoke even a verbal official protest from Russia. And while Putin has talked about fulfilling Russia's earlier S-300 surface-to-air missile contracts to Assad, those missiles (like the earlier ones for Iran) do not seem to be in immediate transit—perhaps because some analysts believe that they would need to be maintained by Russian contractors on the ground in Syria, putting Russian lives at risk from another Israeli airstrike. If Putin's key goals are to maintain a positive personal connection to Assad and to support key Russian arms industry network members—rather than to ensure an Assad victory—this places his choices in a different light.

There is a fifth implication of this framework: we should expect the unexpected. Rather than following a consistent and predictable decisionmaking pattern, Russian policy comes in fits and starts. Decisions are crafted neither through formal institutions nor public debate, but by hidden bargaining between actors whose identities remain shrouded. In domestic politics we saw this in July 2013 with the treatment of Aleksei Navalny, who in the space of several days received an unfair but publicly broadcast trial (throughout which he was allowed to send tweets to his supporters); was arbitrarily convicted and led away in handcuffs; was publicly encouraged to run for Moscow

mayor anyway; and was then suddenly freed for an unknown amount of time with the threat of re-imprisonment held over his head, on what was said to be a technicality. We know that this was not done simply in reaction to the protests that followed Navalny's conviction, because the authorities predicted those protests. (Photographs showed three buses for taking away arrested protesters moving to central Moscow's Revolution Square ten minutes before the verdict was read.)

In foreign policy, the Snowden case showed the same signs of disjointed decisionmaking. At least twice in July there were reports that Snowden's release from the transit area of Sheremetyevo airport was imminent, but both times saw further delays and backtracking. When Snowden eventually left the airport it was not for the three-month administrative consideration period previously indicated by Russian authorities, but for a full year of temporary asylum—although only after the security services announced that they could not guarantee his safety, potentially leaving the door open for a future U.S.-Russian deal of some sort. This means that we should also expect that Putin's policies toward Syria might suddenly veer in one unexpected direction or another, in reaction to opaque domestic network bargains rather than a clear strategic direction.

The eventual end of the Putin era will likely not mean an end to the patronage-based politics on which the entire Russian system is currently based. Any successor to Putin will also focus on personalities more than institutions. That leader will also need to appear aggressively strong and independent, while avoiding truly risky actions, and privilege the economic interests of key network clients, even on security issues. We should also not expect that leader to be consistent over time.

The networks controlling the top may eventually shift. But as long as the Russian security services retain their ability to embarrass and selectively prosecute individuals through the release of compromising information, any shift in the system will be limited, regardless of who the leader is and what happens in the electoral sphere. Old KGB methods are well matched to the personality-driven patronage politics that currently drive Russia.

From a Normal Country to Normal Authoritarianism

THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE POLITICAL REGIME IN RUSSIA*

PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo No. 275

Nikolay Petrov
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In order to maintain Vladimir Putin's hybrid political regime, it is constantly necessary to reconcile the interests and conflicts of various subsystems "by hand." If this is not done, internal conflicts can accumulate until they reach the surface, potentially destroying the entire system.

The weak point of any hybrid regime is the juncture between the real and the decorative, with elections serving as the best example of this. The overpowering of the semi-democratic component of the system by the authoritarian component is driven by the mechanism of self-preservation: the hybrid system seeks to preserve itself against the "corrosive" effects of democratic elements on authoritarian ones. As the regime gets weaker, so does its ability to maintain its hybrid balance. This is what is happening with Putin's regime in its second decade.

The key problem of the Putin regime is a crisis of legitimacy. Putin won the presidential elections of March 2012 but was unable to reinforce his legitimacy. His 63.6 percent of the vote (47 percent in Moscow), which would be good for any democratic leader, does not add anything to the authority of a "father of the nation" who picks his own opponents. The very emergence of the first mass political protests under the Putin regime, with tens of thousands of people in Moscow chanting "Russia without Putin," diminishes his legitimacy as a leader.

In July 2013, Putin's ratio of approval-to-disapproval stood at around 65:35—a significant shift from its peak of 88:10 in September 2008.† About half of Russia's population does not want Putin to be president after 2018,‡ and a growing number of Russians see him as representing the interests of big business, power agencies, and the bureaucracy, not the interests of common people.§

In the face of this political crisis, the Kremlin, afraid to repeat the fate of Gorbachev's *perestroika*, has chosen heavy-handed methods rather than compromise. In

* This memo uses some thoughts from the initial draft of Maria Lipman and Nikolay Petrov, "The Stalinization of Putinism: a Doomed Effort," in *Russia in 2025: Scenarios for the Future* (Palgrave MacMillan, forthcoming 2014).
† http://www.levada.ru/25-07-2013/iyulskie-reitingi-odobreniya-doveriya-i-polozheniya-del-v-strane
‡ http://www.levada.ru/07-05-2013/obshchestvennoe-mnenie-o-vlasti-i-4-m-sroke-putina
§ http://www.levada.ru/11-04-2013/vladimir-putin-god-posle-izbraniya-prezidentom

December 2012, Russia set out on a path of increasing authoritarianism. By the beginning of 2013, it was clear that Putin had no strategy for his third term except consolidating power.

Putin's Three Fronts

The first year of Putin's new presidency has been marked by a Kremlin campaign on three fronts, which opened one-by-one:

The struggle with protesters and politically-active segments of society

The trial of Pussy Riot, the arrest of Bolotnaya Square protestors, and the continued harassment and investigation of the most visible figures of the protest movement, Sergei Udaltsov and Aleksei Navalny, are particularly noteworthy. Navalny, who has the best claim to leadership of the protest movement, received a prison sentence of five years in July 2013 based on fabricated accusations. A guilty verdict for Udaltsov is also predetermined and the probability of prison sentences for both (even after Navalny's mayoral run) is high.

The containment of the elites

In fall 2012, the Kremlin launched an anticorruption campaign and imposed a ban on state officials holding assets abroad. The campaign was designed to fulfill several functions at once:

- To demonstrate that legal investigations can threaten *any* member of the elite so that nobody feels secure, and to preempt the risk of disobedience and minimize the risk of a schism among the elites.
- To create a system of "soft purges," a necessity for maintaining a minimal level of administrative efficiency.
- To carve out a portion of the "pie" for new elites.
- To "isolate" the system, lessening its vulnerability to and dependence on the West.

This strategy of purges cannot help overcome the crisis within the administrative system—one that constitutes a hybrid of Soviet-style *nomenklatura* and new elites and is incapable of reproducing itself. At the same time, an increase in public competition has been blocked.

The struggle with civil society

NGOs have been under government pressure since at least the mid-2000s, but in 2012, when the government realized that civic awakening was eroding the regime's legitimacy, the Kremlin switched to a policy essentially to eliminate foreign-funded NGOs. Russia's eviction of USAID, a source of funding for many prominent NGOs, dealt a severe blow to the latter's activities. This was followed by across-the-board

inspections of almost all foreign-funded NGOs by a variety of government agencies. Autonomous watchdogs are being replaced by GONGOs (government organized "non-governmental" organizations) that imitate genuine civil society organizations. This process of replacement has been happening since the middle of the last decade but was given a boost in 2012-2013 when government funds allocated for the purpose were significantly increased for trusted individuals connected to the Kremlin.

In all the above cases, scare tactics and demonstratively harsh punishments have been employed. The Kremlin's objective has been to avoid a fragmentation of the elites and the unification of "splinter groups" among them and dissatisfied citizens.

Emasculated Political Reform

Russia's political system, built on centralization and a monopoly of power in the federal center, restricts development and requires reform. However, the variation that was announced in December 2011 has been following the pattern of "one step forward –half-step back" accompanied by counter-reform. Examples of this are:

- In Russian parliamentary elections, the new draft law abandons the proportional electoral system in favor of the former mixed system, with half the seats filled on the basis of party slates and the other half by single-mandate districts. A new "criminal filter" forbids the nomination of candidates who were convicted of certain crimes (letting the regime exclude unwanted candidates, such as those who have participated in political protests).
- Gubernatorial elections abolished in 2004 have been formally restored, but they are also accompanied by a system of "municipal filters," allowing the incumbent to win anyway. A 2013 scheme of indirect gubernatorial elections has already been adopted in the North Caucasian republics.
- The creation of almost a hundred new parties lacks any real effect in the absence of changes to the political system. Parties have almost no place in the current political system. Instead of being transmission belts between government and the public, they are elements of political show. Even the strongest of them are unable to seriously affect political decisionmaking. This is true more generally of Russia's legislative branch, including United Russia, the so-called "party of power."

By betting on a fragmented party landscape and by forbidding parties from uniting in coalitions, the government is basically sawing off the branch it is standing on. In the event of a serious crisis, it will be impossible to transfer power from one party to another, and it will be necessary to change the entire political system. The very survival of the Russian political system will be in question.

The Growing Influence of the *Siloviki*

The growth of *siloviki* influence over the course of Putin's third presidential term is not only the result of the aforementioned fight against three fronts but also the consequence of Putin's efforts to marginalize the creative minority that forms the liberal social base. The balance between major elite clans appears now to have been changed too radically to be restored in the near future.

The *siloviki* as a whole are no less fractured and heterogeneous than Putin's elite more generally. There have been some large-scale shifts among them, first undertaken by Putin in 2007-2008 on the eve of realizing the tandem scenario and again in 2011-2012 when switching back to singular rule. Both times shifts occurred among different law enforcement bodies, as well as among the individuals who lead them.

The main point of tension in the internal *siloviki* relationship has also shifted. Five years ago, the real conflict was between the Federal Security Service (FSB) and the Federal Drug Control Service (FSKN). Now conflict lies between the prosecutor general's office and the investigative committee. In addition, Putin was dissatisfied with the FSB's inability to prevent the mass political protests of 2011-2012. He has thus diminished its role as coordinator of all law enforcement activities and has strengthened the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) under his personal control. MVD reform was first undertaken by Dmitry Medvedev, who replaced both its federal and regional leaderships. Formerly provincial cadres became generals under the command of Vladimir Kolokoltsev, former chief of the Orel and Moscow regional branches. There was also a large-scale horizontal rotation, in which about half of all regional police chiefs shifted places, decreasing their connections to regional elites while increasing their loyalties to the center.

Putin's return to the Kremlin has been marked by the renewal of its law enforcement and personnel departments, with Yevgeny Shkolov, Putin's comrade-in-arms from Dresden, becoming a kind of grey cardinal. His role and the role of his protégé, Vladimir Kikot, former chief of personnel at the MVD and now head of the presidential administration's personnel department, are especially important due to the fact that Putin now seems much more distant from operational management. The general trends in the *siloviki* landscape over the last few years can be described as *de-FSB-ization* and *police-ization*.

De-FSB-ization can be seen in a number of ways:

- The arrival of Shkolov and Kikot to the presidential apparatus with the MVD as their base, instead of the grey cardinal tandem of Igor Sechin and Victor Ivanov from the FSB.
- The liberation of the MVD from FSB commissars and external managers, such as Rashid Nurgaliyev and Konstantin Romodanovsky (the same goes for the Justice Ministry).

- Reliance on Sergey Ivanov (and Shkolov and Kikot) for "the fight against corruption" to control elites, instead of on Sechin and Rosfinmonitoring (the Federal Financial Monitoring Service).

At the same time, the FSB's formal powers have been widened significantly and the FSKN, often referred to as the FSB-2, hopes to follow. One cannot exclude that what has taken place is that the FSB has been unburdened from its non-core functions in order to concentrate on its main priorities, including the fight against terrorism (and security at the Sochi Olympics), nationalism, and extremism.

Police-ization can be seen in the following:

- The MVD along with the investigative committee and prosecutor general's office have become the principal tools to control society and elites. Kolokoltsev is considered to have been effective in handling both the nationalist protests in Moscow in December 2010 and the political protests on Bolotnaya Square in May 2012.
- Use of the police model of cleansing regional elites in Orel in 2008, Moscow in 2010 (with Kolokoltsev at the helm in both cases), Kabardino-Balkaria in 2011, and Dagestan in 2013.
- The growing influence of the Federal Migration Service – a kind of MVD-2.

At the same time, there were large-scale purges of MVD generals first during the 2011-2012 reform and then over the course of the counter-reform led by Shkolov and Kolokoltsev.

Although the roles of particular *siloviki* and agencies can change in different ways, the role of the *siloviki* as a whole is increasing, in a process we might call the *etatization* of Putin's aging hybrid regime. At the same time, the process by which the *siloviki* engage in the "privatization of the state" is changing. Along with controlling law enforcement and power agencies in the pursuit of corporate or group interests, we see attempts to control juicy pieces of the state-controlled economy, be it Rosneft under the control of Igor Sechin, Rosselkhozbank under the control of Dmitry Patrushev, or other economic entities directly affiliated to the state.

Evolution vs. Revolution

Russia in 2013 is on the threshold of serious changes that could occur at any moment, with or without sanction from the top. In fact, these changes already began with the political crisis of 2011/2012. The interests of the principal actors—the regional elites, the business sector, and civil society—are more frequently coming into conflict with the interests of the federal government, which in turn has conflicting interests within itself. There are no institutions or even accepted frameworks for reconciling these different interests.

Putin's evident bet on a policy of maintaining the status quo cannot possibly pay off in the long run. The system has almost completely exhausted its resources from the

Soviet period (transportation and engineering infrastructure, industrial potential, education and health care systems), the Boris Yeltsin period (renewed elites), and the early Putin years (first-term economic liberalization and an increase in resources). Putin's system is impotent and incapable of reproducing itself. Its effectiveness is plummeting as external conditions change all around it.

Megaprojects, both completed and planned, serve as perfect examples of the system's colossal ineffectiveness. The 2012 APEC summit in Vladivostok and the Sochi Olympics have proven many times more expensive than originally projected, despite the extremely poor quality of the work. A similar fate awaits all other costly projects, including the overhaul of the military, the 2018 World Cup, grand resorts in the North Caucasus, and the development of Siberia and the Far East. Whatever is not stolen is shoved into the ground with minimal benefit for the economy or people's lives.

Rather than maintaining the status quo, Russia must modernize. However, economic modernization is impossible without political modernization. The Kremlin is capable of blocking development (for a while longer at least), but it is unable to provide alternative scenarios or mechanisms. The longer it stalls and plays for time, the more turbulent and unpredictable the inevitable changes will be in the end. Revolution can provide an alternative and accelerated path of evolution. Either the regime decides to lead the process of political and economic modernization, or it will lose control of the situation and be replaced by a regime that is potentially worse—more authoritarian, repressive, and isolationist—and more effective at maintaining power.

Civil Society and the Second *Putinshchina*

PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo No. 276

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In the first year of Vladimir Putin's second presidency, apparently in response to the mass demonstrations of the last election cycle, the Kremlin launched a comprehensive campaign to intimidate, stigmatize, shut down, and even prosecute nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that receive assistance from foreign donors, particularly from the United States. At the same time, the administration significantly increased government funding of "socially-oriented" NGOs and encouraged the Orthodox Church to play a greater role in organizing Russian society. This memo analyzes Russian policy over the past year toward civic organizations and discusses its implications for the future of Russian domestic politics.

Background

From the very beginning of his presidency, Putin has sought to find a balance between sovereignty and globalization. Preserving the internal and external sovereignty of the Russian state has been a constant theme in presidential pronouncements throughout his tenure. Here, though, Putin faces a dilemma. He recognizes that Russia's external sovereignty cannot endure without harnessing the forces of globalization. Addressing the Russian parliament in December 2012, he said:

> "Who will take the lead and who will remain outsiders and inevitably lose their independence will depend not only on the economic potential, but primarily on the will of each nation…to move forward and to embrace change."

But Putin also expressed concern that the centrifugal pressures and temptations of a globalizing world might undermine Russia's internal sovereignty: while Russia should "develop with confidence," it must "also preserve our national and spiritual identity, not lose our sense of national unity. We must be and remain Russia."

The rhetoric of Putin's second presidency has particularly emphasized the injurious impact that individualistic behavior encouraged by liberal notions from the West has had on the moral fiber of Russian society:

> "After 70 years of the Soviet period, the Russian people went through a period when the importance of their private interests regained its relevance. That was a necessary and natural stage. However, working for one's own interests has its

> limits.…[M]any moral guides have been lost too. We ended up throwing out the baby with the bathwater.…Russian society suffers from apparent deficit of spiritual values such as charity, empathy, compassion, support, and mutual assistance….It is in civil responsibility and patriotism that I see the consolidating force behind our policy."

In short, the president looks to civic activism, provided it is the right kind of civic activism, to provide the social cohesion threatened by the individualizing and internationalizing impulses of contemporary life. Civic activism helps build interpersonal empathy and trust in society. It also molds citizens who respect the law and channel their demands through acceptable institutional pathways. In this way, civil society, even in liberal societies, seeks to define and reinforce the boundary between "civil" behavior, attitudes and individuals that deserve the protection of the state, and "uncivil" behavior, individuals and attitudes that do not. In Putin's case, drawing boundaries is particularly important.

"Uncivil society," moreover, can refer either to the potentially threatening international environment beyond a state's territorial boundaries, or to deviance from accepted norms within those boundaries. In conflating these two, denouncing dissenting voices as abetting the work of Russia's enemies, Putin aims both to discredit the opposition and highlight the need for the protection of a strong state.

But here Putin faces another problem. For much of his presidency—and still today—many of the most professional, most visible, and most sustainable NGOs in Russia have depended heavily on support from outside donors. At first, because the regimen needed the services, expertise, and ideas these organizations could provide, the administration avoided direct confrontation in favor of a policy that Sarah Henderson has called "import substitution."* The Kremlin created a network of new NGOs dependent on money and leadership provided by the state (GONGOs), while at the same time it sought to diminish both the status of organizations funded from abroad and their room for maneuver. The administration escalated this policy after the color revolutions in Ukraine and Georgia, most particularly with a 2006 law targeting internationally-funded NGOs that enabled the authorities to increase surveillance and ultimately shut down any organization it wanted. Despite a significant uptick in official harassment, however, few organizations were actually shut down.

After the mass demonstrations in 2011-2012, the Kremlin took this policy to a new level. In the first seven months of his new administration, President Putin signed several new laws identifying NGOs that received foreign assistance as potential enemies of the people. Details of this legislation and its effects can be found online in the Human Rights Watch report, *Laws of Attrition*.†

The most threatening of these new laws expanded the definition of treason to include providing "consultative or other assistance to a foreign state, an international or

* Sarah L. Henderson, "Shaping Civic Advocacy: International and Domestic policies toward Russia's NGO Sector," in Mary Kay Gugerty and Aseem Prakash, eds., *Advocacy Organizations and Collective Action* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

† *Laws of Attrition*, Human Rights Watch, April 24, 2013 (http://www.hrw.org/node/115059).

foreign organization, or their representatives in activities against the security of the Russian Federation." As far as I know, however, prosecutors have yet to bring up a single case.

The cornerstone of the new policy was a law signed in July 2012, requiring all NGOs receiving foreign funding and engaged in political activities to register as a "foreign agent." Like the NGO law of 2006, organizations so registered would be subject to increased audits and inspections, but the legislation's real damage would come from labeling these organizations with a term associated with espionage and treason. Moreover, the term "political activities" was defined to include any organization seeking to influence public officials or public opinion on any matter of state policy. Still, by mid-January all but one organization (a human rights organization in Chuvashia) denied taking part in political activities and refused to register, and the Minister of Justice, Alexander Konovalov, openly expressed its reluctance to enforce a law that contradicted "the spirit of Russia's NGO legislation."

In mid-February, however, Putin told a meeting of officials from the Federal Security Service (FSB) that the law should be enforced. Soon thereafter, officials from local prosecutors' offices, tax bureaus, and sometimes even sanitary departments made unannounced inspections and audits on hundreds of NGOs all over the country (and even on many religious organizations, though they were explicitly exempted in the legislation). By early summer 2013, at least 44 organizations had received warnings that they must register as a "foreign agent," including the organization "Aid to Children with Cystic Fibrosis." At least five were told by a court that they must pay a fine or disband. In the most visible case, authorities suspended for six months the activities of the Moscow branch of *Golos*, an election-monitoring organization.

Interestingly, by mid-July the Kremlin signaled a willingness to walk back some of the most egregious aspects of the law. In early July, Putin said in separate meetings with human rights experts and Chief Prosecutor Yuri Chaika that the law should be amended to include a narrower definition of "political activities." Just a few days later a court in Perm threw out a case against two civil society organizations, finding that there was no evidence their activities required them to register as a foreign agent. Then, on July 18, according to RBC Daily, Chaika let it be known the law would be applied only to organizations directly involved in political elections, such as "*Golos*, the League of Voters, and others." Indeed, by late August, the Prosecutor's office announced that of the 2200 organizations they claim had received foreign funding only 22 were found to have violated any law.

Similar to the NGO law of 2006, this legislation seems designed more to intimidate and harass than to punish. As such, it has done real damage to civic activism in the country. Organizations have been much less willing to seek funding from abroad or engage in activities that might be construed as "political." The campaign also seems to have had a small but significant impact on public attitudes toward NGO activities. In a recent Levada Center poll, 50 percent of respondents expressed a generally positive

attitude toward NGOs, the same percentage that did so in a similar poll in 2012.[*] The number of people with a negative image of NGO activities, however, increased from 13 percent to 19 percent. Also, more respondents (49 percent) reported positive feelings about the government's activities to curtail foreign influences on NGOs than those who expressed negative feelings (20 percent).

The Kremlin has also made it more difficult for organizations to receive outside funding. The biggest blow came in October 2012, when the Kremlin demanded that USAID close down operations in Russia. Consistent with the policy of "import substitution," the administration also announced it would triple the amount of money that would be distributed to Russian NGOs through the annual presidential grant competitions to almost 3 billion rubles. Historically, these Kremlin competitions have suffered from a lack of transparency and persistent accusations of favoritism and have lost credibility among NGOs in recent years. In the most recent competition announced in late August 2013, the winners included such prominent human rights organizations as Memorial, the Moscow Helsinki Group, and For Human Rights. In addition, Putin announced in July that the Kremlin will provide another half billion rubles annually for a grants competition administered by well-known activist Ella Pamfilova's organization, Civic Dignity, which presumably will have more credibility. Still, these efforts will not offset the damage done by closing USAID, which was the largest source of foreign assistance to a wide range of Russian NGOs, including organizations promoting public health, environmental protection, and civil society development.

In contrast to the "import substitution" policy of the 2000s, Putin's current efforts to both promote and contain civic activism has a new moralist quality consistent with his address to the parliament last December. This new emphasis can be seen most clearly in recent legislation attacking the LGBT community, as well as in the law against "blasphemy." With regard to civic activism, Putin has expressed a desire that the Orthodox Church play a much greater role organizing civil society to promote both "civic responsibility and patriots." In February 2013, for example, he told a meeting of Orthodox bishops that the Church should have "every opportunity to fully serve in such important fields as the support of family and motherhood, the upbringing and education of children, youth, social development, and to strengthen the patriotic spirit of the armed forces." As far as I know, the Kremlin has not offered additional financial support to Orthodox civil organizations, but Orthodox organizations were generally spared from the inspections last spring visited upon other religious organizations—including the offices of Muslim charities, Catholic parishes, and Pentecostal and Mormon groups.

Yet there are signs that support for a more pragmatic approach toward civic activism remains strong among Russian officials. Konovalov's public reservations about the foreign agent law were quite remarkable, and the legislation also met with vocal opposition from the Presidential Council on Human Rights and Civil Society and even

[*] "Relations with NGOs," Levada Center, July 11, 2013 (http://www.levada.ru/11-07-2013/otnoshenie-k-nko).

from members of the usually tame Public Chamber. More interestingly, a program administered by the Ministry of Economic Development to support "socially-oriented" NGOs quietly went about its business despite the drama around the "foreign agent" legislation. Initiated by President Dmitry Medvedev in April 2010, the program offers direct financial support for individual NGOs and substantial subsidies to regional governments to provide logistical support and some financial support to local organizations. Though consistent with the policy of "import substitution," the program is run in a much more efficient and transparent manner than the presidential grants mentioned earlier. For example, in late July, the program announced results in the first round of its national competition, and the organization receiving the highest ranking was the Perm organization, GRANI, which had been prosecuted for violating the foreign agent law less than a month before.

In sum, Putin's policies and rhetoric toward civic organizations in his second presidency suggest a strategic shift even further toward preserving internal sovereignty against the pressures and temptations of a modernizing and globalizing world. This bodes ill for economic and social development in Russia. By limiting the space for independent social action, civic organizations will cease to be a source of social innovation and will function like any other state bureaucracy. In this case, the latest chapter of Putinism will increasingly resemble Brezhnevian stagnation.

Putin's Crackdown
SOURCES, INSTRUMENTS, AND CHALLENGES

PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo No. 277

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The government of President Vladimir Putin has tightened the screws on Russian society since his return to the Kremlin in May 2012. This crackdown has been carried out by the parliament, law enforcement agencies, and the courts. There have been high-profile trials like those of Pussy Riot and Aleksey Navalny, a campaign against "foreign agent" NGOs, increased penalties for participation in unauthorized protests, broadened definitions of treason, and culpability for those "abusing the religious feelings of believers" or spreading "homosexual propaganda." In analyzing these stifling trends, this memo makes three central points:

1) The crackdown should be seen not just as a response to the 2011-2012 protests and the rise of an active opposition movement, but as a repudiation of the main tenets of "Medvedevism," which embraced (especially rhetorically and symbolically) a more liberal and modern vision for Russia.
2) Although the clampdown gives the impression of a well-directed plan from a single center, the unfolding process also shows clear signs of bureaucratic and clan competition and freelancing, and is not simply the product of a unified well-oiled machine.
3) The Kremlin clearly has the advantage, but there are definite risks that follow from this campaign, including potential future problems within the very law enforcement organs that have spearheaded the offensive.

Burying Medvedevism

The notion that Dmitry Medvedev as president was significant enough to have his own "ism" seems implausible, given that he was the clear junior partner in the so-called tandemocracy, a bland placeholder to be swept aside by Putin's triumphal return. But in this case, the differences in style and image between the two leaders were important enough that Medvedev's presidency generated certain expectations for some Russians. The iPad-toting tweeter himself was the least of it. More significant were such initiatives as the Skolkovo high-tech innovation center that welcomed the involvement of Silicon Valley and MIT, a military-industrial policy that embraced foreign deals as a way of putting pressure on Russian heavy industry to modernize, and economic and legal

reforms that relied on liberal academics and civil society representatives not just for general advice but concrete initiatives. The less-than-impressive results from all of these efforts affirm Medvedev's weakness as president, but they do not entirely negate the political impact among liberal-minded elites and some segments of the population.

Perhaps the starkest example of the liberalizing and modernizing discourse associated with Medvedevism was captured in a December 2011 interview with chief Kremlin ideologist Vladislav Surkov after that year's parliamentary elections and initial protests. Surkov spoke of the indefensibility of the existing system, suggested that the protests were "real and natural," and declared that those protesting were the "best… [and] most productive" part of society whose "reasonable demands" should be embraced.

December 2011, however, was the beginning of the end for Medvedevism. The policies pursued since May 2012 strongly suggest that Putin and other more conservative elements blame Medvedev and Surkov for unleashing forces that threaten the regime. Although Medvedev is still prime minister, many of his initiatives have been cast aside and even criminalized. Surkov left his post as deputy prime minister in May 2013 amidst an Investigative Committee (*Sledstevenniy Komitet*, hereafter SK) probe of Skolkovo, with accusations that Surkov used Skolkovo money to finance the opposition. The SK also has been investigating the so-called "experts affair," insinuating that a group of lawyers, economists, and human rights experts conspired to "create the illusion that criminal jurisprudence should be liberalized"; this investigation led to the departure of prominent economist Sergey Guriev to Paris. Although the SK apparently thinks that this group of experts was working on behalf of Mikhail Khodorkovsky, journalist Leonid Nikitinsky correctly pointed out in *Novaya Gazeta* in May 2013 that the most influential participant in this "terrible group of wreckers" was then-President Medvedev.

The overall thrust of the crackdown, whether consciously chosen or not, is that Putin no longer aspires to be the president of all Russians. He has had to sacrifice the intelligentsia, small business owners, the so-called "creative classes," and "internet hamsters." The regime instead has oriented its policies toward more conservative elements of society: the *siloviki*, heavy industry, the working class, the Russian Orthodox Church, and a paternalistic electorate dependent on state support. The political and economic elite, many of whom seek financial and cultural integration with the West, are now being asked to "renationalize," to declare or forfeit their foreign holdings and demonstrate their loyalty to Russia.[*] These tendencies are not absolute and universal—the cultural and economic ties connecting Russia to the liberal West are still strong, and plenty of liberals remain in the government—but they represent a definite contrast with Medvedevism.

[*] See Viatcheslav Morozov, "'Nationalization of the Elites' and its Impact on Russian Foreign Policy," PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo No. 251, June 2013.

A Dis-ordered Police State

The dream of past European absolute monarchs was a "well-ordered police state." This vision probably resonates at some level with Putin, once labeled "the German in the Kremlin" by Alexander Rahr. Putin projects the image of a man with a lot of self-discipline. Is his government equally disciplined?

In some respects the current crackdown appears to be tightly coordinated. Most centrally, the combination of new laws designed to make life difficult for the liberal opposition (the NGO law, the treason law, the unauthorized protest law) and other initiatives designed to paint their supporters as some kind of alien, anti-Russian force (Pussy Riot, anti-homosexual and -blasphemy laws) seems both clever and effective. On the implementation side, we have different law enforcement organs taking the lead in different areas, suggesting coordination and centralized control.

But things may be less well-ordered than they appear; this is Russia, after all, not Prussia. Take the "foreign agent" NGO law. The law went into effect in November 2012, but in January 2013 Minister of Justice Aleksandr Konovalov made clear in comments to the Russian parliament that he was not in a big hurry to enforce it. This seemed to displease Putin, who in a speech to the Federal Security Service (FSB) in February criticized "structures financed from abroad and serving foreign interests" and insisted that the new law be implemented. But the signal was received most clearly not by the FSB or the Ministry of Justice but by the Procuracy, which in March began a far-reaching inspection campaign of foreign-financed NGOs. Procurator General Yuriy Chaika seems to have made this issue his own, even uncovering "foreign agents" in the Presidential Council on Human Rights in a July 2013 speech. However, Chaika's zeal may be more about his ongoing struggle for influence with SK director Aleksandr Bastrykin than any coordinated plan. Regional court cases in Perm and St. Petersburg in July that ruled in favor of NGOs also suggest there is no firm "vertical of power" on this issue that dictates every outcome.

Similarly, the Navalny prosecution in the *Kirovles* case was almost stillborn at the regional level; Bastrykin had to step in to push the case forward. Bastrykin has clearly been a key player in the crackdown, but it is hard to know if he is working at Putin's direction (he went to law school with Putin and was handpicked for his current job) or acting on his own to please Putin and demonstrate his loyalty. The Navalny prosecution also has a highly personal element for Bastrykin, since Navalny suggested that Bastrykin himself should be investigated for several possible crimes, including an apparent murder threat against *Novaya Gazeta* journalist Sergey Sokolov in June 2012 and false statements and tax declarations about business and real estate holdings in the Czech Republic. Bastrykin's checkered reputation may be useful to Putin—as political analyst Tatyana Stanovaya put it, a weakened Bastrykin may be the ideal person to carry out "dirty work," even "taking the initiative where, perhaps, he didn't need to." The curious affair with Navalny's prosecution, arrest, and then release on appeal the next day also seems more easily explained by competing groups within the upper elite than some kind of clever scheme manipulated from the very top.

A final question about the coherence of the crackdown concerns the role of the FSB. The SK and Bastrykin have been out in front on many episodes, including the Navalny and Pussy Riot trials, the "Bolotnoe affair" targeting 28 people accused of inciting or participating in violence during the May 2012 protests against Putin's inauguration, and the investigations into Skolkovo and the "experts affair." The Procuracy has taken the lead on the "foreign agents" campaign. And the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) provides the front-line troops for policing demonstrations, as well as uses its Department for Countering Extremism ("Center E") to gather materials on the opposition. At least publicly, the FSB has been less central to the crackdown, which is particularly striking given Putin's background and the widespread perception of "Chekist" (secret service) domination of the Russian state. Obviously the FSB's electronic capabilities—wire-tapping, internet monitoring—give it a definite role, but it is much less visible in the crackdown than other agencies; the same goes for its head Aleksandr Bortnikov. Russian specialist Andrey Soldatov has suggested that Putin himself is unhappy with the FSB's "passive role," and that even Putin has trouble monitoring and controlling the FSB from the outside, given its traditions and privileges.

Controlling the Controllers

Overall, the effort to tighten the screws since May 2012 should be judged a success from the regime's point of view. The government increased the use of what political scientists Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way call "low-intensity coercion"—surveillance, harassment, investigations, and detentions—to harass actual or potential regime opponents. If Russia is more of a dis-ordered than well-ordered police state, however, then there are potential future problems with the police, broadly conceived. Specifically, two features of the state's coercive and law enforcement organs may become problems for a sustained crackdown: the pervasiveness of corrupt and predatory practices among these bodies, and questions about the reliability of the police in the face of social protests.

A prominent aspect of Russia's dis-ordered police state is not just clan and bureaucratic competition, but corruption. Russian law enforcement personnel do not just serve the powers that be; they also serve their own pockets. In the context of the generalized crackdown on actual or potential oppositionists, arguably there are even fewer checks than before on discretionary, arbitrary, and just plain predatory behavior by investigators and police. The legal justifications in the Navalny *Kirovles* case were so flimsy—"selling wood at incorrect prices"—that many observers anticipate expanded attacks on business from law enforcement, as happened after the Yukos/Khodorkovsky case. But a well-ordered police state cannot function properly if law enforcement personnel are motivated as much by corruption as by service to the ruling regime. As Putin's erstwhile Chekist ally Viktor Cherkesov once famously remarked, "you cannot be a trader and a warrior at the same time." Cherkesov overstated the matter, as it seems quite common in Russia to combine both functions, but it is hard to do both of them well simultaneously.

Another risk from the controllers is at this point purely hypothetical but worth raising because it is also potentially the most significant one. The MVD in general, and its OMON special forces in particular, has been able to handle political protests in Moscow reasonably well. Dealing with major social protests, either in Moscow or the regions, may present greater challenges. Social protests could emerge for multiple reasons, including ethnic and economic ones. Confrontations between ethnic Russians and young men from the North Caucasus have been the flashpoint for social protests in Kondopoga in 2006, Moscow's Manezh Square in 2010, and Pugachev in July 2013. The possibility of further clashes along ethnic lines, including large and violent ones, should be a concern for the police and the regime in general. Economically-motivated protests also could be a cause for concern, especially given current and projected low levels of economic growth. Events such as the 2005 protests over the monetization of social benefits, the 2008 Vladivostok demonstrations concerning imported car duties, or the 2009 protests in Pikalevo over the nonpayment of wages at the sole factory in town are the type of episodes that the authorities would like to limit and control as much as possible.

Russian police and security personnel have done well under Putin, with higher salaries, the promise of a respectable pension and maybe an apartment if they keep their heads down and stay out of trouble, and opportunities for enrichment on the side. But there is not much evidence of a strong ideological commitment to the regime that would make them highly resilient if called upon to violently repress large groups of protestors. The plan for full professionalization of the MVD internal troops by 2016, on top of earlier steps to increase the number of OMON personnel, suggests that someone in the Kremlin is thinking about the possibility of having to cope with widescale protests, whether political or social.

Force is obviously an option of last resort, and Putin retains considerable popularity. This memo should definitely not be read as a prediction of future disorder; indeed, the multipronged crackdown described above seems to have been more successful than unsuccessful. But that does not mean Russia has a well-ordered police state—there is a lot of disorder inherent in Putinism, even with Medvedevism on the run.

Beyond the Polls
GOOGLE QUERIES AND PUBLIC PROTEST VOLATILITY IN RUSSIA

PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo No. 278

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Declining satisfaction with a country's direction—a measure that typically tracks with declining public support for a government in power—has been shown to precede mass anti-government protest, as the Arab Spring illustrated. For example, the end of Hosni Mubarak's 30-year reign followed a steady decline in Egyptians' satisfaction with their country's direction—from 55 percent of respondents in the Pew Charitable Trust surveys in 2006 to 28 percent in 2010. His successor, Muhammed Morsi, was forced out of office after public satisfaction with Egypt's prospects plunged from the post-revolutionary high of 65 percent in 2011 to 30 percent in 2013.*

In Russia, according to Levada Center surveys, satisfaction with the country's direction has gradually declined, for the most part, from a high of 64 percent in December 2007 to 41 percent in November 2011, the month preceding the largest public demonstrations against Putin's rule. Over the same timeframe, approval of Vladimir Putin went down from 87 to 67 percent. Not only was this decline significantly less pronounced than in Egypt, most of it took place prior to 2011. Since January 2011, these measures varied within a 10-percent range (plus or minus 5 percentage points, or just above the 3-4 percent margin of sampling error in these surveys)—not significant enough to foretell large-scale outbursts of public protest. Nor does one learn more from the question on the likelihood of political protest in the same surveys—this indicator has remained flat and low since 2001, whereas protest activity has varied (see **Figure 1**).

Moreover, the Russian government's pressure on NGOs—including taking over Levada's former head office, the All-Russian Center for the Study of Public Opinion (VTsIOM), in 2003 to ordering the Levada Center to report as a "foreign agent" in 2013—justifiably makes Russian pollsters wary of refining protest-related questions. The head of the Levada Center, Lev Gudkov, admitted using weighted coefficients based on Central Electoral Commission (CEC) voting and turnout data for prior elections.† These coefficients, in Gudkov's examples from early 2012, had marginal impact on estimates of electoral outcomes. Yet Gudkov based these coefficients on CEC turnout data from

* Pew Research, *Global Attitudes Project*, "Satisfaction with Country Direction – Egypt," July 2013 (http://www.pewglobal.org/database/indicator/3/country/64/).
† Lev Gudkov and Georgi Satarov. "Sociology: a Crisis of Confidence," *Novaya Gazeta*, April 3, 2012 (http://en.novayagazeta.ru/politics/51942.html).

previous elections and the assumption that the CEC rigged the results in favor of ER and Putin to the order of 3-6 percent of the vote across Russia, whereas an analysis of electoral fraud statistics (such as the frequency of specific digits in reported results) in the 2008 elections suggests that the actual scale of vote inflation was over 25 percent and that CEC-reported turnout strongly correlated with the vote for the Kremlin's candidate.* Due to this correlation, the basing of weighting coefficients on CEC turnout data makes polling data indeterminate as a measure of support for the government in power—regardless of how accurate vote distortion estimates were and how well the polls may have predicted the official voting outcomes.

Moreover, as Gudkov revealed, sometimes Kremlin insiders may want to exaggerate drops in Putin's rating, to make Putin worry about his political future and crack down on political opponents and independent pollsters, as reportedly was the case in 2003.† The Russian pollsters' vulnerability to these pressures—particularly as the Kremlin has ratcheted up judicial penalties against regime critics—further reduces the value of Russian survey data as a social forecasting tool.

Turning to Internet Queries

Luckily, other instruments are increasingly available. A growing body of research now shows that Internet search statistics can systematically predict important social and political behavior. Following a study that reliably predicts influenza epidemics in the United States using Google query data two weeks in advance‡ Seth Stephens-Davidowitz of Harvard University statistically estimated the impact of racial animus on the vote for Barack Obama using Google search statistics for a specific racially-charged term in 2004-2007 across the United States.§ Tobias Preis of the Warwick Business School, Helen Susannah Moat of University College London, and H. Eugene Stanley of Boston University found that specific Google queries were significantly related to the overall direction of the Dow Jones closing prices on a weekly basis.** All of these studies relied on crucial methodological advantages of Internet search behavior, which elicits private sensitive attitudes that are unlikely to be revealed through surveys, interviews, focus groups, or other social research methods.

More importantly, national surveys and other sampling-based opinion measures are designed to assess prevalent views in a country as a whole, whereas mass protests typically involve a small fraction of a country's population—people whose views are more aggrieved, emotionally charged, and action-oriented than those of society at large.

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* Evgeniya Lukinova, Mikhail Myagkov, and Peter C. Ordeshook. "Metastisised Fraud in Russia's 2008 Presidential Election," *Europe-Asia Studies* 63:4, 603-621.

† http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/2247769.

‡ Google, "Flu Trends," 2011 (http://www.google.org/about/flutrends/how.html).

§ Seth Stephens-Davidowitz, "The Cost of Racial Animus on a Black Presidential Candidate: Using Google Search Data To Find What Surveys Miss," March 24, 2013 (http://www.people.fas.harvard.edu/~sstephen/papers/RacialAnimusAndVotingSethStephensDavidowitz.pdf).

** Rob Kozlowski, "Google searches appear to predict stock market moves, new paper says," *Pensions & Investments*, April 25, 2013 (http://www.pionline.com/article/20130425/DAILYREG/130429931).

Internet search data, however, can be calibrated to identify precisely these kinds of users. One of the most challenging issues in Internet query analysis is the selection of diagnostic search terms. Ensuring validity—i.e., that the Internet terms putatively representing a certain attitude or behavior actually represent them—is one major challenge. The analysts of the flu epidemic, for example, went through several stages of sophisticated maximum likelihood estimations starting with thousands of search terms, which were then broken down into meaningful diagnostic clusters. Reliability of terms over time is another problem. When trends are assessed over years and political language changes, Internet search terms may lose their predictive power.

Deriving Internet Protest Indicators from Theory and Context

In Russia's political and social context, an Internet query arguably needs to meet at least three criteria to be a proxy for anti-government protest mobilization. First, it must contain the target of blame or the name of the principal scapegoat. Russia's top-heavy political system rests single-handedly on Vladimir Putin. Debra Javeline's statistical analysis of Russia's public opinion data has shown that blame attribution has been a decisive catalyst of mass public protest in Russia.* Standing out unequivocally as the man in charge of the country, Putin is the most prominent target for any potential protestor.

Second, the query must contain a "blame target characterization" that evokes negative associations. Moreover, this characterization must be consistent with themes that have significant public resonance. One way to identify such themes is Internet content analysis. Excellent data is available in a 2011 study of nationalist, communist, and liberal opposition discourses taken from Russia's largest social network, *VKontakte,* by professor Emil Pain, a former Yeltsin advisor on nationality policy, and his associates. Their quantitative analysis singled out three principal themes that cross over at least two of these three groups—corruption, xenophobia (ethnic hatred), and anti-Americanism.† Thus, more protest-bound Internet users in Russia are likely to be those who search for evidence that Putin might be corrupt, or might not be a Slav, or might be secretly vested in the West's interests and norms to the detriment of Russia.

Third, given that rumors often serve as a key catalyst of mass collective action, speculative but plausible attributes are likely to be better predictors of mass protest behavior than accurate or known-for-a-fact attributes.

Based on these considerations, the key search term picked for this analytic probe was "Putin Jew" ("Путин еврей"). The phrase captures queries that are statements or questions. It contains the principal blame target accompanied by a socially resonant, speculative, and not implausible (if untrue) target attribute. Social research has demonstrated that anti-Semitism has been strong and persistent in Russia's society, where hinting that someone is a "hidden Jew" has long been a standard attribute of

* Debra Javeline, "The Role of Blame in Collective Action: Evidence from Russia," *American Political Science Review* 97 (February 2003): 107-121.

† E. A. Pain, S. V. Mokhov, E. I. Polyakov, S. A. Prostakov, and S. Yu. Fedyunin, "Etnopoliticheskie protsessy v zerkale runeta" [Ethnopolitical processes through the prism of Runet], 2011 (unpublished paper).

negative rumors about a person. Ethno-religious animus in this characterization is also combined with stereotyping of Jews as affluent swindlers who shun honest manual labor and are unfaithful to Russia's national interests due to an affinity with Israel and the West. Those who search the Internet wondering if Putin might be a "hidden Jew" would be likely to do so not only—and probably not so much—out of curiosity or a conspiracy theory fetish, but because they suspect that Putin and his government are corrupt and fail to serve the interests of the ethnic Russian (Slav) majority and of Russia as a state. Thus, the term captures the three key themes that Emil Pain and his associates found in Russian Internet discourses of the principal anti-government opposition users: leadership corruption, xenophobia, and anti-Americanism.

Looking Back: Google Searches Presaged Protest Mood Rise in 2008-2011

Google query statistics for the test term above yield significant insights (see **Figure 2**):

- Intense anti-Putin sentiment emerged and spread to a small but noticeable segment of the Russian public in December 2007 and spiked in winter 2008 (following the designation of Dmitry Medvedev as caretaker president). After December 2007, Putin was no longer Russia's "Teflon president."
- Opinion polls missed this development, as satisfaction with the country's direction and Putin's approval ratings, according to polls, were still rising in late 2007 toward an all-time peak in the first half of 2008. However, the first large rise in the number of searches for "Putin Jew" preceded the turnaround in Putin's approval and valuation of Russia's direction in the polls—from a steady multi-year increase before early 2008 to a steady though slow multi-year decrease thereafter.
- All three most significant spikes in Google searches for "Putin Jew" (April 2008, April 2011, and December 2011)—accompanied by continued search activity at one or more standard deviations above the mean level of interest (see **Figure 2**, the mean is represented by "0")—were followed by large-scale anti-government protests about six months later. Discontent with Putin built up steadily from 2008 to 2011, peaking between April and December 2011.
- Judging from the polling data, intense anti-Putin sentiments in 2011 and 2012 were most likely confined to the 25-35 percent of the Russian public who disapproved of Putin's activity as president in Levada Center polls. Yet, even though they affected probably a much smaller proportion of the population than 25-35 percent, these sentiments were still widespread, capable of sustaining long-lasting mass protests.
- Anti-Putin sentiment was mostly confined to Moscow and St. Petersburg, and strongly correlated with searches for the term, *Vkontakte*, which is Russia's largest social network.

The significance of this probe should not be overestimated. One would need to examine other plausible and control queries and specify what exact level of change in search term frequency is likely to presage what level of anti-government protest on what

issue. The query tracked here also does not necessarily capture motivations for other protest types, notably mass strikes. Still, the results show promise in tracking protest mood volatility in a way that surveys do not.

Looking Ahead

Google queries show that Putin's government faces a much lower risk of public protest today than in 2011-2012. Anti-Putin protests on the 2011-2012 scale are unlikely, at least through early 2014. At the time of writing in June 2013, search frequency for "Putin Jew" on Google in Russian has dropped eightfold from its peak in December 2011. Queries about Putin ostensibly being a thief ("Путин вор")—a popular 2011-2012 protest slogan—dropped tenfold from its peak in February 2012. Queries alleging that Putin might be an American spy ("Путин американский шпион")—controlling for direct association of Putin with anti-Americanism, a significant anti-government opposition theme identified in Pain's study—never reached enough volume to show up on Google Trends. After conducting various such searches, one may conclude that the emotionally charged protest mood has softened and will need time to rebuild momentum.

Yet, the Teflon is not back. The new stability is more brittle than before 2011 in a way that at first glance may appear counterintuitive. Thus, one of the Kremlin's strategies to prop up public support for Putin in his third term has been to beef up nationalist and patriotic credentials through scapegoating and criminalizing social behaviors that are viewed with suspicion or denounced by most Russians—such as receiving foreign funding or displaying homosexual preferences. Google search traffic suggests, however, that this strategy may backfire. Notably, the passing of restrictions on homosexuals earlier in 2013 was accompanied by a significant—and continuing—rise in the number of Google queries about Putin himself ostensibly being gay ("Путин гей"). These searches may well reflect the new source of anti-Putin protest mood.[*] Its increase could have partly fueled an unexpectedly large outpouring of demonstrators onto the streets of Moscow in July 2013 when Putin critic and anti-embezzlement activist, Alexey Navalny, was himself sentenced to jail for embezzlement by a court in Kirov.

While this analysis is at best suggestive and requires more systematic testing, it is helpful in casting a searchlight on political stability in Russia where otherwise it may not have been cast. Two general conclusions are paramount. First, it would be naïve to equate anti-Putin public protests in Russia with support for Western-style democracy. If anything, such protests are more likely to tap into ethnocentric, xenophobic, homophobic, and anti-Western attitudes that are widespread among the Russian public. In other words, Russians would be more likely to protest when they no longer find Putin

[*] Additional tests ruled out a hypothesis that Russians were searching for "Putin gay" predominantly for the latest news on Putin and the laws affecting homosexuals. If this were the case, one would expect searches for "Putin lesbians" to rise and fall and sync. Yet this query was not searched enough to be registered by Google Trends, whereas searches for "gay" and "lesbian" in Russia have gone up and down in sync since 2004. Additionally, the analysis on Google Correlate of top twenty other searches correlated with "Putin gay" revealed no queries related to laws or legislation or politics, yet several queries related to explicit sexual behavior and one query related to a website that posted rumors about Putin's sexual relationships.

as an adequate embodiment of these sentiments. Second, the 2014 Sochi Olympics—an event Putin has cherished as a springboard to a place in history as an internationally revered leader of Russia—is likely to be the most serious testing ground of his political legitimacy in the first half of his third presidential term. Putin faces an unenviable task of striking a balance between international stature and national recognition. If Putin makes exceptions to the new anti-homosexuality promotion laws, and orders Russia's law enforcement agencies to turn a blind eye to violations of Russia's ban on public displays of homosexual symbols by the world's top athletes during the 2014 Olympics, he risks diffusing his core public base of support. If he cracks down on the same displays following the letter of the new Russian laws, he risks going down in history outside Russia as a small-minded, backward-looking autocrat who diminished Russia's international prestige. One way or another, a perceptive analysis of Internet search traffic—more than opinion polls or other sociological indicators—is likely to offer a more sensitive indicator of how well Putin may be managing his tricky balancing act in the run-up to Sochi 2014.

Figure 1. Levada Surveys Foresaw No Spikes of Anti-Putin Protest Mood, 2000-2013
Levada Centre "Indices" available at: http://www.levada.ru/indeksy

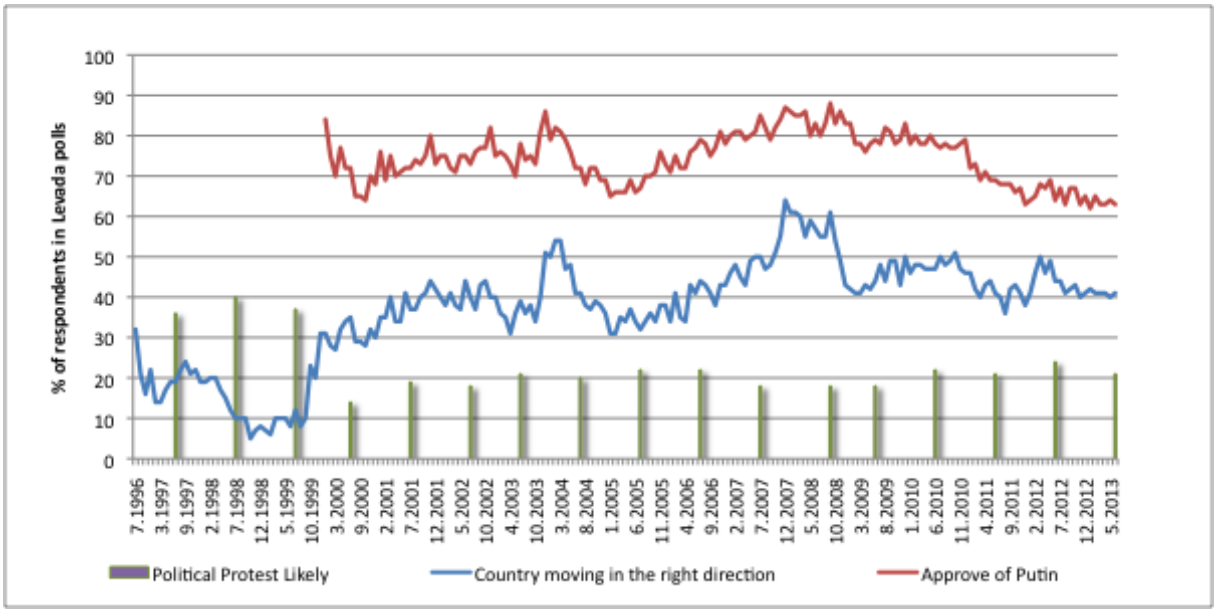

Figure 2. Google Trends Presage Spikes in Anti-Government Protest Approximately Six Months in Advance.

New Media, Political Information, and Opposition Views in Russia

A CAUTIONARY NOTE BASED ON SURVEY EVIDENCE

PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo No. 279

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Access to the internet has grown at an exponential rate in Russia during the last four years, and many commentators have ascribed a mobilizing role to the new media in the waves of discontent and protest surrounding the December 2011 parliamentary and March 2012 presidential elections. A series of surveys conducted during the 2011-2012 election season provides evidence for testing one key mechanism by which new media purportedly encourages opposition to authoritarian regimes: by providing easy access to a wide variety of politically relevant information in contexts marked by moderate to severe government control over conventional media. The surveys contained extensive measures of different forms of both new and conventional media use and of a wide range of political attitudes.

This data demonstrates that the use of new media for political communication—that is, the active exchange of political views on the internet—is indeed moderately associated with more critical (though not necessarily more democratic or progressive) views. However, passive use of the internet as a source of political information is unrelated to political views. The same holds for the use of social network sites. Use of traditional media sources is, as expected, related to more support for the government and its policies. The lack of a consistent relationship between web-based political information-seeking and political attitudes suggests that individuals who use the web for political communication are more critically-minded to begin with: in other words, the apparent positive "effect" of the internet on oppositional orientation is more likely due to self-selection into the group of those who use the web for political communication rather than due to a causal effect of web engagement on political views. These findings imply that policymakers should not assume that promoting internet freedom in Russia and elsewhere will increase the level of opposition attitudes. There are, however, other mechanisms by which the spread of new media might facilitate anti-incumbent mobilization.

New Media as a Source of Alternative Critical Political Information?

The 2009 protests in Iran and the Arab Spring events of 2010-11 helped create a widespread impression that the internet and other new forms of communication such as text messaging and Twitter can play an important role in mobilizing opposition to dictatorial regimes. The U.S. government officially embraces the notion that the web can serve as a tool for spreading democracy, bolstering human rights, and countering authoritarian leaders. This notion is clearly behind then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's much-cited January 2010 "internet freedom" speech and other statements that year and since, as well as tens of millions of dollars earmarked annually for programs to support internet freedom abroad.

One potential mechanism by which new media might play a democratizing role is by expanding access to information about political issues in contexts of moderate to severe government controls over conventional media sources. Proponents of the view that the internet can drive anti-authoritarian mobilization argue that by giving populations access to a wider spectrum of politically relevant information the internet helps expose them to alternatives to the official view, provides the knowledge base necessary to hold authorities accountable for misdeeds, and gives opposition leaders the ability to stir up grievances against incumbent leaders.

The potential role of new media in spreading independent information that is unfavorable toward the government may be particularly pronounced in Russia in light of the fairly pervasive (though hardly universal) control authorities have exerted over traditional media outlets. Yet skeptics have challenged the notion that new media and social media inherently promote democracy, either in Russia or more generally, and there is little or no empirical evidence on this question from non-democratic societies.

Three questions need to be addressed empirically in order to assess the view that new media use fosters the spread of opposition and/or pro-democratic views in semi-authoritarian contexts like Russia. First, what are the distinctive patterns of new (and old) media use? Often, discussions of the internet and new media are fuzzy with respect to what specific forms of media use they have in mind. It may be helpful, for example, to distinguish between internet use for political and non-political purposes, use of social network sites, and use of email, texting, and Twitter, as these different modalities of new media use may have varying relationships to politics. Moreover, any study of new media use and politics should take into account the use of traditional media sources, as they might in principle either substitute for new media or supplement new media, with different implications for their political consequences.

Second, what characteristics are related to the use of different types of new and traditional media? The potential political relevance of any form of media use would be magnified to the extent that it is disproportionately concentrated among strategically important groups, such as the well-educated, high-earners, capital dwellers, and young adults (who in many societies are more likely to take up political activity against authorities).

Third, is there a relationship between different forms of media use and political views, controlling for variables that are likely to be associated with both sets of

variables? By bringing empirical data from Russia to bear on these questions, we can begin to assess the popular notion that the internet can help undermine dictatorships by promoting opposition orientations.

Data

The Russian election surveys were sponsored by Democracy International, a Washington, D.C. consulting firm, and they were implemented by the Levada Center, the leading academic survey research firm in Russia. There were four waves of data collection, all using a standard multi-stage cluster sampling approach to produce a probability sample of respondents aged 18 and over: 1202 respondents were surveyed prior to the parliamentary election (November 17-30); another 1201 were interviewed afterwards (December 9-22); 1401 respondents were surveyed prior to the presidential election (February 17-29); and 1401 following the election (March 16-April 2). The response rates in all four waves were in the range of 36-38 percent, which is standard for surveys conducted in Russia. In total, the election surveys were conducted in 135 settlements (42 regional centers, 54 towns, and 39 rural regions), belonging to 46 regions of the Russian Federation. The latter two surveys included a Moscow oversample, and I use weights to adjust the sample distribution by education, age, gender, and locality to match national parameters.

Dimensions of New and Old Media Use

The survey included 26 questions measuring the frequency with which respondents use new and old media and divided into four blocks:

- Overall use of different communication/information technologies and media.
- Use of different sources for information about political events.
- Use of the internet for specific purposes.
- Seven specific uses of the internet and text messaging for political and non-political purposes.

I performed an exploratory factor analysis to determine how many distinct dimensions underlie these 26 specific measures. The optimal factor analysis solution includes five factors (**Table 1**). This solution performs quite well, explaining over half the variances of all 26 individual survey items (i.e., every unique variance is under .50 of the total variance for the item). Based on the rotated solution, we constructed five separate additive scales:

1) The w*eb-based political information scale* measures the extent to which respondents use the internet and other new media as a source of news. It is based on the mean score on frequency of using Russian websites, foreign websites, and blogs to obtain news about current events, using the internet to obtain information about local, national, and foreign events, and reading blogs on political and non-political topics.

2) The *web-based political communication scale* captures ways of using new media to exchange political views. This scale represents more active political communication as opposed to the passive receipt of information captured by the web-based political information scale. It is computed as the mean score on frequency of using the web to find people with similar political views and to exchange political views, of posting political and non-political commentaries, taking part in a political chat/discussion, and contacting using the web and text messages.
3) The *general social networking scale* represents using the web for the purpose of making social contacts. It includes text messaging, email, the two most popular Russian domestic social networking sites, other websites, and using the internet to find friends.
4) The *Facebook/LiveJournal scale* measures use of these two specific social networking sites, which represents a distinct factor from general social networking.
5) A *traditional news source usage scale* is the mean score on frequency of using television, radio, and newspapers for information about current events. It is worth noting that these three sources all load on the same factor (they all measure the same underlying media consumption trait rather than different traits), even though it is often noted that Russian government controls are tighter over television news reporting than they are over radio.

These results show that in Russia it is misleading to speak of new media use as a single unitary phenomenon: in fact, there are four distinct forms of new media use. Individuals may regularly engage in more than one of these forms, but they represent distinct activities that should be analyzed separately. It is also worth noting that traditional news consumption is positively (but weakly) correlated with both web-based political information-seeking and web-based political communication: apparently, those who engage with the internet for news are also slightly more likely to consume news from old media sources.

Correlates of the Dimensions of New and Old Media Use

I used multiple regression models to determine how demographic, socioeconomic, and residential characteristics relate to each dimension of media usage (results available upon request). Not surprisingly, young people are more likely to engage in all four new media forms. Given their relatively low level of interest in politics (evident from other questions in the survey), this clearly reflects their higher levels of familiarity with web and mobile phone technology. Consistent with this interpretation, they are significantly less likely to seek information from traditional news sources. Education has strong, consistent, and predictable effects on all five measures, probably reflecting a combination of both greater interest in politics and greater access to the internet among

the highly educated. Residents of Moscow exhibit higher levels of all five forms of media usage, notwithstanding Muscovites' avowedly lower level of interest in politics. St. Petersburg residents use three of the five types of media more frequently (not web-based political communication or traditional news sources). Social network use and web-based news source use are less common in rural villages. Women use both traditional and web-based news sources less than men. All five forms of usage grew more frequent after the parliamentary elections, most likely reflecting widespread interest in the ensuing protests and presidential campaign. Overall, there are empirical grounds for concluding that web-based political information and political discussions are reaching strategically important groups in the population (the highly educated, Muscovites, high-earners, and young adults.)

New and Old Media Use and Political Views

To ascertain whether each of the five forms of media use are related to particular political views, I included the five scales in a series of regression models for a range of dependent variables pertaining to political attitudes. The models controlled for age, gender, education, place of residence, income, survey wave, and ethnicity. The type of model used varied depending on the level of measurement of the dependent variable. The results regarding the associations between the five media use scales and political views are displayed in **Tables 2** and **3**.

Web-based political communication and consumption of traditional news sources have much more political significance than the other three forms. Web-based political communicators are generally more opposition-minded, although not consistently more "progressive." They are less likely to support United Russia, President Vladimir Putin, the mass media, and other government institutions; to agree that Russia is on the right course; and to view foreign influence in general and the United States in particular in hostile terms. They are also more supportive of several opposition parties (including both liberal and nationalist ones), critical of the elections, and supportive of the protest movement. A nationalist streak can be detected in their elevated support for the slogan, "Russia for Russians" and for Vladimir Zhirinovsky's Liberal Democratic Party of Russia and the National Bolshevik Party. Traditional news consumption is linked to higher levels of support for the current government (both Putin and United Russia), nostalgia for the Soviet Union and Stalin, and suspicion of foreign influences and both "eastern" minority groups (Azeris, Chechens, gypsies, Muslims, and Tajiks) and "western" ones (Americans, Jews, and Swedes).

In contrast, web-based information seeking shows few significant associations with political views, and no consistent pattern among them. The same holds for both indexes of social network usage. The null findings regarding these three forms of new media use are noteworthy, because they run counter to the widespread view that new media use in general fosters more opposition views. Altogether, the results show that only the active communication about political issues via the web exhibits such a relationship: passive consumption of news on the web does not, nor do other uses of the web (for communication with friends via social networks, for example).

Conclusions

The lack of any association between web-based political information-seeking and political attitudes contradicts the view that Russians are being influenced politically in one direction or another by what they read on the internet. The fact that web-based political communication is the main form of electronic political engagement linked to critical political views, while political information-seeking via the web has no relationship to orientations, would seem to contradict the idea that electronic political engagement plays an independent causal role in stimulating opposition views in Russia. Given the active nature of web-based communication, it is more likely that its association with criticism reflects self-selection: critically-minded Russians turn to the web to share their views with others. If the web had an independent effect in the direction of encouraging opposition attitudes, we would expect to find those who seek information on the web to be more critically-minded.

This does not, of course, mean that political blogs, discussions, and websites play no independent role in Russian politics: after all, web-based communication can help critically-minded Russians find one another and learn that their critical views are shared via the web, leading to the type of opinion cascades that can drive collective action. They can also use the web to coordinate protest activities. But the findings reported here do suggest policymakers and pundits should refrain from touting the web as a source of alternative information that can turn opinion against a regime that exerts control over traditional news sources. New media may play such a role in other countries, but the Russian case suggests that more research on this topic is required before determining whether the U.S. government's financial and rhetorical investment in internet freedom as a source of anti-authoritarianism is justified.

TABLE 1. Factor Analysis of Measures of Electronic Political Engagement, Duma Election survey

	Factor 1	*Factor 2*	*Factor 3*	*Factor 4*	*Factor 5*
Use: SMS on a mobile phone	-.059	-.058	**.809**	-.035	.131
Use: E-mail	.285	-.114	**.661**	.102	-.017
Use: Facebook	-.001	.091	.191	**.687**	.033
Use: Zhivoi Journal	-.045	.178	.071	**.757**	.040
Use: V Kontakte	.024	-.018	**.718**	.189	-.062
Use: Odnoklassniki	-.046	.036	**.828**	.051	-.014
Use: Other websites (not email)	.219	-.063	**.599**	.167	-.093
Use for news: Television	.022	-.059	.026	-.136	**.710**
Use for news: Radio	-.082	.050	.100	.119	**.740**
Use for news: Newpapers	.103	.017	-.148	.102	**.726**
Use for news: Russian news websites	**.788**	-.144	.161	.115	.033
Use for news: Foreign news websites	**.607**	.036	-.066	.365	.025
Use for news: Blogs on the internet	**.547**	.016	.047	.389	.028
Use net for: Get info about political events in your city/town	**.934**	.015	.004	-.082	.019
Use net for: Get info about political events elsewhere in Russia	**.980**	-.040	.025	-.080	.002
Use net for: Get info about political events in other countries	**.952**	.019	.010	-.103	.008
Use net for: Find people who share your political views	.306	**.657**	.012	-.164	.043
Use net for: find new friends	.135	.410	**.519**	-.286	-.003
Use net for: Exchange views on political topics with other people	.357	**.620**	.049	-.179	.007
Frequency: Posted about a political topic on a web site	.022	**.824**	-.054	.142	-.008
Frequency: Read a blog about a political theme	**.676**	.215	-.111	.154	-.025
Frequency: Participated in an on-line discussion/chat about politics	-.024	**.856**	-.039	.119	-.018
Frequency: Posted about a non-political topic on a web site	.018	**.670**	.042	.210	-.059
Frequency: Read a blog about a non-political theme	**.565**	.145	.098	.124	-.065
Frequency: Used the internet to contact authorities	-.086	**.905**	-.017	.025	.029
Frequency: Used SMS to contact authorities	-.156	**.858**	-.038	.113	.016

Additive Scale Label	Political info	Political commu-nication	Social network	Facebook /Live journal	Traditio-nal news
Scale mean	.844	.279	1.077	.347	3.252
Standard Deviation	1.309	.745	1.076	.851	1.206
Range	0 to 5	0 to 5	0 to 4	0 to 4	0 to 5

TABLE 2. Associations of media use scales with support for parties and institutions
Age, education, gender, locality, income, survey wave, and Russian ethnicity are controlled using regression.

Support for specific political parties and organizations

	United Russia	KPRF	LDPR	Yabloko	Right Forces	National Bolshevik Party	PARNAS
Webpolcom	-	0	+	+	0	+	0
Webnews	0	0	-	0	0	-	0
Tradnews	0	+	0	0	-	0	-
Socnet	0	0	+	0	0	+	0
Fablive	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Voted for…	United Russia	KPRF	LDPR	Yabloko	Did not vote (abstain)	Putin	Ziuganov
Webpolcom	-	+	+	+	-	-	0
Webnews	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Tradnews	+	+	0	0	-	+	+
Socnet	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Fablive	0	-	0	0	0	0	0

Confidence in institutions and leaders

	Political parties	*Police*	*Local gov't*	*PM Putin*	*Mass media*
Webpolcom	0	0	-	-	-
Webnews	0	0	0	0	0
Tradnews	+	+	+	+	0
Socnet	0	0	0	+	0
Fablive	0	0	0	0	0

	Pres Med-vedev	*The Duma*	*The Army*	*The courts*
Webpolcom	-	0	-	-
Webnews	0	0	0	+
Tradnews	+	+	+	+
Socnet	0	+	0	0
Fablive	0	0	+	0

TABLE 3. Associations of media use scales on attitudes toward political issues

Age, education, gender, locality, income, survey wave, and Russian ethnicity are controlled using regression.

	Protests are good for Russia	Russia is on the right course	Soviet collapse = catastrophe	Pro-Stalin scale	Agree with "Russia for Russians"
Webpolcom	+	-	0	-	+
Webnews	+	0	+	+	-
Tradnews	+	0	+	+	+
Socnet	0	0	-	0	0
Fablive	0	+	0	0	+
	Agree with "Stop feeding the Caucasus"	Scale of suspicion of foreign influence	US is enemy or rival	Anti-eastern groups scale	Anti-western groups scale
Webpolcom	0	-	-	0	0
Webnews	0	0	+	0	0
Tradnews	0	+	0	+	+
Socnet	0	0	0	0	0
Fablive	+	0	0	0	0
	Agree there were violations in Duma election	Level of dissatisfac-tion with Duma elections	Sympathize with protestors (yes or no)	Scale of support for protests	Likelihood that R would join a protest in his/her town
Webpolcom	+	+	+	+	+
Webnews	0	0	0	0	0
Tradnews	-	0	0	0	+
Socnet	0	-	0	-	0
Fablive	0	0	0	0	0

Political Protest and Regime-Opposition Dynamics in Russia

PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo No. 280

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Focus groups and opinion polls in Russia over the past three years have revealed substantial discontent with Russia's political system—discontent that was instrumental in the outbreak of mass protests in December 2011 after Russia's parliamentary elections were marred by widespread fraud. The scale of the protests caught most observers by surprise. Even though electoral fraud has been a catalyst of anti-regime unrest in several other post-Soviet states in the recent past, neither the Russian authorities nor even many of the protesters themselves expected that the same phenomenon would occur in Russia. The size of the demonstrations and the hostility that was openly voiced toward Vladimir Putin once would have been inconceivable in Russia, but Putin's announcement in September 2011 that he would be returning as Russian president (and his claim that he had decided several years earlier to return in 2012 and had, by implication, merely been stringing people along) sparked dismay not only among the remnants of Russia's political opposition but also among many other Russians who sensed that the political system was becoming stale and needed to be replaced by a less opaque and more accountable structure.

Even though only a year-and-a-half has passed, those protests now seem a distant memory. This policy memo will explain what went wrong and what might happen in the future.

The Protests and Backlash

The demonstrations in Russia in late 2011 and early 2012 came on the heels of destabilizing unrest that had been engulfing North Africa and the Middle East since early 2011. The unexpected outbreak of anti-regime protests in many parts of the Arab world, the downfall of long-time dictators in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya, and the onset of a bloody civil war in Syria contributed to the deep uncertainty that prevailed in Russia in late 2011. The protest organizers in Russia were ambiguous about whether they would emulate the demonstrators in the Arab world in pressing for regime change. The protesters' avowed aim in Russia was to have the parliamentary elections re-run, and most of the demonstrators explicitly said they did not want to foment revolutionary change. However, a few of the protest leaders did hint, or even openly declared, that they were seeking more radical change. Certainly the authorities feared that many of the demonstrators were furtively hoping to precipitate the end of Putin's regime.

Putin was caught off-guard by the scale and intensity of the initial protests. As he tried to regain his footing he was mindful of (and apprehensive about) what had been going on in the Arab world. For a brief while, he and his associates were exceedingly nervous about the outcome in Russia, and they began reviewing the concessions they might need to make to prevent outright rebellion.* Some of Putin's advisers even began to consider whether he might have to agree to not stand for the presidency in 2012, paving the way for Dmitry Medvedev to present himself as a more palatable alternative who could reach a political accommodation with the opposition.

In the end, no such concessions proved necessary. After withstanding the initial protests and gradually regaining the initiative, Putin easily won reelection in the first round in the March 2012 presidential elections and set about implementing major changes in Russia's political-legal system to ensure that he would never again be confronted by a challenge of similar scope. An array of repressive measures, including severe restrictions on pro-democracy and human rights NGOs and election monitors, a huge increase in fines imposed against those who take part in "illegal" gatherings, the banning of public assemblies in certain areas that were sites of protests in late 2011, the exclusion of foreign broadcast media, restrictions on Internet access, and a sweeping expansion of the definition of "treason" were all adopted with the support or at least acquiescence of a substantial majority of the population in 2012. Additional measures were adopted in 2013, including a blasphemy law, a law banning "propaganda" in support of gay rights, highly intrusive inspections of NGO offices, and the implementation of laws requiring NGOs that receive foreign funding to register as "foreign agents" and to identify themselves as such in all their literature. Even though a few NGOs in outlying areas have been able to challenge the applicability of the new laws to their own work, the "foreign agent" requirements overall have had a chilling effect on democracy promotion.

The new web of restrictions has been combined with selective prosecutions and imprisonment of opposition activists, intended to keep everyone off balance. The threat of prosecution or of facing onerous tax charges has been designed to intimidate leading opposition figures and to cause them to worry about leaving themselves or their families exposed. Even individuals with ties to the establishment have felt pressure to display their loyalty to the regime. In June 2013, a wealthy business executive who in late 2011 was sympathetic to the protesters' demands emphasized the precariousness of the situation she faced: "Everything can be taken away from me at any minute."

Putin's Steps and the Opposition's Missteps

By skillfully using structural features of the Russian political system to his advantage, Putin was able to reassert control after the brief period of uncertainty in December 2011. He, far more than the opposition, recognized that as long as oil revenues continue to flow into Russia and keep economic growth rates at a relatively brisk level, the majority

* These statements are based on conversations I had with two prominent advisers to President Putin in late October 2012 in Moscow.

of Russians are much less inclined to worry about things like democracy and freedom. The last time that massive protests really took broad hold in Russia (the RSFSR, as it was then) was in the first few months of 1991. Huge demonstrations on the streets of Moscow in early 1991, numbering several hundred thousand people, came at a time when the policies adopted by Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev had thoroughly destabilized the Soviet economy and caused rampant shortages of goods and soaring inflation. The miserable economic conditions in 1991 (a "suddenly imposed grievance" in the phrasing of social movement theory) spawned acute public disaffection that protest organizers could easily exploit to rally large crowds. If protests against Putin had broken out in December 2008 or January-June 2009 (when the Russian economy was declining precipitously amid the global economic crisis and no one was quite sure how far it would sink), demonstrators might have been able to marshal anxiety about the economy to mobilize people all around Russia.

By December 2011, however, Russia was no longer in an economic crisis. Putin and his aides thus had a much easier time convincing a sizable majority of Russians that it was the protesters who were trying to destabilize the country and plunge it into economic chaos. If a genuine sense of crisis had still existed in December 2011, as it did in late 2008 and early 2009, this would have been a much harder case to make. But the circumstances gave Putin fertile ground for arguing that protests of any sort would rock the boat and possibly jeopardize the improvements in living standards that most Russians had been experiencing since 1999. This explains why polls taken by the Levada Center showed that a solid majority of Russians were opposed to the demonstrations and were fearful that the country might be plunged into instability. This is not to say that they embraced most aspects of Putin's agenda. However, they did accept his basic contention that mass demonstrations would threaten Russia's stability and should therefore be eschewed.

For much the same reason, only a small percentage of Russians have opposed the crackdown that Putin has implemented in 2012-2013. Although Putin's popularity rating gradually declined in the latter half of 2012 and early 2013 before stabilizing at around 64-65 percent, that trend was not a signal of wide public backing for protests. On the contrary, the percentage of those who say they are willing to take part in protests in 2012 and 2013 has declined to 5-10 percent, whereas the percentage of those who are unwilling to take part has ranged from 75 to 80 percent. Not only do many Russians worry that political unrest might cause wider upheaval, instability, and economic dislocation; they also doubt the efficacy of such protests. By eight to one, those who believe that protests "are of no real influence" have consistently outnumbered those who see protests as a means of "achieving genuine concessions."

In addition to the circumstances that have militated against mass mobilization in Russia, the protest organizers compounded their plight by making crucial mistakes. From the start of the unrest in Moscow, they had to be skillful in mobilizing people; they could not expect that grievances alone would be enough. Grievances exist in every country. What protest leaders need more than grievances to mobilize people is a suitable catalyst, particularly a "suddenly imposed grievance" that is widely resented. Once a

catalyst actually emerges, the protest organizers have to exploit it as much as possible. An important catalyst was present in December 2011 (the glaring electoral fraud), but the revived economic growth in Russia in 2010-2011 meant that the threshold for mobilizing people was a lot higher than it would have been three years earlier when the economy was declining precipitously.

As noted earlier, one of the reasons that a majority of Russians were uneasy about the protests in late 2011 and early 2012 is that they feared the "destabilization" of the country and the prospect of a return to the economic dislocation of the 1990s. Faced with circumstances that demanded considerable dexterity, the organizers repeatedly blundered, especially when they took a prolonged break from late December 2011 through early February 2012. Experience from the mid-1980s on has shown that the best way to mobilize people to take part in large peaceful protests is to keep doing it, week after week, to sustain momentum. Most would-be movements will peter out anyway, but they stand a much better chance of success if they engage in frequent mobilization than if they take a month-and-a-half off while the movement is just beginning. Partly as a result of the long hiatus, the protests in Moscow dwindled in 2012, reaching the point of just being a nuisance rather than a threat to the regime. Outside Moscow, where protests were never close to the size of those in the capital, they never revived. The initial round of political contention in Russia thus ended in a clear victory for Putin.

The Outlook

Nonetheless, even though the December 2011 protests in Russia were supported by only around two-fifths of the population, and even though a large majority of Russians rejected the protesters' central demand for a re-staging of the parliamentary elections, the mere fact that mass protests erupted is itself significant. The continued signs of restiveness suggest that, under suitable circumstances, mass demonstrations could recur. Putin's popularity ratings (62-65 percent) remain extraordinarily high compared to those of most Western leaders, but he is no longer in the 80-85 percent range that was the norm during his second term as president. The ridicule that was directed against him during the December 2011 protests may have been disconcerting to a lot of Russians (opinion polls showed that many did not welcome protests that were "disrespectful to the authorities," meaning Putin), but the criticism put at least a few dents in the Teflon that had long surrounded Putin. In that sense, as well as in demonstrating the potential for meaningful collective action, the mass unrest in late 2011 changed some of the political dynamic in Russia. Even if Putin remains in the presidency until 2018 (or 2024), he no longer has quite the same leeway to do whatever he wants without fear of reprisal. The repressive legislation adopted in 2012-2013 may enable him to prevent further protests, but he does now have to be more mindful of going too far.

Whether the opposition will be able to pose a real threat to Putin is, however, uncertain at best. In a semi-authoritarian country like Russia, especially in the wake of the legislation adopted in 2012 and 2013, opportunities for mass mobilization are not likely to come along very often. When such opportunities do emerge, they almost always are of limited duration. Most protest movements do not achieve their objectives

during the first phase of contention, and the key to success is fashioning what Verta Taylor has called a "movement abeyance structure," which enables a "social movement [to] sustain itself in non-receptive political environments and provide continuity from one stage of mobilization to another."* Taylor uses this concept to explore the organizational and ideological bridges that linked the women's movement in the United States at various stages in the twentieth century, and the concept also features in Doug McAdam's analysis of the groups, individuals, and ideas that sustained the civil rights movement in the United States during lengthy periods of frustration and ultimately enabled the movement to achieve its goals. One can also think of underground Solidarity in Poland in the 1980s (from December 1981 through early 1989) as a movement abeyance structure.

In a non-democratic country such as Russia, phases of political contention may be separated by many months or years. During a prolonged gap in the cycle of contention, when political opportunity structures (POS) are inimical to mass mobilization, the only way a fledgling protest movement can survive is by developing an effective abeyance structure. Such a structure will enable individual activists and groups in Russia (whose ideologies and goals vary a great deal except on the basic goal of shifting to a more open and accountable political system) to maintain a basic degree of continuity. If they achieve this, they will be in a much better position to take advantage of future changes in the POS that facilitate a return to mass mobilization. But if, instead, the activists and groups are increasingly divided and fail to maintain even a minimum structure of a movement—as appears to be happening now in Russia—the opposition movement will almost certainly die out. In that case, contention might resume in the future, but it will be through a different movement.

What does this imply for the future? The legal restrictions introduced by Putin in 2012 and 2013 to curtail opposition activities, coupled with the harassment and prosecution of opposition figures, means that the POS are much less propitious for the opposition now than in December 2011. The threshold for mobilizing people will be higher in the future than it was in late 2011. A major deterioration of economic conditions in Russia might provide a sufficient catalyst, but with national elections not scheduled to take place until 2016 (parliamentary) and 2018 (presidential), it is hard to see what else might serve as a catalyst in the near term. The leaders of opposition groups in Russia will therefore have to fashion movement abeyance structures during what could be several years (or more) of an unpropitious phase in the POS. Their chances of success in developing durable structures will be enhanced if they seek to maintain as broad a coalition as possible. Rather than getting bogged down in programmatic details, they should be focusing the energy and attention of fellow activists exclusively on the goal of a transparent and accountable government. In fashioning a protest discourse, they must be mindful of the need to provide a convincing rationale to people from across the political spectrum. If they do these things, they will stand a much better

* Verta Taylor, "Social Movement Continuity: The Women's Movement in Abeyance," *American Sociological Review* 54, 5 (October 1989), 762.

chance of keeping the movement alive, ready to act when the POS change in their favor. If instead they get bogged down in squabbles and infighting, the opposition movement will cease to exist.

During a period in which a movement abeyance structure will be crucial, opposition leaders need to be mindful of public sentiment. In particular, they need to focus on grievances that are shared by large numbers of Russians—such things as the resentment many people feel toward abusive public officials and egregious corruption both petty and grand. Although the Russian public may be more willing than Western societies to tolerate high-level corruption and conflicts of interest, questions of public integrity could, under certain circumstances, be a potent catalyst of the next round of political contention.

Assigning Blame After Natural Disasters in Russia

PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo No. 281

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Russia has experienced a number of natural disasters in recent years causing hundreds of deaths and a massive loss of homes and property. The deadly and dramatic nature of disasters stirs people to seek an explanation for what has taken place—a process that entails assigning responsibility and placing blame. Because government is responsible for disaster preparedness and management, infrastructure, and laws regulating the safety and property of citizens, people make judgments about government performance when a disaster occurs. While in some cases citizens deem government to have been culpable and incompetent (Hurricane Katrina), in others they determine that it saved lives and property, dealt equitably with victims' needs, and effectively managed the damage that occurred. In general, when a natural disaster occurs, citizens may react in several ways: by assigning blame to the government, by giving credit to the government, or by viewing the event as outside the realm of politics altogether.

How have citizens in Russia assigned responsibility for recent natural disasters? An analysis of the 2010 wildfires and the 2012 flood in Krymsk suggests a somewhat complicated answer. Some people maintained that as accidents of nature/God, state officials should not be held accountable. Many others, however, strongly criticized the government. In this memo, I concentrate on the interactions of federal leaders and victims. I show that although the federal government has developed a set of tactics to deflect blame away from itself and onto local leaders, these efforts are not entirely successful. Disaster victims, as well as some citizens living outside the affected areas, do blame local officials but also assign responsibility to the regional level (governors) and to federal leaders.

Thus, though blame assignation by Russian citizens has not resulted in leaders being held accountable and voted out of office as has happened in the United States (Brown, 2010; Malhotra and Kuo, 2008), it can damage the reputation and reduce the legitimacy of even top leaders. Any threat to the legitimacy of Russia's government is a pressing concern for President Vladimir Putin. Since the emergence of the opposition in 2011, Putin has worked to buttress support for his government among rural and regional populations—precisely those whom natural disasters tend to impact the most.

The Wildfires of 2010

In the summer of 2010, a series of wildfires erupted across central and western Russia, burning down more than 120 homes, killing 52 people, and leaving approximately 3,500 people homeless. Rapidly spreading fires threatened to release nuclear contaminants into the atmosphere from areas affected by the Chernobyl disaster. Uncharacteristically high temperatures caused a choking smog from burning peat bogs to blanket Moscow, raising carbon monoxide to levels 30 percent above normal in the city. According to some accounts, the daily mortality rate in Moscow doubled in August. Foreign countries, including the United States, provided assistance fighting the fires, as President Dmitry Medvedev declared a state of emergency in seven of the most severely affected regions. The state responded slowly to the unfolding crisis and proved unable to stop the fires without assistance from ordinary citizens. A severe shortage of firefighters, firetrucks, and basic equipment motivated scores of volunteers to participate, demonstrating a grassroots activism that would be reproduced in the election monitoring campaign of 2011-12.

The Flood in Krymsk

On July 6-7, 2012, a massive flood engulfed the town of Krymsk (pop. 60,000), as well as other settlements in the Krasnodar region. Rains were abnormally heavy and within hours, rivers ran through Krymsk, destroying homes, sweeping away cars, and killing 172 people. The storm hit in the middle of the night, catching people off guard so that some were not able to climb up to their attics or roofs. Many elderly were among those who drowned. The region's infrastructure—energy, gas and water supply systems, and road and rail networks—was severely damaged. The flood affected enormous numbers of people: approximately 7,200 homes were flooded and 29,000 people lost all of their belongings. During the disaster, emergency assistance was slow to arrive; people waited on rooftops of their homes for hours. News reports indicated immediate despair and rage among the population in Krymsk.

The Government Response

Russia's federal leaders have a relatively standard set of tactics following a disaster, including personal intervention, the control of information, financial compensation, and criminal investigation of locals to assign legal culpability. First, a leader shows up at the scene of the disaster to appraise the situation and display resoluteness. Immediately after the flood in Krymsk, Putin jumped into a helicopter to survey the damage from above. Personal intervention may include a show of machismo, as when Putin co-piloted an amphibious aircraft and dumped water on a burning forest in Ryazan, all of which was dutifully recorded for state television.

Next, the leader travels to the crisis zone to meet with victims and promise financial remuneration. In Krymsk, Putin pledged payments of up to $60,000 to people who lost relatives. After the fires, both he and then-president Medvedev promised new homes and payments of three million rubles ($100,000) for families whose homes burned down. Putin even told villagers in Mokhovoye not to worry about the money

disappearing because he would set up video cameras to monitor the rebuilding sites that would broadcast feeds to both government buildings and his own home.

Displays of sympathy for disaster victims are extensively reported on in the media. Conversely, the media ignores the visit if the leaders become the target of popular anger, as happened in the burned-out village of Verkhnyaya Vereya in the Nizhny Novgorod region. Residents there surrounded an enormously uncomfortable Putin who kept trying to promise financial aid. They continually interrupted him, with one woman shouting: "You didn't do anything, everything is burning, don't make promises. We asked for help. We trusted you. Why didn't anybody do anything?"* Putin reportedly turned on the governor during the incident, asking him: "Why haven't you managed to save Vereya?" He also criticized local officials telling them that they should consider resigning their posts. A video of the incident was posted on YouTube†, and many people outside the region viewed it—suggesting the limits of the Kremlin's ability to control information in the era of digital technology.

Finally, identifying responsible local leaders is a crucial tactic of federal leaders in avoiding blame. However, the federal government was more successful at doing so in the temporally and geographically delimited flood than in the protracted wildfire crisis. In Krymsk, Putin ordered federal authorities to investigate whether local officials employed an early warning system to inform the population that a flood was imminent. When it was determined only a week later that the system consisted of a few broken loudspeakers and sporadic text messaging, three officials—the mayor of Krymsk, the former head of the Krymsk district, and the acting head of the local emergency service—were charged with criminal negligence and arrested.

The federal response to the wildfires was more equivocal. As the wildfires spread, Putin and Medvedev initially vacillated about who to blame and ultimately punished relatively few individuals given the broad geographical reach of the fires. However, the tandem steadfastly deflected all responsibility from the federal government. Experts from Russia's World Wildlife Fund, on the other hand, explicitly blamed federal authorities, pointing to a law the Russian parliament passed in 2007 abolishing the federal forest protection service and decentralizing responsibility for fighting fires to regional governments and private logging companies. Some experts criticized Putin directly, alleging that he personally pushed the law through parliament, benefitting companies with which he and Medvedev were associated, and which prioritized profits rather than sustainable forestry.

Initially, Medvedev said local authorities could not be held accountable for a natural disaster. But Putin stated that local officials who had failed to prevent the fires should resign. Days later, Putin told governors of affected regions that they were accountable. Yet in August of 2010, only one local official resigned, the head of a district in Nizhny Novgorod in which 19 people died. When fires in Volgograd caused seven deaths and destroyed 700 homes a month later, Medvedev ordered the prosecutor

* Andrew E. Kramer, "Russian Response to Fire Does Little to Calm Anger," *The New York Times,* August 7, 2010.

† http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8f5wXsB-Yp8&list=PL88B263CA41404A32.

general to investigate violations of fire safety. Three officials (a deputy governor, and the leaders of two decimated districts) resigned. Medvedev also formally reprimanded several military leaders and fired others of lower-rank for failing to stop a fire that destroyed their navy base in the Moscow region.

The Reaction of Victims

Popular anger at the inability of the government to fight fires spread among victims in the hardest hit regions. In the Nizhny Novgorod region, citizens directed their anger toward local authorities, some of whom had been threatening volunteers with criminal charges for trying to protect their homes, and toward the region's governor, Valery Shantsev, who told the federal Ministry of Emergency Situations that his region could handle the fires on its own. In the small town of Vyksa, where residents fought the fire with shovels and their own cars, a factory worker told reporters that: "No one has the illusion that the [regional] government will help." Meanwhile, the governor's office tried to conceal its ineffective response and blame Mother Nature. Furious villagers in Verkhnyaya Vereya cursed Shantsev and called on Putin to oust him during his visit to the village, as described above.

Following the flooding in Krymsk, rage crystallized against local authorities and the region's governor when people heard that officials knew of the impending flood several hours before it began but failed to notify them. A second blame narrative emerged: that the authorities had purposefully opened the floodgates of a local reservoir in order to protect the important port city of Novorossiysk. Here, blame was directed at the owners of the reservoir, Yevraziisky Bank, which is co-owned by a former deputy minister of energy. Another, slightly different story alleged that authorities opened the reservoir gates to avoid flooding Putin's dacha located nearby. In both versions of this conspiracy theory local officials were seen not only as derelict in their duty to warn the population but as the cause of the flooding. The Putin dacha version suggests that some residents were prepared to implicate *all* levels of the Russian government.

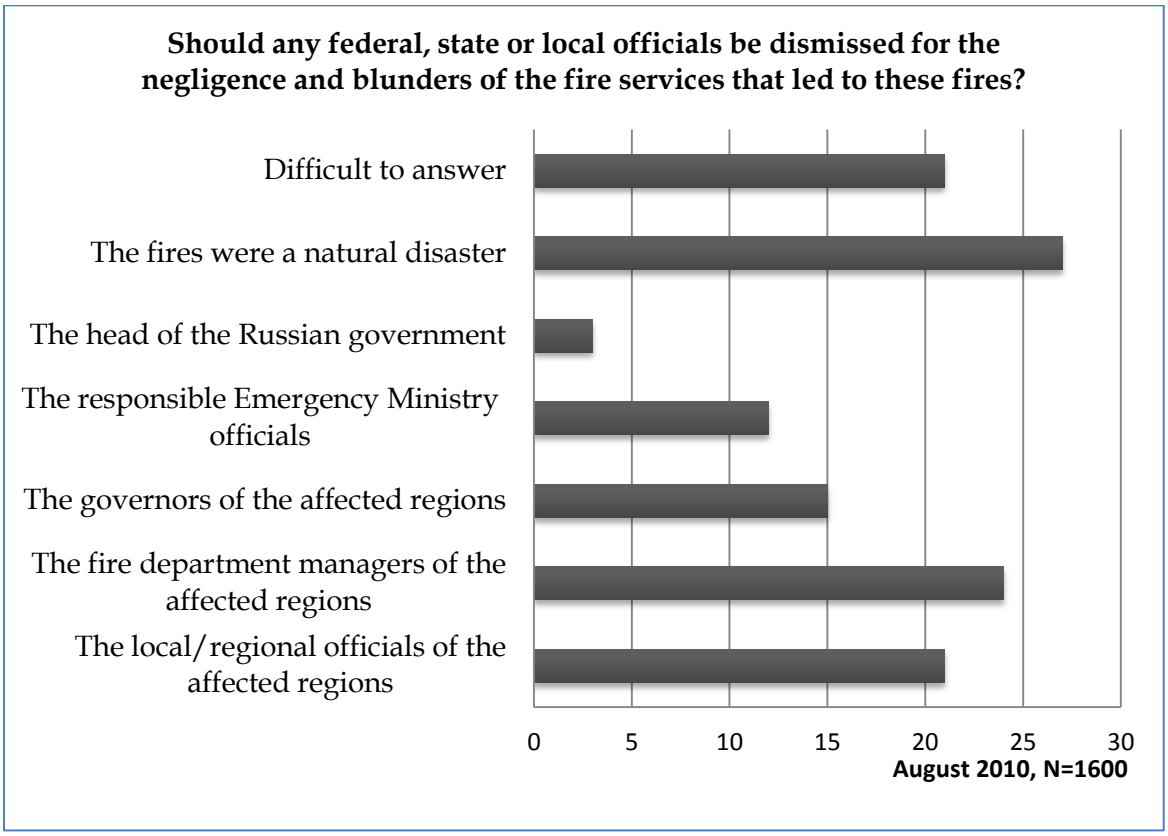
Further inflaming public opinion was the callous response of Governor Aleksandr Tkachev, who told a group of survivors, "Do you think, my dear people, that we could have gone round to each one of you? This is impossible!"* Citizens also became upset by the slow pace of emergency assistance and by the often coldhearted reaction of emergency workers. Weeks after the flood, the local population continued to vent its anger about the state's response, complaining that the bureaucracy was impeding access to financial assistance. Observers noted deep anti-state feelings among victims. According to a member of Russia's Public Chamber who visited Krymsk, "The people feel terribly let down by the authorities … people feel they are treated like pigs … people aren't happy with the governor … confidence in the authorities has hit rock bottom."†

* Masha Lipman, "Floods and Suspicion in Russia" *The New Yorker*, July 12, 2012.
† "People in Krymsk Treated Like Pigs," *Moskovsky Komsomolets*, July 17, 2012.

Public Opinion Among Russian Citizens

How did citizens outside the regions that were directly affected by the disasters apportion blame? With regard to the wildfires (the only disaster for which survey data is currently available), public opinion polls of three organizations—FOM, VTsIOM, and Levada—indicate that both Putin's and Medvedev's rating dropped from January to early August. This decline, however, was not necessarily caused by the wildfires.

There is evidence that many citizens accepted the government's blaming of local officials, according to a Levada Center survey.* Of those respondents who supported firing state officials, the largest number (21 percent) believed that local or regional officials in the affected regions should be dismissed for the negligence of the fire services. Some respondents (15 percent) favored firing governors. Only 3 percent supported firing the prime minister. Other respondents thought local managers of fire departments (24 percent) or officials in the Emergency Situations Ministry (12 percent) should be fired. Finally, a significant number of respondents (27 percent) said that no officials should be fired because the fires were a natural disaster.



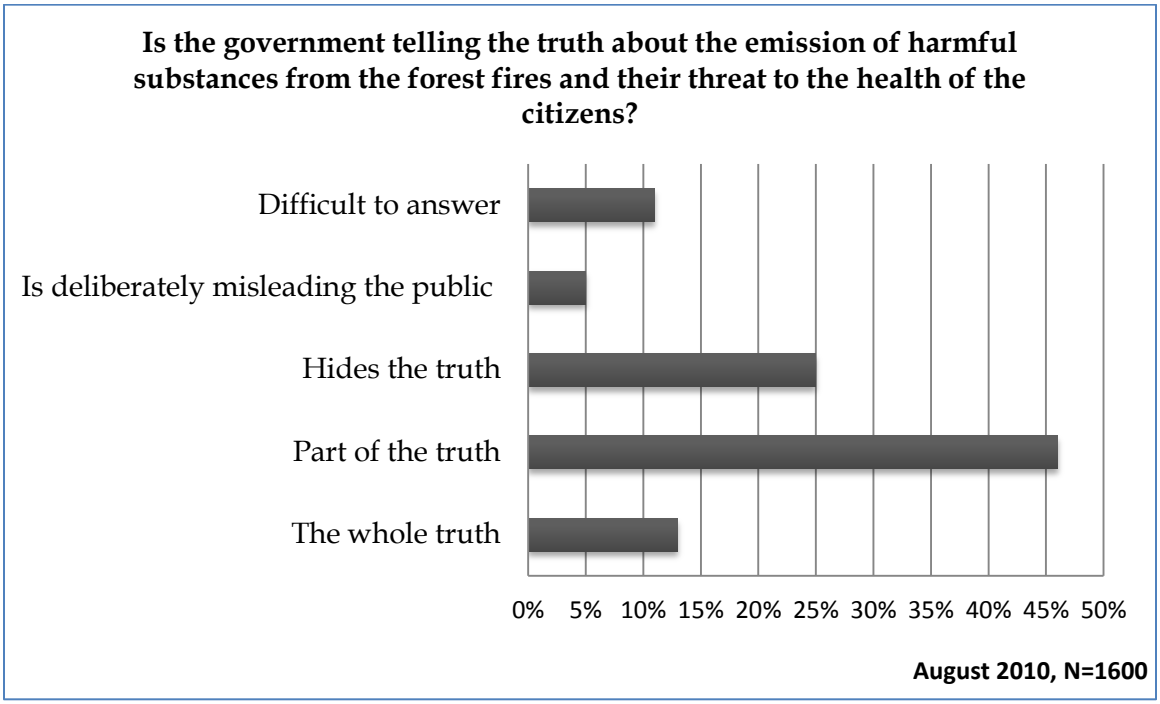
Still, the same survey also indicates that many citizens in Russia found the government's response during the crisis inadequate and self-interested. When asked,

* The poll was conducted in August-September 2010. See http://www.levada.ru/category/rubrikator-oprosov/gosudarstvo-i-obshchestvo/vlast-v-chrezvychainykh-situatsiyakh.

"Do you think the government did everything it could to protect citizens in central Russia from forest fires and to help the victims, or was the government just engaged in self-promotion and public relations?" 38 percent of respondents answered "self-promotion and public relations," while 44 percent said the government did everything it could.

Also, a majority of respondents indicated that they did not find the government credible. When asked, "Do you think the authorities are telling the truth about the extent of the fires and the number of victims?" 50 percent of Russians answered "only part of the truth," 17 percent said "hiding the truth," and 4 percent answered "deliberately misleading the public." Only 19 percent said that the authorities were telling the whole truth.

Similarly, a little over three-quarters of respondents felt the government was hiding information or not telling the whole truth about "the emission of harmful substances from the forest fires and their threat to the health of the citizens." Overall, these results suggest that the government's response to the forest fires seriously damaged citizens' trust in the state.



Conclusion

Of the three options available to citizens following natural disasters, praising government performance, blaming the government, or failing to perceive disasters in political terms—citizens in Russia have chosen the latter two. Despite the strenuous efforts of federal leaders to shift blame for natural disasters entirely onto local leaders, victims and citizens outside the affected areas affix some responsibility onto regional leaders and some, albeit less, onto federal leaders. Thus, even in non-democracies such

as Russia, citizen attribution of blame for disasters can damage the legitimacy of top leaders. It remains to be seen what effect these opinions among rural and regional populations have on the tenure of leaders in office.

Quasi-Feudalism in Higher Education?
RECTORS AND POLITICS IN RUSSIA

PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo No. 282

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The rectors of higher education institutions in Russia hold important academic positions, ones that tend to come with social, financial, and political benefits. Due to the scale of many Russian institutions, the number of people deferential to rectors can equal the population of small towns. As such, rectors sometimes can wield semi-autocratic powers. This memo examines the role of Russian rectors within their own universities, the influence they have in local political environments, and their relations with federal higher education authorities. Empirically, this memo is partially based on an analysis I conducted of the biographies of 1,060 rectors of Russian universities and educational institutions.

The System

The Russian president appoints the rectors of the country's two main universities, Moscow State University and St. Petersburg State University, while the prime minister appoints rectors of all nine federal universities.* In addition, the heads of military academies and some other specialized universities are appointed by their corresponding ministries. In the rest of Russia's universities and institutions, rectors are elected by staff and student representatives. However, incumbent rectors tend to have sufficient informal power to secure a loyal majority in electoral assemblies. In many cases, alternative candidates are just puppets of the frontrunners who exist only to make the process technically valid. One could say that the autocratic management system of Russian universities is quasi-feudal. This manifests itself is as one might expect: through arrogant and disrespectful treatment of subordinates, the use of luxury items (bought by their universities) at the workplace,† and pressure on staff members who disobey their

* The list of federal universities includes: Baltic (Kaliningrad), Far Eastern (Vladivostok), Kazan (Volga Region), North Caucasian (Stavropol), North-Eastern (Yakutsk), Northern (Arctic) (Arkhangelsk), Siberian (Krasnoyarsk), Southern (Rostov-on-Don), and Ural (Yekaterinburg). Federal universities are ostensibly leading universities in Russia in both education and research and receive special financial support from the federal government. In fact, they suffer from the same problems as "ordinary" universities, including over-centralization of governance, low salaries for academics, corruption, clientelism, and a lack of academic mobility.

† For instance, there were some scandals in 2012 when universities tried to buy luxury cars for their top managers. In one case, a university was ready to pay more than $160,000 for two cars. See: "Minobrnauki

informal orders (such as giving high marks to well-connected students). The majority of university trade unions have their place in the hierarchical system and are reluctant to defend the rights of employees.

The huge difference between the salaries of rectors and of faculty is a main feature of the quasi-feudal system. The incomes—salaries plus bonuses—of rectors are typically dozens of times greater than the incomes of regular academics. According to 2013 data from the Ministry of Education and Sciences (MES), the median annual income among some 300 rectors was approximately $122,000, while several rectors earned more than $400,000 (incidentally, the majority of rectors ignore the MES directive to post their salaries on university websites). In comparison, an associate professor ("docent") at a provincial university might earn a salary of under $5,000 a year—comparable to the salaries of local shop employees.

The huge and non-transparent powers of rectors provide space for considerable malpractice: financial machinations, procurement-related kickbacks, administrative-academic tourism, protection of well-connected students, jobs for friends and relatives, and so on. It is common in Russia for rectors' spouses, children, and other relatives to work at the same university, often as a head of department or administrative unit. This practice is especially persistent at private universities, many of which are nothing more than "diploma mills." While composing my database, I managed to identify more than 50 private universities where between one and four relatives of the rector worked as top managers.

Of course not all Russian rectors are corrupt. The problem is the universal lack of systemic mechanisms to prevent abuses of academic power. However, there is little ground to believe that the current approach to university governance structures—omnipresent and autocratic—will be changed.

Rectors and their Political Environments

One of the main tasks of a rector is to establish good relations with the regional political base. This means, among other things, being responsible for stability in student communities that are typically multiethnic and politically unreliable, preventing active student participation in protests and opposition events and occasionally mobilizing students for pro-regime activities and electoral turnout (many polling stations are situated in universities or dormitories).

Top university managers periodically have to meet the informal requests and demands of influential local figures (like politicians, police, security officials, and businessmen), like ensuring good grades for their relatives, a successful defense of a postdoctoral thesis or second degree, or procurement contracts for firms they informally control. While rendering such services can be profitable for rectors and sometimes even for their universities, it can also be quite disastrous for them to quarrel with such influential people. Indeed, such quarrels potentially turn into threats of dismissal for

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prokommentirovalo zayavki vuzov na zakupki dorogih inomarok," *RIA Novosti*, September 1, 2012 (http://ria.ru/society/20120901/734933376.html#ixzz284UHnxa1/).

rectors or even prosecution over some "violation," while their universities receive unscheduled audits of their educational activities or face fire, sanitary, and safety inspections, any of which could paralyze the university's work for a long while.

Many rectors willingly enter regional and federal politics. On the one hand, it gives them a chance to increase their personal status and opens room for parallel or future political careers. One of the most recent examples is the appointment of Dagestan State University rector, Murtazali Rabadanov, to mayor of the city of Makhachkala in June 2013. For candidates seeking a rector's position, membership in United Russia increases their chances. On the other hand, United Russia readily includes rectors of state universities in party councils, as it gives the party a more intellectual image. Seven rectors are members of United Russia's Supreme Council, headed by former parliamentary chairman Boris Gryzlov. On the whole, among those rectors of state universities who have a right to be members of political parties,[*] at least 39 percent, according to my calculation, are members of United Russia, while only one percent (6 rectors) are members of A Just Russia—with the Communist Party, the Agrarian Party, and the Patriots of Russia represented by one rector each. Because rectors of private universities, which tend to provide a lower quality of education than state universities, generally cannot contribute much to improving the intellectual image of the ruling party, it is no wonder that the share of prominent members of United Russia among them is much smaller; according to my imprecise estimate it is likely to be no more than 10 percent.

Rectors and Higher Authorities

Similar to hierarchical relations in feudal times, rectors, while having autocratic power inside their universities, are rather vulnerable in their relations with federal authorities. MES or the other federal ministries or agencies to which universities are subordinate have wide powers to force rectors to retire "voluntarily," often using financial leverage or the university evaluation process, or remove them from their posts for various reasons such as "insufficient efficiency of management" or some other "violations."

The rotation process has been going on rather intensively. More than two thirds of the current group of rectors (and acting rectors) at state universities were appointed since 2005, while approximately 40 percent were appointed since 2009. Approximately 25 percent are new since 2011. MES usually appoints an acting rector until institutional elections are set, and the new head has enough time to secure the loyalty of the representative electoral assembly. Federal authorities possess the right not only to approve or dismiss rectors, but to reject any candidate running without providing a reason. Since 2006, allegedly in order to prevent "random people" from becoming rectors, candidates have had to receive the preliminary approval of special attestation commissions, consisting of representatives of various federal and regional bodies as well

[*] Rectors of universities belonging to military, police, and some other services legally cannot be members of political parties.

as civic organizations. This means that, to be qualified, candidates need connections to the MES, other federal or regional bodies, or, better yet, the support of United Russia.

At the same time, attestation commissions can hardly be considered a filter against the increasing number of formally-eligible retired high-ranking officials who consider a rector's position attractive for their own income and prestige. When Saratov Governor Dmitry Ayatskov became director of the Stolypin Volga Regional Institute it was akin to the granting of a fiefdom to a vassal in the Middle Ages. The massive influx of such former officials to leading positions in Russian universities is a worrisome trend of the Putin era. One problem is that the majority of such officials in their own turn received postdoctoral degrees under dubious circumstances. In total, according to my estimation based on biographical analysis, about ten percent of current rectors (including those of some federal universities and other universities with special status) obtained their academic degrees under questionable circumstances.

The relationship goes both ways, to some extent. While rectors are heavily dependent on federal authorities, they are also the key partners to the state when it comes to higher education reform. Rectors are organized in associations, and they and their deputies participate in numerous meetings organized by the MES. The voices of rectors and their deputies are typically (if erroneously) portrayed as voices of their university communities.

Conclusion

The typical role of rectors in the Russian higher education system is contradictory. While they have autocratic power inside their own university, their position vis-à-vis federal authorities and the regional political environment are rather vulnerable. To strengthen their positions, rectors usually have to demonstrate loyalty toward those in power and to periodically satisfy their informal requests. For the same purpose, many rectors participate in regional political life as prominent members or supporters of United Russia.

The arbitrary power of rectors is probably one of the key factors corrupting Russia's higher education system. This, above all, undermines the quality of assessing student performance and the proper education of young people as a whole. It creates fertile ground for pressuring teachers while they evaluate students, for unfair academic staff selection policies, and for inequitable distribution of resources to teachers and students. To fight these malpractices requires democratic governance together with independent trade unions and student organizations, transparency of information, enforcement of codes of ethics, and other such reforms.

However, the ruling regime is not interested in reforms that would weaken control; they seek to do the opposite, especially in politically-unreliable universities. They prefer that universities be governed by loyal rectors, including former officials with dubious academic careers. As we see from the current "reform" of the Russian Academy of Sciences, the regime aims to reduce or liquidate autonomous academic governance in institutions where it still tries to exist.

The Unintended Consequences of Russia's Gubernatorial Elections

PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo No. 283

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The revival of Russia's gubernatorial elections following the mass protests of 2011-2012 may not have promoted democratization, but neither has it proved trouble-free for the Kremlin. In light of the regime's retrenchment and the crackdown on civil society following Vladimir Putin's re-election to the presidency in March 2012, it is significant that the regime did not retract its pledge to allow gubernatorial elections. While they are not necessarily competitive, their revival must be understood from the Kremlin's perspective as a necessary evil that is fraught with unintended consequences.

The center's efforts to limit or channel the process of electing governors bear the potential to create uncertainty and instability among regime subordinates. One may infer from the regime's mixed signals in managing gubernatorial elections that this effect is an unintended consequence, especially in the alternation between liberalizing and constraining measures. The initial re-introduction of gubernatorial elections by then-President Dmitry Medvedev accompanied the liberalization of party registration, but Putin later augmented the process for electing governors to include so-called presidential and municipal "filters." The presidential filter requires political parties to consult with the presidential administration in their choice of nominees, effectively providing the Kremlin with an initial veto over the selection of candidates. The municipal filter requires candidates to obtain signatures from municipal deputies in support of their candidacy in order to obtain registration. The quota for signatures ranges from five to ten percent, with the threshold set by regional councils and the precise quantity established by regional electoral commissions. Regional electoral commissions usually invalidate enough signatures collected by opposition candidates to deny their registration, sometimes on the grounds that local deputies already provided signatures in support of another candidate. Hence, the municipal filter creates at least two opportunities for incumbents to block opposition candidates: first, by pressuring local deputies not to provide signatures in support of a candidate (or, presumably, to sabotage them by providing support for two or more candidates) and second, in the inspection of signatures by regional electoral commissions. As a result, the new system of gubernatorial elections favors incumbents and disadvantages opposition parties so

much that little change was expected from the first round of gubernatorial elections in October 2012.

Yet despite these measures aimed at constraining competition, elected governorships once more function as a symbol of political status among the regional elite. In the October 2012 gubernatorial elections, which were held in five regions (Amur, Belogorod, Bryansk, Novgorod, and Ryazan oblasts), all the incumbent governors promoted their relations with the Kremlin as an indication of their success and, in turn, successful elections were claimed as confirmation of the Kremlin's confidence. For those governors elected in October 2012, expert ratings conducted by the Agency of Political and Economic Communications suggest the impact of popular elections on governors' perceived relative influence in federal politics (i.e., in lobbying their region's interest in the presidential administration, the government, the parliament, and among the political and business elite): from June 2012 to July 2013, Oleg Kozhemyako's (Amur) rating rose from 62nd in June 2012 to 7th, Sergei Mitin's (Novgorod) rating rose from 60th to 37th, Oleg Kovalev (Ryazan) saw his rating rise from 53rd to 25th, and Yevgeny Savchenko (Belgorod) from 18th to 6th. Only Nikolai Denin's (Bryansk) rating remained unchanged at 56th, likely due to the particularly scandalous course of his election that even saw him temporarily removed from the ballot.*

In the current round of gubernatorial elections, this association of perceived status with popular election is especially pronounced in Moscow's mayoral election, where Sergei Sobyanin resigned from office over a year early—his term was not set to expire until 2015—in order to run for election (Sobyanin showed a similar zeal in giving up his electoral mandate as governor of Tyumen oblast when gubernatorial elections were eliminated in 2005). Unlike the October 2012 elections, in which incumbents displayed little interest in even simulating competition, incumbents in Moscow and Moscow oblast have sought to make their elections appear convincingly competitive. The dominance of United Russia in regional parliaments and the dependence of local government on regional budgets mean that it is virtually impossible for opposition candidates to obtain registration without the incumbent's consent. In both Moscow and Moscow oblast, however, Sergei Sobyanin and Andrei Vorobyov pointedly included opposition leaders Aleksei Navalny and Gennady Gudkov respectively in the upcoming gubernatorial elections so as to enhance perceptions of the elections' legitimacy and transparency—a point echoed by the first deputy head of the presidential administration, Vyacheslav Volodin, in June 2013. In both regions, Sobyanin and Vorobyov went so far as to mobilize local deputies to provide Navalny and Gudkov with the necessary signatures to surmount the municipal filter (this courtesy was not extended to all opposition candidates: only six candidates were registered while another ten candidates failed to clear the municipal filter in Moscow oblast, while 30 out of 36 candidates were denied registration in Moscow). Some journalistic accounts even

* Governors are rated individually by ten experts on a scale of 1 (least influential) to 10 (most influential), then the rankings are averaged to produce an index of perceived influence (http://www.ng.ru/regions/2012-07-06/5_rating.html; http://www.ng.ru/regions/2013-08-08/5_rating.html).

alleged Sobyanin's personal involvement in arranging Navalny's improbable release after he was sentenced to five years in prison in July 2013. The close tie between an incumbent's ability to win a competitive election and perceived status further led to speculation that Sobyanin views the Moscow election as a stepping stone to becoming Putin's successor.

In addition to the introduction of presidential and municipal filters for direct elections, Putin also moved to give regions the option to forego direct elections. During Medvedev's presidency, nominations for governor were made by parties bearing a majority in a given region's council (in practice, United Russia). While some observers argued that this strengthened the hand of regional legislatures vis-à-vis governors, nominations ultimately were made by the party's central body rather than regional branches—indeed, recommendations for gubernatorial nominees made by regional branches of United Russia were frequently ignored by the central party apparatus.

In re-establishing the option of a non-electoral option in place of direct elections, Putin cited the potential for elections to provoke ethnic conflict in Russia's republics. He singled out Dagestan as a case in which a non-electoral option would help to preserve indigenous mechanisms for power-sharing among ethnic Avars and Dargins. However, the procedure as adopted allows for any political party represented in a regional council*or* the national parliament to nominate candidates for governor. In other words, the option for an "indirect" election weakens the ability of regional parties to influence the Kremlin's choice of governor by involving parties lacking any presence in regional councils.

The disciplinary subtext of this procedure cannot have escaped the notice of regional actors. Few regions now appear interested in foregoing direct gubernatorial elections: so far this has been limited to Dagestan and Ingushetia. Even in these cases, however, the Kremlin has been forced to confront regional elites. In Dagestan, Magomedsalam Magomedov's claim that the republic was ready to hold direct elections for governor prompted Volodin to demand his resignation in January 2013. In his place, Putin appointed as acting governor parliamentary deputy Ramazan Abdulatipov, who in turn had the republican council reject direct gubernatorial elections. The popular mayor of the republic's capital, Said Amirov, also supported direct elections and appeared well positioned to contest the post until his arrest in June 2013. Putin's final slate of candidates (from which the regional council formally chooses the head of republic) included Abdulatipov and two unlikely challengers in the republic's Minister of Labor and Social Development, Malik Baliev, and human rights commissioner Ummupazil Omarova.

In Ingushetia, opponents of the unpopular incumbent Yunus-Bek Yevkurov gathered in Moscow in June 2013 to demand (unsuccessfully) direct gubernatorial elections. Instead, the list of nominees submitted to the Kremlin featured two candidates chosen by United Russia (Yevkurov and deputy parliamentary speaker Magomed Tatriev) and the republic's similarly unpopular former president Murat Zyazikov. Putin in turn nominated Yevkurov, Tatriev, and the head of the republican branch of Just Russia, Uruskhan Yevloev.

In both republics, the Kremlin's preference for central appointments rather than direct elections belies the weakness of its ties to republican elites while exposing the limits of patronage and institutional control. Moreover, Putin's justification for appointments as safer than direct elections in ethnic republics may be treated at best as an expressive hypothesis awaiting evidence or, at worst, as a challenge to subnational elites to prove him wrong. In an early sign that other republics are closely watching the process in Dagestan and Ingushetia, republican councils in Bashkortostan and Tatarstan flatly refused to consider the bill to introduce a non-electoral option for selecting governors in April 2013.

The revival of gubernatorial elections puts the Kremlin's new generation of appointed governors who lack electoral experience in an awkward position. They are now assumed to potentially lack popular support until proven otherwise by a popular election, but they are not independent actors like the elected governors that preceded them in the 1990s and early 2000s. The contrast is particularly striking for a number of acting governors currently seeking election after the departure of political heavyweights. The most significant among them is Andrei Vorobyov in Moscow oblast, who took over for the popular and influential Sergei Shoigu after the latter's appointment as minister of defense in November 2012. Svetlana Orlova was appointed acting governor in Vladimir oblast after Nikolai Vinogradov's departure after sixteen years in office. Orlova lacked ties to the region, having spent most of her career as a senator in the Federation Council for Kemerovo oblast, and she is not considered popular in the region. Similarly, Konstantin Ilkovsky has been acting governor in Zabaikal krai since Ravil Genyatulin left office after seventeen years (he was originally elected governor of Chita oblast in 1996). Ilkovsky initially made his career in business in Yakutia, but in 2011 he was elected to parliament on Just Russia's party list in Buryatia. He is the only incumbent or acting governor not affiliated with United Russia, although the ruling party is not running a candidate against him. Aside from these candidates, Roman Kopin (Chukotka) is running for election for the first time, having previously been appointed governor in 2008. Kopin lacks any electoral experience though he also lacks any serious challengers. He further benefits from the difficulties faced by potential opposition in overcoming infrequent air transportation to gather signatures. In Magadan, Vladimir Pechyony was appointed acting governor following the dismissal of Nikolai Dudov in February 2013. Pechyony's position is the most secure among acting governors, having previously been twice elected mayor of the region's capital city (2004-2013). Vyacheslav Shport (Khabarovsk) and Viktor Zimin (Khakassia) are also considered relatively secure incumbents.

Given the difference in capabilities among acting and incumbent governors in the current round of elections, one might well expect a new cleavage to emerge between those governors strong enough to orchestrate (and win) convincingly competitive elections and those who keep office simply by well-worn methods including ordinary election fraud (such as the use of voter "carousels"), limiting competition through the exploitation of administrative resources such as media manipulation and excluding opposition, or by forming alliances in the center to the exclusion of regional actors.

Perhaps inadvertently, Putin raised the stakes for governors to choose between these paths by issuing a decree last spring that grants government ministers the right to propose that governors be sacked. In a meeting with the country's governors in June, Putin railed against the tendency of governors to make decisions behind closed doors, to substitute events for work, and to make promotions based on loyalty rather than merit—in effect, criticizing the way politics works in Russia but shifting responsibility to the governors. As the Kremlin increases the number of pretexts and mechanisms for governors to be fired, governors may well seek to test the waters in competitive elections as an alternative source of job security.

Europe's Disillusionment with Russia

PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo No. 284

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June 2013 marked the 10th anniversary of a crucial EU-Russia agreement. At the 2003 EU-Russia summit in St. Petersburg, both parties agreed to gradually proceed toward the establishment of "common spaces" in economics, justice, home affairs, external security, culture, education, and research. At face value, the assumption that all fundamental aspects of European and Russian life would come to be regulated by a set of similar rules was nothing less than a promise of total de facto integration.

Today's reality differs drastically from such a vision. In most respects, the European Union and Russia are not converging but drifting apart. Although the notion of an EU-Russia "strategic partnership" is still in use and summits are routinely held, it is difficult to see any results of the decade-long "progression" toward common spaces. Multiyear negotiations on a new "framework agreement" have stagnated. The Kremlin says it no longer even perceives Europe as a model, making the notion that Russia should harmonize its norms with those of the EU seem absurd.

In this context, a complete overhaul of current EU policy toward Russia is unlikely, but there will be change. The EU will continue to deal with Russia on an ad hoc basis and will not return to a comprehensive value-based policy. But the pragmatic understanding that the interests of the EU and Russia often differ, and will continue to do so, will likely result in a number of tougher policies to protect the interests of Europe, if need be at Russia's expense .

The Main Elements of Europe's Disillusionment

A new view of Russia and the future of EU-Russia relations emerged in 2011-13. Previously, European skeptics of Vladimir Putin's Russia conflicted with others who hoped for political liberalization, stemming from the rhetoric of then-president Dmitry Medvedev, and social change that was to be brought about by economic growth and the rise of a Russian middle class. Needless to say, certain business actors and lobbyists had a direct stake in portraying Russia in a positive light, and a number of politicians and civil servants were also interested to see and report "progress." The U.S.-Russian "reset" also noticeably strengthened European hopes for cooperation with Russia. But after September 2011, when Putin announced his return to the presidency, bullish arguments about Russia began to lose their persuasive power. Although the term "consensus" may

seem like an exaggeration, public stances in Europe in defense of the Kremlin have become extremely rare.

Until recently European discussion on Russia's political evolution concerned the country's exact place on a scale of liberal democracy to authoritarianism (setting aside former German chancellor Gerhardt Schroeder's 2004 characterization of Putin as a "flawless democrat"). Today the verdict is unambiguous and gloomy. French political scientist Marie Mendras has observed that 86 percent of French respondents in a survey conducted by the French Institute of Public Opinion in February 2013 believed that the situation regarding civic liberties and human rights in Russia was "not satisfactory." German public opinion has been rather negative toward Russia for a long time, on top of which experienced German Russia-watcher Hannes Adomeit has recently noted:

> "The overwhelming majority of German academic specialists on Russia, Moscow-based correspondents of the major German newspapers and television channels, the heads of German political foundations working in Russia, the Russia desk in the foreign office and (the few) members of parliament knowledgeable about Russia and Eastern Europe—all hold a negative view of the direction the country has taken under Putin."

Another source of European frustration has been the apparent failure of the "Partnership for Modernization" program, pompously signed between Russia and almost all EU member states during Medvedev's presidency and genuinely seen by many as a vehicle for pragmatic cooperation. Admittedly, many Europeans were not happy that the "Partnership" was supposed to lead in Russia's view mainly to technology transfer, as opposed to comprehensive legal or political reform. But all this pales in comparison with Russia's pronounced focus on huge state-run projects, the prioritization of the defense industry, and the demonstrative downgrading of the "modernization" plan's flagship project, the Skolkovo Innovation Center.

Russia's non-compliance with its new World Trade Organization commitments was a major blow to European perceptions of Russia as a credible partner. The EU was instrumental in the last stage of negotiating Russia's accession to the WTO and strongly welcomed its entry in August 2012. Days after it joined, however, Russia introduced a "recycling fee" on imported cars, compensating itself for the newly-established lower tariffs. In March 2013, EU Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso accused Russia of not "applying the letter and the spirit of the commitments made." More broadly, Russia's refusal to consider further trade liberalization with the EU has effectively eliminated the possibility of achieving a free trade agreement, something many Europeans view to be desirable.

Russia's intent to review its foreign policy priorities has also had an impact on EU perceptions. The issue is not Russia's proclaimed "pivot to Asia," which may or may not happen, but the notion that the "historical West" is in decline. This was the central point of Russia's new Foreign Policy Concept, adopted in February 2013. It ascribes the

EU a very modest role among Russia's external partners, barely mentioning it on a range of issues from Central Asia to the Arctic.

Russia's lack of cooperation on Syria, a priority issue for many leading EU members, was to be expected, taking into account the general trajectory of Putin's foreign policy. However, Moscow's decision not to obstruct Western actions during the Libyan crisis played a misleading role and, once again, raised false expectations that were later replaced by greater frustration. Meanwhile, the EU's attempts to convince Moscow to take part in European conflict resolution efforts in areas where Russia does not have direct interests, like Mali last winter and spring, and thus to create at least some positive cooperative momentum, met with no response.

Last but not least, Russia became topical again in Europe's security discussion. Unlike in 2009-10, when Russia's proposal to conclude a new security treaty was discussed with understanding, and even sympathy, now Moscow's actions are cause for concern not only in Poland and the Baltics, but even among, say, the Nordic states. In addition to Russia's rising defense expenditure and its multiple military exercises, which take place at a time when Europe's conventional arms control regime has been weakened by Russia's suspension of the Conventional Forces in Europe treaty, anxieties stem from certain provocative Russian actions. In March 2013, Russian planes reportedly carried out an exercise on the eastern edge of the Stockholm archipelago, which was interpreted as a simulated attack. All this is taking place as a real revolution is occurring in Europe's energy markets due to the arrival of mass quantities of LNG and shale gas technologies. As Europe's energy dependence on Russia decreases, it may feel less constrained in revising course.

Business Better than Usual?

One counter-argument to this gloomy picture of EU-Russia relations is that the economic cooperation between the two is thriving. In 2011, bilateral trade increased by 28.5 percent as compared to the previous year. In 2012 it increased another 4.1 percent and stayed at approximately the same level through May 2013. By comparison, in the same period Russian trade with the Eurasian Customs Union dropped by more than 10 percent. In 2012, European exports to Russia reached 123 billion euros while imports reached 213 billion euros. Significantly, the EU's negative trade balance did not grow over the last year despite the rising price of Russian energy exports.

At the moment, the state of the political relationship between an EU member and Russia does not noticeably affect their economic relations. Economic interests find their way through—or around—possible political complications. The best example of this is Russia's relations with the United Kingdom, which does not boast the same kind of traditional political proximity as Russia does with Germany, but nonetheless continues to increase exports to Russia, hosts dozens of Russian companies on the London Stock Exchange, and otherwise enjoys a vibrant bilateral economic relationship.

The weakening, if not absence, of the linkage between political and economic relations, however, has yet to be recognized. The unwillingness of the business community to deal with any troublesome political complications prevails. To a large

extent, this dictates the choice of national governments and, indirectly, Brussels. Aware of this, Moscow thinks it can safely ignore European concerns about Russia's domestic situation. The failure of attempts to push the EU toward following U.S. sanctions against Russian officials that violate human or civil rights bolsters this assumption.

… Or Changes Underway?

And yet, certain changes in the EU's approach toward Russia are apparent. The EU's legalistic and technocratic ways have begun to undermine the ability of some members and European businesses to pursue more expedient relations with Russia. The EU Commission is making a serious effort to prevent unfair competition and market distortions by external actors. The so-called Third Energy Package, which was adopted to eliminate the concentration and monopolization of production, transportation, and trade of gas, has caused serious tensions between Brussels and Moscow. In September 2012, the Commission opened an antitrust case against Gazprom on the grounds of hindering competition in Central and Eastern Europe. While the EU is willing to discuss certain aspects of the legislation's application, it will not revise its main principle—the "unbundling" of supply and transit.

Even more telling is an EU WTO case against Russia, started in July 2013, against Russia's recycling fee on imported cars. The case signals that the EU will not tolerate non-compliance with commitments that Russia has taken. It also shows that however small a particular violation may seem in the context of the total economic relationship, the matter can be significant enough to specific industries that openly welcome the EU's involvement.

The March 2013 banking crisis in Cyprus indicated that Russian interests and objections can be ignored when greater issues are at stake. The bailout package for bankrupt Cypriot banks included the de facto confiscation of deposits belonging to Russian citizens and, possibly, businesses, despite Moscow's protests.

Finally, a qualitative shift in the EU's relations with other Eastern neighbors looms. If at the November 2013 Vilnius summit of the Eastern Partnership the EU signs association and free trade agreements with Ukraine and/or initials agreements with Armenia, Georgia, and/or Moldova, these states will obtain a relationship with the EU that is unavailable to Russia for the foreseeable future. Several years ago, Russia's closest European partners, Germany in particular, would have viewed such a prospect as totally unacceptable.

The significance of the recent evolution of EU policy toward Russia is difficult to determine, but to deny it altogether is impossible. Europe is becoming more demanding and assertive in its relations with Russia. It is ready to make compromises but not unilateral concessions. It is more willing to defend Europe's legal and economic integrity. Altogether, Europe is trying to introduce and enforce certain new rules in its relationship with Russia. Acceptance of these rules by the latter, and respect for commitments taken, would eventually have a certain transformative effect in the country.

How the CSTO Can (and Cannot) Help NATO

PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo No. 285

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In preparation for the 2014 withdrawal of International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) troops from Afghanistan, there have been numerous discussions about what comes next. While a role for Russia and Central Asian states is often considered, a role for the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) is typically overlooked.* Afghanistan is on its way to becoming a missed opportunity for NATO-CSTO cooperation. This, however, does not mean there is no agenda at all for cooperation between the two alliances.

Created in 2002, the CSTO has consistently sought to establish official relations with NATO. Despite its willingness to establish official relations with NATO, however, the CSTO is rather ambivalent toward the Alliance. CSTO declarations less often mention the possibility of cooperation with NATO than they do the Alliance's expansion and deployment of anti-ballistic missile defense systems in Europe.

For its part, NATO has been reluctant to work with the CSTO. NATO does not want to recognize the CSTO, something that is perceived by its members as a purely ideological Cold War holdover. NATO members have also not seen significant results from CSTO activities and tend to think it easier to negotiate significant issues bilaterally with Russia, which dominates the organization. In recent years, U.S. officials have not entirely excluded the possibility of cooperating with the CSTO on certain concrete issues like Afghanistan, but this has not translated into any clear efforts to do so.

In any case, Western officials expect the CSTO to first prepare a detailed agenda with a concrete program. CSTO representatives say they have made some concrete suggestions. These are outlined in **Table 1**.

* The CSTO's members include Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, and Tajikistan. Uzbekistan is a former member (joined 2006, withdrew 2012). Afghanistan (2013) and Serbia (2013) are observers in the CSTO Parliamentary Assembly. The CSTO's main objectives are collective defense, the fight against extremism, terrorism, drug trafficking, illegal migration from third countries, crisis reaction, peacekeeping, and reaction to emergency situations and natural and man-made disasters.

Table 1: CSTO Views on Areas of Possible Cooperation with NATO

Year	Areas of Possible Cooperation
2007*	• Counterterrorism and counternarcotics • WMD nonproliferation • Arms export control • Post-conflict assistance (*obustroystvo*) to Afghanistan • Border management
2012†	• Counterterrorism and counternarcotics • Restoring stability in Afghanistan; preventing threats from its territory; securing transit for ISAF needs; training and equipping Afghan security forces • Joint reaction to man-made and natural disasters • Mutual assistance in case of evacuation of official diplomatic missions and CSTO/NATO citizens in crisis situations • Exchange of information about the main aspects of CSTO and NATO activities
2013‡	• Joint efforts to stabilize Afghanistan and neutralize threats from Afghan territory • Regular exchange of information about political and military developments in conflict-prone regions, discussion of possible joint steps • Elaboration and implementation of coordinated measures to counter drug trafficking, extremism, and terrorism and to provide information security§ • Planning of coordinated steps to eliminate consequences of man-made or natural accidents or disasters • Creation of a mechanism of joint discussion of CSTO and NATO's conceptual approaches to security • Exchange of information between CSTO and NATO about collective rapid reaction forces • Peacekeeping

CSTO views on a possible agenda for cooperation with NATO have shifted in recent years, illustrating a gradual change in the organization's priorities and self-identification. In 2007, the CSTO proposed to cooperate with NATO on hard security issues like WMD and arms export control, despite the fact that such issues are not high priorities for the organization, which has only adopted political declarations on the subjects. Such suggestions indicate that the CSTO perceives NATO more as a classic

* "Armenia is a reliable, time-tested partner in the system of alliance relations among the CSTO member-states," *Novosti-Armenia*, January 18, 2007 (http://www.newsarmenia.ru/exclusive/20070118/41627762.html).
† "Council of the CSTO Foreign Affairs Ministers adopted a declaration about cooperation with NATO," *RIA Novosti*, April 6, 2012 (http://ria.ru/defense_safety/20120406/619406089.html).
‡ Vladimir Bogdanov, "CSTO is ready to cooperate with NATO," *Rossiyskaya gazeta*, May 23, 2013 (http://www.rg.ru/2013/05/23/odkb-site.html).
§ In Russia, "information security" is not equivalent to "cyber security." The term "information security" is mostly used in relation to information warfare or extremist information on the Web.

military bloc and/or that Russia, as a nuclear state and large arms seller, is the main agenda-setter within the CSTO. The 2010 NATO Strategic Concept addresses WMD nonproliferation, arms control, and disarmament, but all these issues are already subjects of NATO-Russia or bilateral U.S.-Russia cooperation. There is no need to create yet another platform for cooperation, especially since Russia is the only CSTO member that can support a real dialogue on hard security.

In 2012, hard security issues disappeared from the agenda of potential CSTO-NATO cooperation. They were replaced by an emphasis on conflict resolution and crisis management, to which in 2013 peacekeeping was added. But what specifically can the CSTO offer in the fields of crisis management and peacekeeping?

The CSTO has four types of collective forces. These include two regional groups of military forces (Russia-Belarus and Russia-Armenia), prepared to react to external military aggression; a 4,000-strong Collective Rapid Deployment Force for Central Asia; a 20,000-strong Collective Rapid Reaction Force (both of which have been designed to react to crises short of interstate conflicts); and collective peacekeeping forces, including about 3,500 soldiers and military officers and more than 800 civilian police officers (exact figures for all types of forces are not publicly available).

Since the CSTO will not let NATO participate in conflict resolution or crisis management on CSTO territory, cooperation could occur only in out-of-area peacekeeping operations. Just one of the above forces is designed for such operations – the peacekeeping forces.

Moreover, there are two important legal limitations on CSTO peacekeeping activities. The first is that participation is voluntary, which could lead to a repetition of the situation from the 1990s when Russia bore the main "peacekeeping burden" (as official documents put it).

The second is that the CSTO allows its forces to take part in UN-mandated out-of-area peacekeeping operations only following an official request from conflicting parties to conduct such an operation. Unfortunately, today's peacekeeping operations often include some element of enforcement, i.e., operations are conducted without the consent of one or both parties. The UN principle of "responsibility to protect" also implies a violation of sovereignty, when an international intervention is made to protect a state's population without an official request. The CSTO will not participate in peace enforcement or other operations under the responsibility-to-protect principle.

At the same time, there is not all that much interest in the UN for CSTO peacekeepers. A Memorandum of Understanding between the UN Department for Peacekeeping Operations and the CSTO Secretariat was signed in September 2012, but it is just an agreement to exchange information. In June 2012, Russian media speculated that CSTO peacekeepers could be sent to Syria, but this was a theoretical discussion devoid of any outcome. Taking into account the above mentioned legal constraints, cooperation between the CSTO and NATO in peacekeeping would be possible only in operations requested by conflicting parties. However, NATO does not specialize in such kinds of operations.

Afghanistan is the most obvious sphere for cooperation between the CSTO and NATO. However, neither organization has rushed to work together. NATO prefers bilateral negotiations with individual CSTO members for military transit and bases. For a long time, the same was true for the CSTO. Only in 2011 did CSTO members agree that the deployment of non-CSTO military bases on the territory of CSTO members requires collective approval. For its part, Russia prefers to cooperate with NATO and the United States on Afghanistan on a bilateral basis. In general, CSTO political declarations tend to mention Afghanistan separately from other possible spheres of cooperation with NATO.

This is not surprising. The interests of the two organizations in Afghanistan are rather divergent. For the CSTO, Afghanistan is not a possible field of military activity but an external threat; it cares more about extremism and drug trafficking via Central Asia and is ready to act only in its area of responsibility. By contrast, NATO operates on Afghan territory, is interested in Afghanistan's internal stability, and does not prioritize the fight against drug trafficking. The most the two organizations can do, it seems, is to engage in an exchange of information, which could in fact become a highly useful sphere of cooperation.

Recommendations

In general, there are three areas of cooperation that have some potential. The first are information exchanges about general activities and collective forces. Such exchanges can be a first step toward greater transparency and trust. Currently, mutual stereotypes impede cooperation. NATO perceives the CSTO as a club of dictators who want to use the organization to safeguard their regimes. CSTO members tend to see NATO as an interventionist actor that wants to overthrow non-democratic regimes and gain strategic influence in the post-Soviet region. Institutionalized exchange of information and personal contacts would allow for a lessening of mistrust between the two alliances.

A second area of cooperation could be the elimination of the consequences of natural and man-made disasters. This type of cooperation is politically neutral, as there is always a request from a suffering state for assistance. Despite numerous annual exercises, the CSTO has yet to participate in real operations of this sort. Cooperation in the field would provide a test of the CSTO's true operational capabilities.

The third area is post-conflict peace-building and state-building. Since opportunities for CSTO out-of-area conflict settlement are rather restricted, post-conflict activities represent a good alternative for the CSTO to test its mettle. Recent international interventions demonstrate that the military stage of operations is the easiest, thanks to the West's military preponderance. The largest problems occur at the stage of state-building, which is a long-term process that does not provide a clear exit strategy for intervening forces.

The CSTO would not want to intervene at the stage of peace enforcement, but it could join in at later stages of state-building. Russia and other CSTO members have useful experiences they can draw upon to work with troubled states. They are young, formerly or still authoritarian, multiethnic, and multi-religious states with problems of separatism—in other words, they continue to undergo their own processes of state- and

nation-building. The problems they deal with internally are usually present in the troubled countries where the West intervenes. As well, Central Asian states are much closer than Western states to the mentality and level of social development in, say, Afghanistan. The CSTO can serve as a kind of "interpreter" of Western best practices for post-conflict states.

As for Afghanistan, in particular, the CSTO can train and equip local security forces (Central Asian states can be particularly helpful thanks to their similar strategic cultures) and it can foster intergroup dialogue (drawing, for example, on the experience of the Tajik civil war). In the end, such sharing of experience can also work both ways: in working with Afghanistan, CSTO members might come to better understand their own problems and become more effective at solving them.

Three Russian Myths About Iran

PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo No. 286

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The arrival of new Iranian President Hassan Rouhani has sparked a new round of speculations concerning the future of Iran's nuclear program and Tehran's ability to find common ground with the international community. Russian authorities tend to be of the opinion that the main challenge in dealing with Iran lie in overcoming the United States' failure to understand what Iran really seeks through its nuclear program. However, Russia's understanding of Iran has its own snags, and this is because it is based on three myths.

Myth 1: Iran is developing its nuclear program because it wants security guarantees, not nuclear weapons.

Moscow-based nonproliferation expert Vladimir Orlov recently quoted Russian President Vladimir Putin as saying that "…under the guise of fighting to prevent the spread of weapons of mass destruction, [the West] is undertaking different kinds of efforts concerning Iran for a different purpose—regime change."[*] Accordingly, Iran seeks unambiguous and credible security guarantees from the United States, which, once received, "will remove the nuclear issue from the agenda."

But what kind of guarantees could the West even theoretically provide to satisfy Iran to the point that it would agree to refrain from seeking nuclear weapons capability? Would these be unconditional, or include some red lines in regard to Iran's nuclear behavior?

Russian nuclear expert Alexei Arbatov has written that the most constructive form of guarantee would be one that affirms that Iran will not be attacked unless it attacks Israel or any of the Gulf States. This type of guarantee, however, would hardly be sufficient to prevent Iran from going nuclear. Moreover, such a guarantee would not require a nuclear Iran to abstain from throwing its weight around the Middle East, even if it did not directly attack another state. Even without starting a war, Iran might provoke others, in particular Israel, into aggression. Such a security guarantee can therefore even be potentially damaging.

Of course, the idea of providing guarantees is viable only if Tehran really is focused on security. It is not a secret that Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei

[*] Vladimir Orlov, "Vibory v Irane, Vybor SShA," *PIR Center*, May 29, 2013 (http://pircenter.org/blog/view/id/116).

associates Iran's nuclear program with the country's independence and scientific development. Why should Iran freeze uranium enrichment or limit its nuclear program if it is a symbol of the state's future greatness and prosperity? This situation is somewhat analogous to that of India, which has also tied its nuclear weapons program to national goals. In the words of India's Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, nuclear tests "have given India *Shakti* [empowerment], they have given strength, they have given India self-confidence," even as new security concerns were emerging at the time of India's nuclear testing in 1998.*

If security concerns are also not Iran's main concern and instead just a pretext to justify the development of its nuclear program, this pretext has been generously supported by Russian experts and politicians. Recall that in 2008, Iran made a public statement that it does not need any international security guarantees that would deny it the development of its nuclear program. In particular, then-Iranian Ambassador to Russia, Gholamreza Ansari, said, "When they tell us about security guarantees to Iran, we don't understand anything in this, as we don't need this."† This was a statement Moscow preferred to ignore.

Myth 2: Iran is Russia's potential ally.

This myth is quite popular in Russia, coming from a range of experts, journalists, and bloggers. Iran is often depicted as Russia's natural ally, with common interests and values and ready to counterbalance American influence. This idea has gained even more traction with the crisis in Syria, in which Russians and Americans are politically supporting opposing camps. There is even a special "community group" on the social media website *Vkontakte* with the label "Iran is our main ally in the struggle with the United States."

When Russia's permanent representative to NATO, Dmitry Rogozin, said that "Russia regards any military actions against Iran as a threat to its interests," some Russian journalists interpreted this as a demonstration of Moscow's intent to support Iran in case of a major conflict in the Middle East.‡

Tehran is aware of the Russian mood. Analyzing relations between Russia and the United States, Iranian experts predicted that the Russian leadership would soon get tired of the "reset" policy and would not permit Washington to act unilaterally in the Middle East, especially on Iranian and Syrian issues.

This myth is largely built on wishful and ideological Cold War-type thinking. Iran's leadership has been highly adept at maintaining a geopolitical balance, often exploiting Russian sentiment in order to block any comprehensive UN Security Council resolution opposed to the development of Iran's nuclear program. At the same time,

* George Perkovich, *India's Nuclear Bomb: The Impact on Global Proliferation,* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999.

† "Posol Irana: garantii bezopasnosti nuzhny ne nam a SShA," May 16, 2008 (http://top.rbc.ru/politics/16/05/2008/167680.shtml).

‡ "I Kitay i Rossiya yavliayutsia silnimi soyuznikami Irana," *Newsland*, January 18, 2012 (http://newsland.com/news/detail/id/868447/).

Iran often supports ideas and values that are contradictory to Russian interests. For example, in official Iranian mass media, Chechnya is often presented as an Islamic state integrated into Russia by force and struggling for its independence. And even as Iran is happy to have Russia as its advocate in the UN Security Council, it refuses to rely on Moscow on central issues like uranium enrichment.

Myth 3: After the Iranian presidential elections of 2013, we could see a breakthrough in negotiations.

President Rouhani has a reputation as a moderate and a critic of his predecessor's excessive aggressiveness and inability to find a common language with the West. Some Russian experts even consider that the change of president from Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to Rouhani will be damaging for Russian interests. Rouhani is regarded as someone who aims at building a better dialogue with the West which, de facto, means having a negative impact on relations with Russia. Moreover, at the beginning of the 2000s, Rouhani was Iran's chief negotiator on nuclear issues and eventually agreed to suspend the uranium enrichment program and allow tougher IAEA inspections of Iran's nuclear facilities. In his first post-election press conference, Rouhani said, "[o]ur nuclear programs are completely transparent. But we are ready to show greater transparency and make clear for the whole world that the steps of the Islamic Republic of Iran are completely within international frameworks."[*]

Such a statement can be interpreted in different ways, however. It might mean that Rouhani is prepared to make certain concessions concerning Iran's nuclear program, but it could also mean that he will concentrate his efforts on establishing the legal grounds for Iran's nuclear rights. Either way, Tehran will try to exploit the "constructive" and "flexible" image of its new leader to weaken international sanctions without any major shift in its nuclear program like limiting uranium enrichment or providing full access to the IAEA. Also, even by the most optimistic estimates of the Iranian weapons program, according to which it was halted in 2003, Rouhani would still have been part of the team that actively pursued its development. It is also important to remember that Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has led Iran for almost twenty-five years—with both conservative and more liberal presidential administrations that have shepherded the state's nuclear program through periods of confrontation and détente up to the creation of the full fuel nuclear cycle. Iranian presidents might be responsible for the state's tactics with the international community, but Khamenei is the one who sets the state's strategy.

If Rouhani's presidency affects nuclear negotiations, it might do so only at a tactical level, easing dialogue with Iran's counterparts and perhaps preparing the international community for the notion that Iran is ready for a compromise. But changing how Iran discusses its goals (like unrestricted uranium enrichment) is not the same thing as changing the goals themselves.

[*] "Rohani says Iran is ready to show 'greater transparency' on nuclear program," *The Jerusalem Post*, May 17, 2013 (http://www.jpost.com/Iranian-Threat/News/Rohani-says-Iran-is-ready-to-show-greater-transparency-on-nuclear-program-316823).

Conclusion

According to popular myths circulating in Russia, Iran tries to enhance its security by demanding security guarantees from the West; Iran is a potential Russian ally on major political issues; and the world (if not all Russian experts) will be inspired by a new president looking to develop a constructive dialogue with the United Nations. This is the Iran that Moscow defends in the Security Council. Moreover, Rouhani's Iran might be able to get even more political and economic favors from Moscow, as the latter seeks to keep Iran in its sphere of influence.

However, this picture does not coincide with another one, whereby Iran is determined to increase its power and influence not only in the region but in the wider international arena. Iran's nuclear program is an important sign of Iran's rising potential, a symbol of its prosperity, independence, and national pride. Nuclear weapons may be regarded as the highest stage of Iran's national progress—a means to secure Tehran's ambitions and a symbol of the country's return to the greatness of ancient empire. No matter who is in power, warrior or diplomat, Iran's main aim will be the same, just pursued in different ways. Allies are necessary for Iran to reach its goals, but it is not so important who they are. Whether Russia or the West, they are all temporary in the greater scheme of things. Embedded in Iran's culture of international relations is the idea that the country is destined to fight for greatness with minimal trust in—or dependence on—anyone else. If Iran were to become nuclear-weapons capable, it would pursue it interests in the Middle East more aggressively, which could result in conflicts with Israel, Saudi Arabia, and the United States and also aggravate the situation in neighboring states. In the end, Russians should realize that the emergence of an unpredictable, powerful, nationalistic, and determined nuclear neighbor on its southern periphery will do little to increase their own security.

The China Factor in U.S.-Russia Relations

PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo No. 287

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There is a surprising lack of substantive discussion within U.S. and Russian policymaking communities on the influence of China on U.S.-Russia relations. After several influential books and journal articles on the subject appeared from 2008 to 2011, a consensus has seemingly been reached on the tactical nature of the developing ties between Beijing and Moscow. Most observers remain skeptical about the prospects of Sino-Russian relations evolving into a full-fledged alliance, given the number of policy contradictions between the two countries. According to this line of reasoning, Washington need not be concerned with the potential fallout of Russian-Chinese rapprochement on the United States' policy toward Russia. However, changes in the international strategies of Moscow and Beijing, as well in the international security environment overall, suggest that these earlier conclusions may need to be revised.

Over the last two years, China and Russia have increasingly coordinated their positions on international issues of significance to the United States, including on the civil war in Syria and Iran's nuclear program. Some observers have also noted the nearly identical language of Chinese and Russian statements on a number of key issues in Asian politics where Russia has followed China's lead.

Russia's largest oil company—state-run Rosneft—has become heavily indebted to Chinese state creditors. In 2009, Rosneft received a $25 billion loan from the China Development Bank to build the East Siberia–Pacific Ocean oil pipeline. In June 2013, an agreement was reached between Rosneft and its Chinese counterparts on substantial oil deliveries to China over the next 25 years. Rosneft received $60 billion as an advance payment for future oil supplies to China. That same month, the China National Petroleum Corporation acquired a 20 percent stake in Yamal LNG—an upstream natural gas development project controlled by Novatek, Russia's second largest natural gas producer and potential exporter. This was the first time that a Chinese company was allowed to hold shares of a joint venture producing natural gas in Russia.

Finally, Russia and China have been jointly conducting a growing number of full-fledged military maneuvers (some of which over the past decade have been presented as Shanghai Cooperation Organization exercises). The latest round of bilateral naval maneuvers took place in July 2013 and was the largest naval drill China has ever

[*] The views expressed here are solely those of the author and not those of MGIMO or the MacArthur Foundation.

carried out with a foreign partner.

Given these and other developments, a new round of discussion about China's influence on the U.S.-Russia relationship is long overdue, even if both Washington and Moscow have refrained so far from accepting the need for one.

Reasons for Neglect

There are several factors preventing the development in Russia and the United States of diligent and well-informed analyses of the China factor in bilateral relations.

For their part, Russian policymakers are likely refraining from openly discussing the risks of China's rise in order to avoid the negative effects of a pronounced security dilemma. They generally consider strategic ambiguity to be the safest approach to relations with Russia's large and powerful neighbor. China might regard exchanges between Moscow and Washington on China's international conduct as contradictory to the spirit of the 2001 Russo-Chinese Treaty of Good-neighborliness, Friendship and Cooperation. This treaty requires bilateral consultations between Moscow and Beijing if one of the sides claims its security is under threat. Finally, while Russian pundits generally have a penchant for triangular geopolitical schemes, few well-trained and internationally-exposed experts have a good grasp of both Russian-U.S. and Russian-Chinese relations.

In turn, U.S. policymakers have sought to avoid antagonizing China with thinly disguised balancing attempts, at a time when the United States is arguably more exposed than ever to the risk of China's adverse behavior and rising Chinese nationalism is increasingly turning against the United States. Silence on the "China factor" in the United States may also be due to the compartmentalization of policymaking in Washington on, respectively, Russia/Eurasia and China/Asia Pacific. Bureaucrats may not have an incentive to establish causal and other links between two different blocks of bilateral issues. The lack of experts who can address overlapping issues in U.S.-China and U.S.-Russia relations may also play a role—partly determined by the difficulty of learning two arduous foreign languages (Chinese and Russian). Finally, most of the trends and issues that demand weighing the China factor in U.S.-Russia relations are very recent and evolving quickly. However, while Russia is not relevant to a large number of U.S. foreign policy priorities and nothing like their Cold War triangular relationship now exists among Washington, Beijing, and Moscow, it is hard to see how U.S. strategy toward Russia can any longer discount the China factor.

Russia's Calculus

Despite the spectacular growth in China's economic and military capabilities, as well as Beijing's attempts to expand the geographic reach of its naval forces, Moscow officially casts China as the first great power peer in Russian history that Moscow—at least on a declaratory level—does not need to counterbalance. Such statements usually contrast China to the United States, with its programs of advanced weapons development—high-precision conventionally-armed ballistic missiles and missile defenses—that raise significant concerns among Russian policymakers. Confidence-building measures and

other costly signals from the United States have so far not been effective in dispelling these fears.

In contrast, costly signaling has worked between Moscow and Beijing, despite their own bilateral differences, such as the contest for influence over Central Asian trade policies and alliance orientations. Russian policymakers think they have secured reliable guarantees of China's non-expansionist behavior: China sides with Russia on the unacceptability of externally-assisted regime change and other forms of intervention in the affairs of sovereign states.* In addition, Moscow believes that Beijing is not interested in applying the same kind of pressure on territorial issues to Russia as it does to Southeast Asian nations on the South China Sea.† Observers of China's Russia policy think that Beijing is not prepared to engage in a costly conflict with Russia for territorial control over the lands of Russian Siberia, given their harsh climate, geographic remoteness, the widespread lack of even basic infrastructure, and, indeed, the likely readiness of Moscow to resort to the threat of nuclear retaliation in the event of an overwhelming military assault. Analysts also assume that China is satisfied with Russia's friendly neutrality in China's tug-of-war with the United States and its Asian allies.

Yet there is one area—the Arctic—where Russia may increasingly feel its sovereignty is being challenged by China. Drawing "red lines" for China in the Arctic is more difficult than in Eastern Siberia. Beijing has a solid record of implementing low-profile, consistent, and goal-oriented policies and action programs that are hard to stop or even interfere with before it is too late. Examples include trade liberalization with Central Asian states, pipeline construction, and penetration of natural resource development sectors across the world. Unlike armed conflict, such initiatives do not pose an immediate threat to Russian interests. However, after their consistent implementation over a number of years, a power shift from Russia to China becomes glaring. Moscow feels that the Arctic is one such area where Chinese gradualism could jeopardize Russian sovereignty.

Modeling the Game

In their approach to China, both Russia and the United States are leaving a number of options open. Their final choice, if it is ever made, will depend on the evolution of Beijing's own international behavior.

In broad terms, the Kremlin is choosing between two courses of action: 1) unequivocally allying with China on the basis of the 2001 Moscow Treaty and allowing Beijing to exert substantial influence on Russian international strategy, especially in Asia, or 2) hedging against potential challenges by China to Russian interests by

* According to a news story published on a pro-Kremlin website, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said at a December 2012 meeting with pro-government activists that "Russia is unfazed by the strengthening of China's positions in international affairs" [because] "we [Russia and China] adhere to absolutely identical perspectives on the state of affairs in the world" (http://www.dni.ru/polit/2012/12/9/244918.html).

† See, for example: Dmitri Trenin, "True Partners: How China and Russia See Each Other," Centre for European Reform, 2012, and Igor Zevelev, "A New Realism for the 21st Century: U.S.-China Relations and Russia's Choice," *Russia in Global Affairs*, October-December 2012.

cooperating at least sporadically with the United States and its allies in areas that are sensitive for Russian-Chinese relations.

U.S. policymakers in turn have the broad options of: 1) engaging China while hedging the risks of Chinese expansionism, or 2) containing (and possibly confronting) China—for example, by reinforcing military ties and expanding the scope of U.S. alliances with China's neighbors in Asia.

Combinations of these strategies lead to four possible outcomes. The chart below outlines the most relevant characteristics of each outcome for U.S.-Russia relations.

		Russia	
		Ally with China in counterbalancing the United States	*Hedge the risk of Chinese expansionism by selective cooperation with the U.S. and its allies in Asia*
United States	*Engage China, but hedge the risks of Chinese expansionism*	China's power is significantly enhanced. Russia faces an assertive China. Reaching lucrative deals on financing Russian corporations by Chinese banks or supplying hydrocarbons to China becomes difficult once Russia forgoes its bargaining chips vis-à-vis China while Beijing retains full flexibility.	Russia faces China's unwillingness to allow for trilateral initiatives. China is the party most interested in separating the two relationships from each other in order to preserve its freedom of maneuver. Chill in Russian-Chinese relations is likely. Moscow and Washington discuss and possibly coordinate their China policies. Moscow fends off Beijing's irritation by referring to Russia's right to multivector diplomacy. Moscow's ability to stick to this strategy depends on U.S. willingness to discuss China with Russia.
	Confront China now given the evidence of its not-so-peaceful rise	Russia's zero-sum view of relations with the United States compels Washington to abandon hopes of cooperating with Moscow. However, the need for resources to deter China on its southern rim discourages the United States from confronting Russia at the same time. Russia's ability to strike a balance in relations with China and the United States and hedge the risks of Chinese expansionism becomes constrained. Moscow's ultimate gamble is on the demise of the United States as the superpower.	A push for closer U.S.-Russian coordination would force Russia to make a difficult choice between Washington and Beijing. This is not an equilibrium outcome because the choice will be made in favor of China, given the higher economic and security stakes in Russia's relations with China than with the United States.

Should China continue to build up its military muscle and adjust its doctrines and postures to allow for a greater role in world politics, it will be increasingly difficult for Moscow to maintain ambiguity in Russia's approach toward China. Certain developments might serve as triggers that will dramatize Russia's choice and require prompt reaction:

- Beijing faces off against a strong coalition backed by the United States on maritime issues to the south of China. Trying to defuse nationalist sentiment, China turns to the north, pressuring Moscow on immigration rules or even attempting to open negotiations on the status of some border territories.
- China's trade with Central Asian states increases so much that Kazakhstan begins to tilt toward a preferential trade relationship with China and mulls an exit from its Customs Union with Russia.
- The balance of Russian-Chinese military potential clearly and irreversibly shifts in favor of China.

In all these cases, Russia would be willing to at least set up a regular mechanism of consultations on China with the United States.

Consequences of U.S. Choices on China

Should the United States opt to confront China head-on, Moscow will likely choose to fully side with Beijing. A firm alliance with China could take the form of open Russian support for China's territorial claims (especially if the United States is seen in Moscow as inhibiting territorial settlement between Russia and Japan) or a consensus in the Russian policymaking community about the need for Moscow to accept its position as China's "strategic rear." This may result in growing Russian assertiveness and intransigence in relations with the United States and a likely escalation of tensions concerning international crises in which Moscow and Washington consider themselves rivals (such as Syria and, to an extent, Iran). Because an international crisis or open conflict between major powers could undermine China's economic growth, in this scenario Beijing may find itself in the unusual position of being a moderating force for Russian foreign policy or even a mediator between Russia and the United States. For its part, Russia will afford itself only occasional balking at China in order not to lose all its opportunities for dialogue with the United States. Unless Washington's pressure on China proves effective in the short-term, this scenario will place China in the favorable position of a playmaker.

If the United States decides to continue engaging China, Moscow will be incentivized to cooperate with Washington and its Asian allies rather than give Beijing unprecedented freedom of maneuver by moving closer to China. Russian hedging against full dependence on China could mean substantive progress on territorial settlement with Japan and the continuation of policies driven by commercial benefit, such as joint oil upstream projects with Vietnam or arms trade with India and ASEAN nations.

Overall, the real test of Russia's foreign policy "autonomy," which the Kremlin is keen to maintain, will be its ability to keep its options open in relations with the United States and its allies while convincing Beijing that this does not compromise the Russian-Chinese quasi-alliance.

The Politics of Sports Mega-Events in Russia
KAZAN, SOCHI, AND BEYOND

PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo No. 288

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One of the most visible aspects of Russia's path to globalization is the country's hosting of large international sporting events. In July 2013, Kazan hosted the World Student Games (the Universiade). In February 2014, Sochi will host the Winter Olympics. A dozen Russian cities are preparing for the 2018 World Cup. We can add to the list the 2016 Ice Hockey World Championship in Moscow and St. Petersburg, as well as a Formula One race, World Aquatics Championship, and other tournaments.

All these global mega-events may be seen as islands of "glocalization," a product of an expanding international market for promoting regional and urban brands and Russia's search for greater legitimation of its international standing. The ways in which these high-profile championships are discussed extend far beyond sport to include an array of social and political issues. Most of these come down to the Kremlin's (mis-) management of huge international fora and their effects on different sectors of the economy, society, and administrative apparatus.

In this memo, I analyze the experience of hosting and preparing for sports mega-events to illuminate certain mechanisms of power and sources of ideological indoctrination in today's Russia. I focus on lessons from the recent Universiade in Kazan and on the forthcoming Winter Olympic Games in Sochi.

The Machine of Mega-Events: From Kazan to Sochi

The Universiade in Kazan was an event more noticeable inside Russia than abroad, despite the presence over the course of ten days of almost 12,000 athletes from 160 countries competing in 27 sports, as well as 150,000 visitors. Its domestic significance was boosted by two consecutive visits (including for the Universiade's opening ceremony) of President Vladimir Putin, who remarked that the Universiade ought to be considered a testing ground for other upcoming sports mega-events in Russia. Yet those events themselves appear to be a litmus test for the ability of Putin's regime to successfully host global events. In this regard, the Universiade unveiled a number of important characteristics of power relations within Russia and raised a plethora of questions related to the Kremlin's strategy toward mega-events, as well as their political and social effects.

Putin's Sporting Ideology

Mega-events are a double-edged sword for the Kremlin. On the one hand, they are the means for a mass-scale redistribution of financial resources and, indirectly, the competences and prerogatives of different groups of powerholders. The Kremlin wishes to strengthen its security-making capacities and role as the center of political decision-making by its effective management of high-profile international events. Engaging and disciplining regions like Tatarstan—with a record of skeptical attitudes toward Moscow's rule—is another political function of these projects.

At the same time, such events are playgrounds for ideological articulations of the Kremlin's hegemonic discourse. The Sochi Olympics are an essential part of Russia's triumphalist narrative of "rising from its knees," retrieving its great power status, and returning to the "premier league" of world politics. As presidential press secretary Dmitry Peskov acknowledged, Russia is eager to exhibit its capacity to run sizeable international projects while the EU is mired in financial crisis. The entertainment aspect is essential for boosting feelings of national pride through sport: for example, French movie star Gerard Depardieu, who was recently granted Russian citizenship, plays a Russian sports manager in the lavishly state-sponsored film *Sports Without Borders*, set to be released right before the Olympics.

On the one hand, there is some evidence that the Universiade was intended to communicate the ideology of Putin's regime via messages intentionally formulated in non-political language. By forbidding volunteers in Kazan to talk politics with foreigners, or by proposing to participants of the closing ceremony to kiss each other as a celebratory gesture of love and peace, Universiade organizers wished not only to stage a politically sterile event but also to demonstrate that sports can connect people more effectively than diplomacy and foreign policymaking. Yet on the other hand, lying behind this putative universalism was a determination to attain an impressive national triumph, which is a clearly political move. The Russian team had an unusual number of world-class athletes at the Universiade and won as many medals as all the other teams combined, which questioned the spirit of competitiveness. Instead, the Universiade turned into an orchestration of public performance, aimed at boosting patriotic feelings of pride and glorification of "the Russian spirit."

But this superiority provoked serious skepticism among observers, who deemed that the Universiade was an expensive spectacle staged for easy victories that could be widely publicized as a symbolic vindication of Russia's grandeur. President Putin took such criticism personally, recommending that skeptics "take Viagra," a comment that revealed the degree of the Kremlin's irritation—and serious communication problems—with its opponents.

In Sochi, Olympic organizers will most likely face a series of even sharper information attacks. An artistic exposition in the city of Perm entitled "Welcome! Sochi 2014," supported by controversial art producer Marat Gelman and banned by the authorities shortly after its opening, is a toxic piece of mockery—the display portrayed the Olympics as a totalitarian regime embellishing its image. Putin's attempts to inflate patriotism through sport is facing challenges even from athletes like three-time Olympic

rowing champion Yevgeny Salakhov, who has publicly lambasted the Kremlin for profligacy, mismanagement, and its political manipulations.

In many respects, the holding of sports mega-events helps undermine the coherence of Putin's nationalist and conservative discourse by opening new space for the public to articulate issues like tolerance, lifestyle diversity, and human rights. Tolerance was the catchword for a campaign in support of AIDS-infected individuals held in Kazan within the framework of the Universiade. The international LGBT community has launched a media campaign protesting the detention and deportation of four Dutch citizens in Russia for homosexual propaganda that, according to a recent law passed by the State Duma, constitutes a legal offense in Russia. Instead of calling for an Olympic boycott, as some U.S. senators proposed after Moscow agreed to consider Edward Snowden's asylum petition, campaigners called for turning the Sochi Olympics from a Russia-centric event to a cosmopolitan one, in which universal values of human dignity trump parochial nationalist identities.

Authoritarian Mobilization

Sports mega-events can only take place in Russia through the comprehensive mobilization of administrative resources. News reports asserted that many elements of the Universiade—from ticket distribution to construction works—were achieved through reliance on an opaque administrative system that created the preconditions for multiple abusive and corrupt practices. The same goes for the Sochi Olympics: the borderline between state-owned and non-state assets has remained intentionally flexible, and spheres of responsibility between different levels of authority—and even individuals—have been deliberately blurred. For example, Putin's public questioning in February 2013 of Dmitry Kozak and other officials, responsible for gross mismanagement of Olympic construction, made clear that many of the managers failed to differentiate between private investments and credits from Sberbank, which counts the state as one of its largest shareholders. Administrative conflicts within the government—for example, between the Ministry for Regional Development, which manages the bulk of funds assigned for the Sochi Olympics, and the *Gosstroy* state corporation, in charge of construction works—only further discredits the proverbial "vertical of power."

All this has material consequences. One is the quality of construction works: for instance, the building of the Information Center in Kazan was damaged by heavy rain during the Universiade. Poor-quality construction was also a problem at the APEC summit held in Vladivostok in September 2012, when a highway especially constructed for the event subsequently eroded. The exorbitant costs set by *Olympstroy*, the key contractor for the Olympics, are another issue; Russia's national ice hockey team could not afford to pay for its training in Sochi and had to choose another location.

The issue of how to manage Olympic infrastructure after the Games is already being debated. Irina Rodnina, a famous Soviet-era figure skating champion and now a member of parliament from the ruling United Russia, suggested that a top ice hockey team might be transferred to Sochi to play in the newly constructed Olympic arena. This

illustrates the continued reliance in Russia on a purely administrative approach to sports management, largely void of economic rationale and evocative of Soviet-style administrative culture.

Room for Exception

Sports mega-events often involve the temporary suspension of normal rules. Many families in Sochi lost their homes in evictions that were legalized by a presidential decree in 2007 to facilitate the procedure of expropriating land for Olympic construction (reimbursements turned out to be time-consuming and unfair). By the same token, the Universiade was a pretext for the postponement of a high-profile police-abuse trial, accelerating local military conscription, and towing away vehicles to reduce traffic and congestion. Such exceptional measures facilitate the misuse of public competences and strengthen the regime's corrupt components.

Security concerns only increased the scale of special measures. On the eve of the Universiade, Tatarstan's authorities publicly announced that they had reached an informal deal with religious extremists to temporarily discontinue their activities. Public order in Sochi is supposed to be partly protected by Cossack patrols, an indication of the state's limited ability to manage domestic security challenges. Reliance on regional elites in the North Caucasus also appears to be an important element of the Sochi project: Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov has pledged to liquidate the terrorist Doku Umarov for openly threatening to foil security during the Olympic Games.

That said, exceptional measures can occasionally be for the better. The federal government has lifted visa procedures for official delegations participating in international sports event in Russia, starting with the Universiade. This gesture of goodwill is meant to demonstrate Russia's eagerness to support visa facilitation, a stumbling block in Russia's relations with the EU. Moscow has also given its informal assurance to the International Olympic Committee that a new law criminalizing gay "propaganda" will not be implemented during the Sochi Olympics. This, of course, vindicates the fact that Russia's restrictive domestic regulations deeply conflict with the dominant democratic standards and very spirit of the Olympic movement.

Sports and International Politics

It is evident that the maxim of "sport above politics" is either wishful thinking or self-delusion. Mega-events will always provide terrain for the articulation of diverse political messages. Popular sports—especially football (soccer) but also ice hockey—often produce politically-tinged messages that accord with a policy of state-sponsored patriotism but challenge the country's international credentials and domestic unity. Past memories will always bear political connotations, be it Circassian protests against the repressive policies of the Russian Empire or a putative (and overwrought) parallel between the Putin-patronized Sochi project and the 1936 Olympic Games in Nazi Germany.

The fact that an increasing number of sports events are held in non-Western countries raises an important political question—how do these events redefine cultural

and sociopolitical boundaries between host countries and the West? Do they bring non-Western states closer to the Western normative order, or do they push them away from it? Non-Western states are particularly keen to take political advantage of hosting sports projects. The mayor of Gwangiu, South Korea, host city of the next Summer Universiade, made an explicitly political statement in Kazan by suggesting that in 2015 the two Korean states would field a single team. Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev, at a reception for his country's returning student team, proudly noted that Azerbaijan came "in ninth place in Europe and first place among Muslim countries"—a statement directly referencing the country's identity. Ukrainian Vice-Premier Konstantin Gryschenko cheered Ukraine's student team in the aftermath of the Universiade, underlining its contribution to the prestige of Ukraine's higher education worldwide and to the promotion of a healthy lifestyle, both of which the government counts among its top priorities.

Against this backdrop, the key challenge is not to avoid inevitable political overlays but to make them effective. For instance, U.S. Ambassador to Russia Michael McFaul, who visited Kazan during the Universiade, drew a parallel with the United States' "ping-pong diplomacy," which played a role in bridging the gap with China during the Cold War. In so doing, he advocated a re-interpretation of the political meaning attached to sports mega-events from an emanation of nationalist sentiment to an interface for open interaction between states and societies.

There are some signs that sports mega-events can perform such a function. The forthcoming Sochi Olympics gave new impetus to Russia's security cooperation with the United States and Great Britain. Cooperation with private business can also play a positive role. The largest German, French, Austrian, and Swiss corporations investing in Sochi projects may be motivated by profit, but their operations can have deeper effects that help engender social change. For example, the telecommunications sector is developing networked communications, internet-based communities, and new social media all relatively independently from the state. European investors are also bringing their business cultures and promoting institutional standards like public-private partnerships, which became one of Russia's priorities during its current G20 presidency.

Yet Russia's preparations for the Olympic Games, with their rampant corruption and clan-based system of financial distribution, have yet to provide proof that foreign investments are making the Russian economy more transparent and accountable. On the contrary, a certain part of the Russian business community is loath to share its lavish contracts with foreign partners. A bill banning foreign citizens and companies from participating in the organization of mass events in Russia is expected to be submitted to parliament this fall by Russian Federation Council member Sergei Lisovsky. For many sectors in Russian society, globalization is associated not with new opportunities but risks, which must be quelled by administrative measures.

Conclusion

Every sports mega-event is a blend of entertainment, symbolic and carnivalesque performances, celebrations of national pride, and managerial technocracy. Yet these

events are also sources of political messages and ideological expressions. The Olympic Games, as seen from a political perspective, are meant to confirm Russia's claim to normalcy and ability to provide world-class security. However, they also open avenues for portraying the Russian government as corrupt and mismanaged, unable to effectively tackle either hard or soft security challenges, and insensitive to environmental issues. The success of the Sochi Olympics in further socializing Russia internationally may be limited. Of greater consequence, perhaps, is the growing domestic disdain to the blend of bad governance and artificial patriotism with which the Kremlin's hosting of sports mega-events is increasingly associated.

Sochi 2014
THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF RUSSIA'S MEGA-PROJECTS

PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo No. 289
September 2013

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Billions of people around the world watch the Olympics and even more viewers tune in to the World Cup soccer championship. These events not only draw large audiences, but many people are willing to interrupt their daily schedule to watch them.

Such games are always a mix of commerce and politics. Traditionally, big cities in Western countries with developed democracies and advanced market economies hosted such events in an effort to boost their international profile on the global tourist market, hopefully influencing more visitors to vacation nearby while spending money in local hotels and restaurants. Of course, national leaders recognized the political possibilities of the Olympic Games early on. Hitler used the 1936 Berlin Olympics to promote Nazism while Japan welcomed the world to Tokyo in 1964 to announce its return to the international community after World War Two. The Soviets recognized the propaganda possibilities when they joined the Olympic movement in 1952, and they hoped to showcase socialist successes in Moscow in 1980, although the invasion of Afghanistan and the subsequent U.S. boycott crimped their plans.

Vladimir Putin, an avid sportsman, needed little convincing that bringing the Olympics back to Russia was a good idea. Most likely the idea for hosting the Olympics, and the enormous construction projects associated with them, developed with the input of oligarch Vladimir Potanin and Krasnodar Krai governor Aleksandr Tkachev, but Putin has since made the Sochi mega-event a personal priority. The games serve three primary functions for his regime: building Russia's international image, defining the priorities of regional development, and maintaining regime support among important elite groups and the masses.

International Image Building

The International Olympic Committee's decision to award the 2014 games to Russia at the 2007 meeting in Guatemala marked a moment of success for Putin personally and for Russia as a country. After the humiliation of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the economic decline of the 1990s, Russia sought to use the Olympics as a way to proclaim that it had emerged from a decade of chaotic change with the strength and vitality to host the world's premier athletes at a planned state-of-the-art winter resort.

Flush with oil money and the confidence flowing from having imposed his stamp on Russian politics, Putin sought to use the Olympics as a way of showing that Russia could compete effectively in the global capitalist system. Unlike the earlier Berlin or Moscow games, these Olympics did not espouse a particular ideology. Rather they sought to show that Russia could manage its affairs no worse than the West and stood in the same rank with emerging countries like China, South Africa, and Brazil, who had also recently hosted or won bids to organize similar global events.

Regional Development

Mega-projects in Russia serve as a de facto regional development program in the absence of more coherent priority-setting or policy-making processes. Building on a Soviet-era legacy of projects, such as Magnitogorsk, "virgin lands," and the Baikal-Amur railway, Russia today has developed a string of mega-events that spin off mega-projects that benefit select sites. The result has directed tremendous resources to a small group of cities, including Vladivostok ($20 billion in projects to host the 2012 APEC conference), Kazan (nearly $7 billion to host the July 2013 Universiade), Sochi ($50 billion for the Olympics so far), and the 11 cities slated to host the 2018 World Cup.

Focusing scarce development resources on these specific cities de facto resolves a long-running debate over Russia's regional development policy. The government has offered various plans that would either work to bring all regions up to a minimal level of development or focus resources on "locomotive" regions that already show promising results in the hopes that their success will raise the level of nearby poorer regions. Pursuing mega-projects effectively settles the debate in favor of the relatively successful cities by devoting high priority and extensive resources to their development.

Mega-projects provide a vehicle well suited for Russia's centralized and vertically organized policy-making process. The basic decision to pursue mega-events and mega-projects is made at the top. The projects are then funded through extensive access to state resources. Of course, lower-level policymakers, urban planning experts, implementing contractors, and civil society groups have some impact on how the projects are implemented and what their impact is on the ground. But, ultimately, the key decisions and resource allocations are made in the Kremlin and there is little public participation in the process.

Maintaining Regime Stability

The third function of Russia's mega-projects is ensuring support for the ruling regime. The Olympics provide the regime with benefits on both mass and elite levels. At the mass level, the Olympic project serves as a replacement for ideology in an era when the Russian state has not been able to define what the Russian idea consists of. Proponents of "Olympism" claim that it promotes world peace by bringing young people together for regular sporting competitions. With teams organized by country, in practice the games promote a strong degree of nationalism, as countries compete with each other to win as many medals as possible.

This combination of a peaceful higher purpose and nationalist promotion serves Putin's key domestic political interest of ensuring that he and his allies will remain in power as long as possible. Organizing mega-events gives the population something to be proud of; thereby, the regime hopes, it imbues a form of performance legitimacy on the current leadership. Putin and his colleagues can claim that they are building Russia's future in an effective manner by organizing mega-events and the new urban infrastructure and prosperity that they will bring to Russian cities.

The purpose of the games in this sense is to demobilize Russian citizens. The Olympics provide soaring narratives for state television, which disseminates information to the vast majority of the Russian population and often sets the tone for the broader debate on the internet as well. By demonstrating the progress that Russia and its key cities are making under Putin's leadership, Russia's official media works to deprive activists of a cause for organizing against the regime.

In addition to facilitating mass quiescence, the games also provide a useful way of distributing rents to powerful elite groups whose support Putin needs to remain in power. These factions include, most importantly, the oligarchs and the *siloviki*. The games provide a reason to set aside large sums of money from the state budget that can be appropriated by these groups. One of the central mechanisms for distributing these funds is Olympstroy, the special state corporation set up to organize and oversee preparations for the games. According to Russian law, state corporations are special entities that control and distribute public funds but are not subject to the same accountability or oversight as regular government agencies or private corporations. Russian researchers have demonstrated that Olympstroy pays up to three times as much as Western counterparts to build similar structures. This extra money is presumably going to insider rents. Using mega-project funds in this manner supports Russia's neo-patrimonial system of networks, which, in turn, provide a basis for maintaining the current leadership in power.

Small Circle of Winners

The implications of Russia's growing appetite for mega-projects for its development prospects are bleak. The first consequence is that there is only a small circle of elites that benefit directly from the projects. This group is, first of all, Putin and his immediate circle of oligarchs and *siloviki*, who depend on his continued rule to maintain their power and wealth. These groups control and benefit from massive state spending, much of which is redirected from the ostensible purpose of the projects into their personal accounts.

The second circle of winners is the leading cities who secure direct support from the immense infrastructure investments related to Russia's participation in such projects. Residents in cities like Sochi, Kazan, and Vladivostok receive federal funding for directed projects at a time when other development projects, such as a plan for the overall development of the Far East or the North Caucasus, go unfunded. Tying state funding to high-profile mega-events means that the leading cities will receive preferential access to federal investment funds.

Questionable Overall Benefits

While small groups and a handful of cities benefit from increased spending, the implications for society at large are less sanguine. There is little evidence that investing in mega-projects produces long-term positive developments for cities. In fact, research on past Olympics and World Cup events has shown plenty of evidence to the contrary. Host countries and cities can be saddled with numerous white elephant stadiums and other structures that serve no purpose once the games are over. While Sochi hopes for a tourist boom after the Olympic closing ceremonies, it is not clear that the city will be able to compete with other destinations that can provide better service and amenities at lower prices. Some of the infrastructure investments will undoubtedly benefit residents, ranging from an upgraded airport to new roads, sewers, and electricity generating power plants. However, it is by no means clear that the rushed decision making and development of these specific facilities was the best way to use the money spent. Alternative development models might have provided more sustainable infrastructure better designed to meet residents' needs rather than the specific requirements of a sports event. While such questions afflict all Olympic games regardless of where they are held, mega-events can prove particularly costly in a semi-peripheral country like Russia where development and investment needs are immense.

Overall, the Sochi Olympics, already dubbed the most expensive in history, seem much better designed to suit the short-term needs of Russia's rulers than the long-term aspirations of its population. In this sense, they provide a useful case study of Russia's overall political economy.

Managing the Threat of an Olympics Boycott
INTERNATIONAL PRESSURE AND RUSSIA'S RESPONSE

PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo No. 290

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As Russia's world-class athletes, culture, and economic development will be showcased at the 2014 Olympic Games in Sochi, its political direction and an array of unresolved issues will be exposed. No doubt, some foreign countries and NGOs are already trying to capitalize on the globalized nature of the Olympic Games to urge the Kremlin to come to terms with troublesome topics, from the Russian occupation of Georgian territories to LGBT rights and the scandal surrounding asylum-seeker Edward Snowden. What patterns have emerged in the Kremlin's responses to major issues and challenges? How will the Kremlin handle increasing domestic pressure and global scrutiny as the Games come closer?

After the 2008 War: A Case Study in Futility

Moscow enjoys a reputation as having a rather aggressive foreign policy in the post-Soviet space. There have been many cases over the past two decades when Russia played on the weaknesses of its neighbors, using all kinds of instruments from trade sanctions to actual military invasion. But how does Moscow itself react to a neighbor's attempts at coercion? The case of the 2014 Olympics demonstrates that the Kremlin stands firm against such threats.

Russia faces many unresolved issues in the post-Soviet space, any of which could escalate rapidly during the short timeframe leading up to the Olympics. These include Russian diaspora problems in the Baltic states; political pressures in Moldova and breakaway Transnistria; Russian-Georgian relations in light of Russia's recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia; managing relations with Baku and Yerevan; the U.S. military transit center in Kyrgyzstan; tension in Russian-Ukrainian relations; and new Eurasian customs union regulations. In fact, most post-Soviet states have a bone to pick with Russia and could use, say, a boycott of the Games as an instrument to try and pressure Moscow.

To date, however, political tensions between Russia and its neighbors remain disconnected from the Olympic spirit. Perhaps one of the most eloquent examples of this was when Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili was the first to congratulate Vladimir Putin when Russia won its Olympic bid in 2007. Tbilisi's initial enthusiasm did not

soften Moscow's position over Russian-Georgian relations, however. In spite of the fact that Sochi is very close to the Georgian border, Russia did not hesitate to declare war against Georgia in August 2008. Then, rubbing salt into the wound, the Kremlin recognized the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, leading Tbilisi to use the Olympics as a platform to garner international attention in condemnation of Moscow's actions. Even with the support of some U.S. politicians, Georgia applied in vain to the International Olympic Committee (IOC) in September 2008 requesting that the Games not be held in Sochi. Then, Tbilisi declared it would not send Georgian athletes to Sochi. It also boycotted the Women's World Chess Championship in Nalchik in 2008 (despite projections that the Georgians were the favorites to win). In another move, on May 2011, Georgia recognized as genocide Tsarist Russia's mass murder of Circassians in Sochi (the last capital of independent Circassia).

Initially, during a September 2008 press conference, one month after the August war, Putin formulated the Kremlin's uncompromising policy toward the challenge of an Olympic boycott, saying: "If they do it once, it will destroy the entire structure of the Olympic movement…However, on the other hand, if they want to take [the Sochi Games away], let them take on this burden." Indeed, neither the August 2008 war, nor the occupation of Georgian territory next to Sochi, nor the UN resolutions against Russia for years to come, nor the recognition of Sochi as a territory where genocide was committed—nothing has made the IOC change its decision to hold the Olympics in Sochi. This is not surprising. In the past, the IOC has tolerated bigger controversies: it did not move the 1980 Moscow Games in spite of the USSR's invasion of Afghanistan and the ensuing mass boycotts, nor the 1984 Los Angeles Games, which was boycotted by the USSR and its allies.

The firmness with which the Kremlin addressed the Georgian challenge prevented similar challenges from other post-Soviet states that might have been tempted to exert the same kind of pressure in their complicated relations with Russia. It became obvious that it would not affect the Olympics if, say, Chisinau or Baku were to provoke the Russian military in Transnistria or Nagorno-Karabakh, or lead to any gains for Estonia if it also recognized the Circassian genocide.

In 2013, Tbilisi changed its position and announced that Georgia would not boycott the 2014 Olympics. The shift in Tbilisi's policy was the result of a change in government rather than the result of the Kremlin's firm policy. However, this is quite a remarkable example of how the same country tried to use the same political instrument three times, first supporting the Olympics in 2007, then deciding to boycott in 2008, and finally deciding to participate in 2013. Tbilisi's political inconstancy strikingly contrasts with Moscow's permanent line not to let its post-Soviet neighbors play the Olympic card.

Kremlin Policies with the West: Stopping Short of the Point of No Return

Russian policy toward Western states incorporates a much higher level of restraint and flexibility than Russia exhibits in its relations with post-Soviet states. Russian-British relations in recent years are an example of this kind of discontinuous rapport. For example, in 2006 there was high bilateral tension due to the assassination of Alexander Litvinenko, but last year relations were stable even though the UK supported the Magnitsky list. Generally, Moscow rarely applies to the West the same wide range of consistently hard remedies it uses with post-Soviet states, namely economic sanctions and military threats. Nonetheless, when it comes to threats from Western states, Moscow enjoys the reputation of challenging them by applying so-called policies of "symmetric response." That said, when it comes to such a sensitive issue like a possible boycott of the 2014 Olympics, the Kremlin seems to restrain itself even from "symmetric response," choosing not to cross certain "red lines" or "points of no return" in the escalation of crises.

Russia's policy towards the United States is less risk adverse than its approach to Europe, with the Kremlin edging very close to a point of no return. A series of confrontations brought the U.S. threat of Olympic boycott to the fore. The first U.S. boycott threat emerged in September 2008 as a reaction to the Russian-Georgian war, when U.S. Representatives Allyson Schwartz (D-PA) and Bill Shuster (R-PA), co-chairs of the House Georgia Caucus, introduced Congressional Resolution No. 412 ("No Russian Olympics in 2014") calling on the IOC to strip Russia of the 2014 Winter Olympics and to find a more suitable alternative location.[*] At the time, however, the "reset" policy made the idea of a boycott politically irrelevant.

Between 2008 and 2013, there were no discussions in the U.S. of boycotting the Sochi Olympics. But, very recently, the threat of a U.S. boycott again emerged during the scandal connected with Edward Snowden. On July 16, Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-SC) suggested that the United States should boycott the Olympics if Russia granted Snowden asylum, but Graham found little support among his colleagues in Washington or more broadly within the American public. The senator's position did not alarm the Kremlin because even the more popular 2008 initiative in the U.S. Congress to boycott the Olympics had no consequences. However, public opinion shifted as the Snowden controversy dragged on and even more so as Russia's restrictive laws regarding sexual minorities attracted greater attention. The Kremlin miscalculated the White House's outlook when instead of relieving Russia-U.S. tensions from converging controversies, it escalated it by granting Snowden asylum. President Barack Obama responded by cancelling his planned meeting with Putin and for the first time referenced an Olympic boycott. Even though Obama announced his personal position as against the boycott, the very fact that he referenced it demonstrated that the Kremlin was at its point of no return.

[*] https://schwartz.house.gov/press-release/memberseeeeeno-russian-olympics-2014"-resolution#.UhfcMuCPdBs

Feeling this, the Kremlin went silent and did not further escalate bilateral tensions. According to the Kremlin's "symmetric response" policy, one would expect Putin to do something in response to the cancellation of the presidents' meeting and "cancel" something in response. However, Moscow preferred not to escalate tensions with the United States. At its red line, the Kremlin did not cancel the 2013 meeting between the U.S. Secretaries of State and Defense, John Kerry and Chuck Hagel, and the Russian Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Defense, Sergey Lavrov and Sergey Shoigu, which the U.S. Department of State then framed as generally productive.

On the social level, after the Russian parliament adopted laws against sexual minorities in Russia, the LGBT community and social activists in the United States, Europe, and elsewhere made anti-Olympic statements to which the Kremlin quickly responded with a statement assuring that there will be no persecution of LGBT athletes during the 2014 Olympics. European politicians also distanced themselves from any anti-Olympic activists. The Russian parliament that had been very active in adopting anti-gay laws abruptly became quiet. Though they did not go so far as to undo the laws, Russian officials explained that these laws were not against the LGBT community, but against propaganda of so-called "untraditional sex," trying to show that there was some fine line there that had not been crossed. In their statements and interviews, many Russian officials, including Putin, were quick to assure the international community that there would be no danger to gay athletes during the Games. In an interview with the Associated Press in September 2013, Putin, for the first time, expressed his readiness to meet with representatives of LGBT community, which many experts interpreted as caused by the pressure of LGBT athletes and community in the West.

Conclusion

The 2014 Sochi Olympics can be treated as diplomatic capital. Such a tool may be used even multiple times, as Georgia did when it announced in 2008 its intentions to boycott the Olympics and later in 2013 when it used the Games to restore relations with Russia. The Kremlin, for its part, is hostage to the Olympics, as it deals with challenges that may lead to negative publicity or boycotts. With lasting tensions and new unexpected challenges, Russia has several times come close to provoking different countries to boycott the Games. So far it has navigated this uphill course, with a firm hand toward neighbors like Georgia and more flexibility with the West. It would be sensational if a country does boycott the Games, an outcome Moscow seeks to avoid. But, truth be told, even if a boycott took place, it will not be a fatal blow to the Kremlin, and the Games will go on.

NATO-Georgia Relations
WILL 2014 BRING ANYTHING NEW?

PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo No. 291

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The foreign policy orientation of Georgia's new government has been the subject of considerable speculation. During the NATO Parliamentary Assembly's 83rd Rose-Roth Seminar, held in Tbilisi, Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili reiterated that his government looks forward to receiving a Membership Action Plan (MAP) at the 2014 NATO summit. Although he cautioned the Georgian public that his statement should not lead to exaggerated expectations, some skeptics have still questioned his confidence and criticized his statement as unrealistic.

Ivanishvili's government has to an extent reduced Georgia's level of confrontation with Russia without sacrificing the country's overall path toward Euro-Atlantic integration. Georgia is also the largest non-NATO troop contributor to the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan and has indicated its willingness to participate in the post-2014 mission. However, none of this is earning Tbilisi that many points with some major European members of NATO, which seem content with the alliance's existing composition. Georgia's Western partners agree that Russia should not be allowed to control Georgia's foreign policy choices, but its aspirations for membership and NATO´s promises toward Tbilisi are likely to stay unfulfilled for the foreseeable future, barring any earthshaking change in global politics, while the country´s strategic dilemmas will remain.

Stalemate Continues Despite Consensus on Pro-Western Foreign Policy

NATO integration is one of Georgia's top foreign policy priorities, deemed less a question of choice than a strategic necessity. At the NATO Bucharest summit in April 2008, the Allied Heads of State and Government agreed that Georgia will become a member of NATO. This decision was reconfirmed at successive NATO summits, including at the 2012 Chicago summit.

But while Georgia is committed to active political dialogue and practical engagement with NATO, using such integration mechanisms as the NATO-Georgia Commission and the Annual National Program, Georgia's NATO membership bid remains indefinitely frozen. Although there is a slim chance that Georgia could get a NATO Membership Action Plan (MAP) at the 2014 summit, there is plenty of hesitation among NATO members to commit to Georgia's security as a full-fledged NATO ally.

Although many Georgians believe that the Alliance might be willing to do something unprecedented for "an aspirant country," it is unlikely that Tbilisi will be able to overcome the misgivings of continental European powers with extensive commercial and energy ties to Russia (like France, Italy, and Germany) who blocked a MAP at the Bucharest summit. Even the position of the United States, previously the strongest voice for Georgian membership in NATO, has altered considerably during the Obama administration, which was focused more (at least in its first term) on the U.S. "reset" with Russia. As a result, while the door to Georgian membership in NATO has been kept open rhetorically, in practice the membership of the country has been put on hold.

Contrary to expectations, Georgia's change in government has not overly influenced its foreign policies, and its strategic orientation toward NATO remains. Although there is no indication that Georgia will become a member in the near future, most Georgians continue to support NATO membership, which they perceive not only as a guarantee of security but a symbol of their belonging to the West. According to a June 2013 survey commissioned by the U.S. National Democratic Institute (NDI), support for Georgia's EU and NATO integration remains strong at 79 percent and 73 percent, respectively.[*]

At the same time, most Georgians also realize that with the Russian military occupation of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Georgian security is diminished if not shattered. Relations between the two estranged neighbors may be slowly improving, but there is no clear public mandate in either country to push for restoration of diplomatic ties. And while the Ivanishvili government hopes to find a *modus vivendi* with Russia, Georgia will continue to face strong opposition from Russia in its pursuit of NATO membership, regardless of who rules in Tbilisi. On the fifth anniversary of the August 2008 war between Russia and Georgia, Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev confirmed once again on Georgian television that NATO membership would strain Georgia's ties with Moscow. He also reminded Tbilisi that Russia is a nuclear power—something to keep in mind while weighing the costs and benefits of joining NATO.

As Georgian diplomacy reconsiders how to deal with its powerful northern neighbor, which still tends to view the former Soviet states as virtual vassals, it is not clear how the country can meet the enlargement criteria set by NATO, at least as they are now written:

> "States which have ethnic disputes or external territorial disputes, including irredentist claims, or internal jurisdictional disputes must settle those disputes by peaceful means in accordance with OSCE principles. Resolution of such disputes would be a factor in determining whether to invite a state to join the Alliance."

What should Georgia's strategy be under these circumstances? While no clear long-term strategy and comprehensive idea has yet been defined, the Georgian political

[*] Luis Navarro, "Public attitudes in Georgia: Results of a June 2013 survey carried out for NDI by CRRC," available at: http://www.ndi.org/files/NDI-Georgia-Survey-June-2013-ENG.pdf.

class understands that the formulation of such a strategy may involve addressing some politically awkward questions that can contradict or even endanger the national interest.

Dynamics of Internal Politics: Territorial Integrity vs. Western Integration

Russia pushes Georgia to make a false choice between territorial integrity, which is closely linked with Georgia joining the Eurasian Union and returning to Russia's sphere of influence, and continuing with NATO integration (but without its breakaway regions). In doing so, it conveys a message to other post-Soviet states about what might happen if one opposes the Kremlin's will and chooses its own foreign policy orientation.

Under these circumstances, some Western friends of Georgia suggest that Georgians should think "outside the box" in regards to territorial integrity and even "think the unthinkable." According to their advice, if Tbilisi switches its priorities away from recovering the occupied territories and toward anchoring itself in Western institutions, then Georgia's integration with NATO would become a real option. According to this calculation, it will be much easier for NATO to offer Tbilisi a MAP if it does not also have to help secure Georgia's territorial integrity.

However, it is very unlikely that such a course will be adopted any time soon. Many in Georgia believe that even if it were politically possible to accept the so-called "reality on the ground," this would in no way guarantee that Russia would quietly agree to such a concession if it meant Georgia's entry into NATO. Even if Georgia were to somehow give up the territories, Russia still might not drop its objections to Georgian membership, and so NATO itself would be unlikely to accept it as a member. At the end of the day, the Georgian public has not forgotten that Russia's war aims were not about controlling the breakaway regions but punishing Georgia due to its move toward NATO integration and exercising Russia's hard power in its self-declared "near abroad."

Such "appeasement" of Moscow would not be good for the international community either, as it would set a precedent for the forcible change of borders by Russia in the post-Soviet space. It also directly contradicts the principle of inviolability of borders, which constitutes the cornerstone for contemporary European security recognized by the Helsinki Final Act. Human rights also matter. Ethnic cleansing supported by a great power cannot be seen as a legitimate tool of self-determination of any people, including Georgia's separatist regions.

Finally, while few Georgians would disagree that NATO membership is desirable, it is not entirely assured that Western integration would prevail over the issue of territorial integrity if a referendum on the issue were to be proposed.

Understanding this reality, the Kremlin tries to exploit any weaknesses in Tbilisi to gain influence over Georgian politics, which it definitively lost after the 2008 war. As Georgia is not a member of any security organization and its NATO prospects remain uncertain, Moscow also attempts to lure Georgia back to its security realm by hinting that some face-saving solutions might be found with regard to Abkhazia and South Ossetia under the auspices of the Moscow-promoted Eurasian Union. But engaging Moscow too closely and accommodating it too willingly opens the door to constant

meddling in Georgia's internal affairs and limits its independence as well as its foreign policy choices.

As Tbilisi is not going to sacrifice its sovereignty and territorial integrity, there has been some discussion about whether or not Georgia could receive NATO membership without extension of security guarantees over its breakaway regions. This would follow the model of West Germany, which was admitted to NATO in 1949 despite its own "frozen conflict" with Moscow—one that was not solved for decades. Supporters of the idea claim that it would not oblige the Alliance to defend parts of Georgia that have not been directly governed by Tbilisi for twenty years. Interestingly, if this plan works out, some Georgian analysts think that Germany could join the United States as a patron of Georgia's Euro-Atlantic aspirations. However, its not clear that Germany is prepared to take such a role in upholding Georgia's NATO bid.

While this idea might sound unrealistic, and could be difficult to sell to all NATO members, Tbilisi might nonetheless hope to persuade Washington and its NATO allies that Georgia's situation is unique and, in light of the threat Russia poses to Georgia, that Tbilisi should be exempted from normal procedure. Decisions in NATO are taken by consensus, and it is debatable how many members would be prepared to antagonize Russia by bending the rules in Georgia's case. Still, from the Georgian point of view, the argument is a rational one and worthy of discussion.

Conclusion

Although Georgia's NATO membership prospects seem remote, the cause is not entirely hopeless. Georgia's progress on the membership track to date is noteworthy, especially when one considers the point from which it began. Yet concerted efforts are required in order to put the relationship back on track. Given NATO members' skepticism of Georgian membership, the perpetual promises to incorporate Georgia into Western structures are starting to ring hollow. Some Georgians now say that the price the country is paying to move up on the Alliance's membership waiting list (i.e., the loss of its solders in Afghanistan) is too high. This is an indirect result of the policies of the previous government, which created false expectations that were impossible to meet in the short run. Criticizing previous government rhetoric, the new government is also prone to feeding the public unrealistic expectations, claiming that the process of Georgia's gradual integration into NATO is moving forward even faster. If not checked, this tendency can also cause public disillusionment.

Georgia has passed an important test of democracy and accomplished a peaceful transfer of power through parliamentary elections. In this way, the country has made a major step toward integration into NATO. If further reforms and a strengthening of democratic institutions follow, this will bring it even closer to the Alliance. But this also requires NATO to take concrete steps to further Georgia's integration with the Alliance and to avoid policies that combine polite assurances in public with private indifference or aversion. The failure to give Georgia some sort of upgrade in its status in the near future may result in a serious blow for those domestic forces that support Georgia's Euro-Atlantic integration. This can decrease the enthusiasm of the population toward

the country's integration with the West, which may lead to the erosion and eventual crumbling of the nationwide consensus on the issue.

Although Georgians realize that their country's contribution to the ISAF mission is not a means of buying entry into NATO, they do expect that NATO will make reciprocal steps to demonstrate that an integration process is occurring. Whether or not Georgia receives a MAP in 2014, Tbilisi can at least expect that the next NATO summit will acknowledge Georgia's substantial progress, appreciate the current political processes in the country, and encourage practical steps forward toward Georgia's full and irreversible integration into NATO.

Armenia and Georgia: A New Pivotal Relationship in the South Caucasus?

PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo No. 292

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With the recent change of government in Georgia, which has led to a reduction of tension between Russia and Georgia, Yerevan and Tbilisi are in a better position to improve their relations. Armenia and Georgia are also coming closer together through their efforts to continue and deepen the process of EU integration. In Georgia's case, this means a readiness to conclude an Association Agreement with the European Union that include a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA), set to be initialized at the EU's Eastern Partnership (EaP) summit in Vilnius this November. In the case of Armenia, which Russia recently forced to abandon taking a similar step and instead to declare an intention to join the Russian-led Eurasian Customs Union, this means being on constant standby to resume the process of integration with the EU in a more favorable external environment. Regardless of this latest hiccup, the latest developments are promising for a breakthrough in Armenian-Georgian relations. If such a breakthrough occurs, it will have significant regional implications.

Parameters of the Current Armenian-Georgian *Modus Vivendi*

Economic cooperation between Armenia and Georgia is based on trade and energy transit through Georgia. Bilateral trade between the two neighbors is relatively low but growing. In 2012, Georgia was Armenia's 9th largest trading partner by exports (totaling $78 million), while Armenia was Georgia's 2nd largest export destination ($261 million, although most of this consists of the re-export of used cars).* In recent years, Armenian investment in Georgia's tourism and transportation infrastructure has increased significantly. In general, the states' economies are similar in structure and thus poorly integrated. They target different markets and rely on different energy resources and raw materials.†

* Armenia exports to Georgia construction materials, glass, rubber and plastic goods, agricultural products (especially grapes), machinery, and medical supplies. Imports from Georgia include foodstuffs, nitrogen fertilizers, timber, and wood products. In the last few years, the re-export of used cars (from the United States and Europe) has also become an important item of Georgian export. Data available at http://comtrade.un.org.

† For more, see Sergey Minasyan, "Armenia and Georgia: Problems and Prospects," *Central Asia and the Caucasus,* 13 (2), 2012.

On security issues, Armenia and Georgia have different approaches and opposing major-power backers. This has been especially obvious since the August 2008 war between Georgia and Russia, as the latter is Armenia's main military-political partner, both bilaterally and through the Collective Security Treaty Organization. The Georgian attitude toward Armenia and Armenians in the post-Soviet period has been shaped by negative perceptions of the ongoing alliance between Moscow and Yerevan. For its part, Armenia closely monitors Georgia's cooperation with Turkey and Azerbaijan, fearing a deepening of the existing transport and communications blockade of Armenia by these two states. The position of the two states on the settlement of regional ethnic conflicts also differs. Georgia supports the principle of territorial integrity (in the case of Abkhazia and South Ossetia), while Armenia advocates for the principle of self-determination (Nagorno-Karabakh). The issue of Georgia's Armenian-populated Javakheti region plays an important role in their bilateral relations. The settlement of nearly 100,000 ethnic Armenians in this administrative-territorial region bordering Armenia has created mutual concerns and phobias.

However, the two countries have points of collegiality. For example, Armenia does not recognize the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, while Georgia strives to maintain neutrality in the Karabakh conflict.

On the global level, within the tenets of the European Union's Eastern Partnership, the positions of the two countries are quite similar. Moreover, Armenia and Georgia are connected via relations with the United States, given the influential Armenian-American communities there and U.S. political support for Georgia.

The overall result of all the above is a fairly stable *modus vivendi* between Tbilisi and Yerevan.

New Factors and Trends: What is Different?

The coming to power of Bidzina Ivanishvili's government in Georgia has been one of the most important positive factors for Armenian-Georgian relations. With Ivanishvili's efforts to normalize relations with Moscow, Armenia's political and military cooperation with Russia has been transformed from an obstacle into an opportunity. The most visible example of this are Georgian references to Armenia as a major beneficiary of restoring the railway connection through Abkhazia (closed since the early 1990s)—even as this idea serves as a convenient pretext for the Ivanishvili government to find ways to enhance relations with Russia.

To some extent, Georgia's attempts to adjust its foreign policy appear to borrow from Armenia's own foreign policy of "complementarism." These efforts are partially due to the disappointment of the Georgian political elite with the outcome of President Mikheil Saakashvili's single-vector policy. The danger of Saakashvili's daring but unbalanced foreign policy was evident in August 2008. During his first official visit to Yerevan in January 2013, Georgian Prime Minister Ivanishvili bluntly mentioned the benefits of Armenia's balanced foreign policy, noting that "Armenia is a good example

for Georgia [in this respect]. We can only be jealous of it."* Predictably, this caused strong criticism from Saakashvili and his team, suggesting that attempts to redefine Georgia's foreign policy will require considerable public support.

The opportunity to really implement more a balanced foreign policy could arise after Georgia's presidential election in October. But expectations of any dramatic change are unwarranted. There will be no pro-Russian turn in Georgia in the foreseeable future. The Georgian parliament's unanimous resolution in support of the country's top foreign policy priorities—including membership in NATO and the EU—proves the point.

Nonetheless, the overall softening of the Georgian-Russian political atmosphere has had a positive impact on many levels, including on the situation in Javakheti. Under Saakashvili, Javakheti was under the strict control of police and security services. The situation is now changing. With less pressure from the security services, local administrative entities and political organizations are gaining an opportunity to actively participate in public policy. This is increasing the local population's level of confidence in the central authorities and reduces the fear that their rights as an ethnic minority will be violated. This, in turn, is favorably affecting relations between Yerevan and Tbilisi.

Intriguingly, Russian-Georgian attempts at reconciliation and the overall rebalancing of Georgia's foreign policy are taking place at the same time as a greater discontent is settling among Armenians about Russian-Armenian-relations. This has been mostly due to the rising price of Russian gas and the announcement of a scandalous Russian arms deal between Moscow and Baku.† Most recently, Russia has actively sought to prevent Armenia's European integration and forced Yerevan to declare its intention to join the Eurasian Customs Union. Russia is trying in such a way to prevent Armenia's initializing of the Association Agreement/DCFTA it has already agreed upon with Brussels.

Practically speaking, however, a customs area is appropriate only for states that have a common border. Armenia could really only join the Customs Union by way of Georgia (as even if Azerbaijan were to join, a remote possibility for now, its border with Armenia remains closed). Thus, Armenia's cooperation with Georgia after Tbilisi's initialing of an Association Agreement /DCFTA acquires particular importance, as the latter will provide Yerevan a common border with the EU's customs area and will provide an additional argument for its difficult negotiations with Moscow in the framework of the Custom Union.

Growing domestic dissatisfaction inside Armenia concerning Moscow's current regional policy is unlikely to dramatically change the military-strategic framework of Russian-Armenian relations in the short-to-medium term. However, current dynamics can bring a kind of division between the military-strategic and economic dimensions of Russian-Armenian relations. Yerevan hopes that such a division will allow Armenia to continue its integration processes with the EU (even in a holding pattern) without

* RFE/RL. "Interview: Georgian Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili," *RFE/RL*, January 18, 2013 (www.rferl.org/media/video/24877492.html).

† For more, see Sergey Minasyan, "Russian-Armenian Relations: Affections or Pragmatism?", PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo No. 269, July 2013.

Russia's firm resistance, avoiding any threat to the military and security guarantees Moscow provides.

The Ongoing Importance of the European Integration Aspirations of Georgia and Armenia

During a visit to Armenia and Georgia in July, the European Commissioner for Enlargement, Štefan Füle, favorably assessed domestic political developments in both countries and their progress toward signing Association Agreements. At the end of that month, Georgia and Armenia completed their negotiations with the EU on an Association Agreement and DCFTA and announced that they were ready to initiate the agreements. However, from the beginning of August, Russian pressure on Armenia became considerably stronger, mainly due to the Kremlin's frustration about Ukraine's determined resistance to join the Custom Union and simultaneous tensions with Belarus. As a result, during a meeting of Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan and Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow at the start of September, Sargsyan was forced to disassociate himself from any plans to initiate an Association Agreement. Instead, he made a political statement regarding Armenia's readiness to join the Customs Union.

Nonetheless, these developments will not stop the process of Armenia's EU integration, even if they slow it down. It is obvious that if Armenia does not initial documents already agreed upon with the EU, this will not be because of domestic constraints or be a voluntary choice of the Armenian political elite but the result of strong external pressure and even threats. Armenian society is aware of this, and it is also clear for Brussels. Accordingly, under slightly more favorable conditions, Armenia will resume the process of European integration at the point where it was forced to suspend it. Immediately after the Sargsyan-Putin meeting, Commissioner Füle stated during a meeting with Armenia's Minister of Foreign Affairs Edward Nalbandyan that the EU and Armenia "are convinced that it is in the interest of all to further strengthen together with Armenia what we have jointly achieved over the past years of partnership."[*]

Against this backdrop, Georgia's success in initialing its own Association Agreement/DCFTA in Vilnius is of critical importance for Armenia. It will mean the gradual establishment of a European economic and political space directly on Armenia's borders. The success of neighboring Georgia will be a good example for Armenia to continue its domestic reforms and synchronize its legal and economic environment with European standards even without a formal political commitment from the EU.

Georgia's success will not imply any immediate changes to bilateral relations, but it can lead to positive change over time. For example, the ongoing modernization of custom checkpoints on the Armenian-Georgian border and more simplified crossing procedures (part of a 60 million euro grant from the EU to Armenia) will encourage a

[*] "EU-Armenia: About Decision to Join the Custom Union," September 6, 2013 (http://ec.europa.eu/commission_2010-2014/fule/headlines/news/2013/09/20130906_en.htm).

more active and flexible trade regime between the two neighboring states even in such a complicated situation.

Conclusion

In general, highly favorable conditions—namely the new leadership in Tbilisi, significant domestic economic and political developments in both states, and parallel European integration aspirations—are transforming Armenian-Georgian relations, on the basis of a stable *modus vivendi* and a productive two-decade-long record of interstate cooperation. Armenia and Georgia still have a long way to go to achieve the goals they have set for themselves, but the very prospect of a "shared path" will enable Armenia and Georgia to forge a newly pivotal political and economic relationship in the South Caucasus.

A Fork in the Road?
UKRAINE BETWEEN EU ASSOCIATION AND THE EURASIAN CUSTOMS UNION

PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo No. 293

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The drama has accelerated over Eastern European integration projects. The EU announced that comprehensive Association Agreements are ready to be signed with Ukraine and initialed with Moldova, Georgia, and Armenia during this November's EU Eastern Partnership (EaP) summit in Vilnius. In parallel, Russia has increased pressure on Ukraine and other EaP states to join the Eurasian Customs Union, which is expected to be transformed into the Eurasian Union by 2015. At the time of writing, Armenia has accepted the Russian deal while the others appear to be staying on the EU track. What are the details, limits, and expected outcomes of these two offers? Can Ukraine and other post-Soviet states progress in their European integration bids while maintaining good relations with Russia?

Europe's Offer

The EaP summit is scheduled for November 29-30 in Vilnius, Lithuania. It is supposed to open up a new era in the EU's relations with six of its eastern neighbors—Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine. The most optimistic assessment is that Ukraine will sign an Association Agreement at the summit, with Moldova, Georgia, and Armenia all initialing agreements (i.e., initiating the accession process). The summit could mark an important threshold: if substantial progress is demonstrated, the entire EaP policy will gain new energy. If not, the policy is likely destined for failure.

The Association Agreements, which include Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas (DCFTAs), are intended to promote the gradual integration of signatories into EU market structures, albeit lacking formal EU membership prospects. This model of engagement, including political association and economic integration, has been developed throughout the negotiation processes, beginning with Ukraine as a pilot country in 2007, even before the official launching of the EaP program.

The EU-Ukraine Association Agreement is currently the only one that has been fully leaked* and afterwards officially released. Full texts of the other agreements are

* "Association Agreement between the European Union and its Member States, of the one part, and

currently not publicly available, but the main elements are the same as the Ukrainian one.

The Association Agreement is the most extensive international legal document in the entire history of EaP states and the most extensive international agreement with a third country that the European Union has ever concluded.* The scope of EU legal aspects (the *acquis*) contained in annexes to the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement and which are to be incorporated into Ukrainian legislation, above all the DCFTA, is unprecedented. The wording and requirements are very close in nature to the documents that candidates for EU membership have been required to fulfill. The EU-Ukraine Association Agreement could become a beacon for socially significant reforms ensuring the irreversibility of Ukraine's European integration.

The implementation of the Association Agreement will contribute to the convergence of the regulatory frameworks of Ukraine and the EU, resulting in the elimination of not only customs duties but also non-tariff barriers to trade. This will facilitate Ukraine's integration into the European economic and legal space, in particular the EU's internal market and the European Economic Area.

Ukraine's Association Agreement was initialed in July 2012. Unfortunately, the deteriorating atmosphere of EU-Ukraine relations has cast doubt on the prospects that the agreement will actually be signed. In December 2012, the EU Council stipulated that Ukraine needs to meet certain conditions in order for the Association Agreement to be signed.† These include ending selective justice (including, essentially, the release of former prime minister Yulia Tymoshenko from jail), improving election legislation (based on the judgments of the Council of Europe's Venice Commission), and implementing reforms in line with previously adopted commitments.

The EU will be able to sign the Association Agreement only by agreement of the Council of the European Union, i.e., by unanimous decision of the governments of EU member states. As of August 2013, there is a lack of consensus within the EU on the matter of signing the Association Agreement with Ukraine. There is a real chance that one or member states will not agree to the agreement being signed. The next few months will be decisive.

Russia's Offer

The Russian Federation has been promoting the Eurasian Customs Union as its main strategic initiative in the post-Soviet space, aiming to structure the region in line with its updated vision of Russia's own regional and global role. The existence of the Customs

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Ukraine, of the other part"
(http://glavcom.ua/pub/2012_11_19_EU_Ukraine_Association_Agreement_English.pdf).

* See "EU-Ukraine Association Agreement: Guideline for Reforms," KAS Policy Paper 20, Konrad-Adenaur-Stiftung, 2012 (http://www.kas.de/wf/doc/kas_32048-1522-2-30.pdf?120911173352).

† Council conclusions on Ukraine 3209th FOREIGN AFFAIRS Council meeting, Brussels, December 10, 2012 (http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/134136.pdf).

Union "means that the EU is not the 'only game in town' and presents a normative challenge to it."*

The Customs Union came into existence on January 1, 2010, with Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Russia as members. It was launched as a first step toward forming a Eurasian economic alliance of former Soviet states. In 2015, it is supposed to be transformed into an entity called the Eurasian Union.

Ukraine is the principal target of the Russian policy aimed at continued Customs Union expansion. During recent visits to Ukraine, Russian President Vladimir Putin has made the Customs Union the keystone of his dialogue with Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovych. During his last visit to Ukraine at the end of July, Putin unexpectedly attended a "pro-Eurasian" NGO conference in Kyiv and spoke of the "pragmatic need" for Ukraine to join the Customs Union in order to solve Ukraine's economic problems. These latest efforts by Russia's leadership were spurred by the fact that Ukraine has a real chance to conclude an Association Agreement. Russian presidential aide Sergey Glazyev told the conference in Kyiv that Ukraine would not be able to participate in the Customs Union, or be an observer in the future Eurasian Economic Union, if it signed an Association Agreement. Some days later, Glazyev openly threatened to disrupt Russia's existing free trade agreement with Ukraine if the latter were to sign an Association Agreement.† The Kremlin clearly sees real danger in the Association Agreement and is trying to derail it by any means.

Armenia became the first EaP country to (probably) be derailed from the EU-led Association track. Despite the fact that Association Agreement talks were finalized by Armenia and the EU in July, President Serzh Sargsyan announced after meeting with his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin in Moscow at the start of September that Armenia was willing to join the Eurasian Customs Union and subsequently take part in the Eurasian Union. The EU reacted to this development by cautioning that Armenia's inclusion in such integration processes was incompatible with its Association Agreement offer. According to media reports, Armenia's decision is a "political boost for Putin, who is struggling to stop Ukraine from turning towards the European Union."‡

Under these circumstances, Kyiv's hopes to build free trade regimes with both Russia and the EU—beginning with integration in the EU market while "partially" integrating in the Customs Union—appear naïve and disconnected from reality.

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* Rilka Dragneva and Kataryna Wolczuk "Russia, the Eurasian Customs Union and the EU: Cooperation, Stagnation or Rivalry?" Chatham House Briefing Paper, August 2012 (http://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/public/Research/Russia%20and%20Eurasia/0812bp_dragnevawolczuk.pdf).

† Liga.net, "Rosiya zahrozhuye vlashtuvaty Ukraïni ekonomichnu katastrofu," Liga.net, Sept. 17, 2013 (http://news.liga.net/ua/video/politics/878148-ros_ya_zagrozhu_vlashtuvati_ukra_n_ekonom_chnu_katastrofu_v_deo.htm).

‡ Euronews, September 4, 2013 (http://www.euronews.com/2013/09/04/armenia-set-to-join-russia-led-customs-union-in-blow-to-eu).

Memorandum of May 31 and "Observer" Status for Ukraine

The debates regarding the extent of the possible entrance of Ukraine into the Customs Union finally led to a provisional agreement that led both Moscow and Kyiv to feel like they achieved their objectives. Last May in Minsk, Ukrainian Prime Minister Mykola Azarov signed a memorandum of cooperation between Ukraine and the Eurasian Economic Commission—the executive body of the Customs Union. It calls for the establishment of a permanent Ukrainian representative in the Customs Union, access for Ukraine to copies of the Customs Union's documents (including drafts), and the right to submit its own proposals to the Commission. Further, it promises Ukraine future status as an *observer* in the Eurasian Union without clarifying the substance of this status. This gives both parties room to maneuver. In particular, Russia interprets this uncertain status as a temporary arrangement for incipient Customs Union members, while Ukraine perceives it as a long-term status implying no definite obligations.

Subsequently, informal negotiations regarding Ukraine's possible selective implementation of certain Customs Union provisions and regulations began. This despite the fact that current Customs Union rules do not provide any form of selective implementation, only full-fledged membership. Ukraine declares it has no intention to violate its obligations to the WTO or the provisions of the Association Agreement. However, Russia has no interest in selective steps if they do not disrupt a future agreement with the EU. Finally, it was disclosed on August 26 after Ukraine-Russia intergovernmental consultations in Moscow that Russia would consider any form of selective integration with the Customs Union inappropriate if Ukraine signs an Association Agreement with the EU.

The Issue of Compatibility

According to definition, a customs union is a trade bloc with a free trade area and a common external tariff and trade policy. Therefore, a country participating in any customs union cannot sign a free trade deal with a third country or group of countries separately from the rest of the union's members. This means that only the customs union as a whole may conclude free trade agreements with external partners. Accordingly, if Ukraine or any other EaP state becomes a full member of the Eurasian Customs Union, this should mean that it would not be able to sign an Association Agreement/DCFTA, since the latter specifically regulates external tariffs.

But is it really true that Customs Union members cannot negotiate trade agreements with third countries? Within the framework of the WTO an interesting precedent occurred. Russia negotiated its WTO accession without Belarus and Kazakhstan, even though Russia was a Customs Union founding member. This was possible because Russia's WTO accession and Customs Union formation processes were synchronized, so that tariffs accepted as part of Russia's WTO obligations became the official external tariffs of the Customs Union. This procedure is impossible to replicate in the case of a DCFTA, unless Customs Union members are willing to reconsider all Customs Union tariffs. This would be an especially problematic task if a state were to

first sign a DCFTA and then start negotiations to join (fully or partially) the Eurasian Customs Union.

As stipulated by the Association Agreement, signatories will be obliged to "refrain from acts that would deprive the agreement of its object and purpose." According to experts' interpretation, this means that "Ukraine will have to refrain from participating in any integration formations the format of which would run counter to this legal obligation. These formats that are contrary to the Association Agreement include any formation of customs unions, economic unions, or common markets. At the same time, Ukraine's participation in free trade area level formations with any third parties does not conflict with the Association Agreement."*

However, Article 39 of the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement draft entitled, "Agreements with other countries" is more ambiguous:

> *(1) This Agreement shall not preclude the maintenance or establishment of customs unions, free trade areas or arrangements for frontier traffic except insofar as they conflict with trade arrangements provided for in this Agreement.*
>
> *(2) Consultations between the Parties shall take place within the Trade Committee concerning agreements establishing customs unions, free trade areas or arrangements for frontier traffic and, where requested, on other major issues related to their respective trade policy with third countries.*

Therefore, there is no direct ban on negotiations to join any customs union. At the same time, even a brief analysis of basic Eurasian Customs Union documents, especially "The single external tariff of the Customs Union,"† demonstrates deep differences between its norms and rules and those of the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement. Whereas according to the Association Agreement more than 98 percent of tariffs should be reduced to 0 percent within 10 years, the Customs Union maintains rather high tariffs with the EU, something previously negotiated in the EU-Russia bilateral protocol that preceded Russia's WTO accession. In particular, the average aggregated customs tariff of the Customs Union in 2011 was about 8.51 percent. According to updated norms adopted in 2012, 29.12 percent of all tariffs were at 5 percent; 16.06 percent were at 10 percent; 18.89 percent were at 15 percent; and 4.89 percent of all tariffs were at 20 percent.‡ Considering that neither the Customs Union as a whole nor its members are negotiating trade agreements with the EU, these tariffs are unlikely to be changed in the foreseeable future.

This puts into question the practical compatibility of the Customs Union and an Association Agreement. The parties involved need to clarify whether the requirements

* Konrad-Adenaur-Stiftung, "EU-Ukraine Association Agreement: Guideline for Reforms," KAS Policy Paper 20, 2012 (http://www.kas.de/wf/doc/kas_32048-1522-2-30.pdf?120911173352).
† Single Customs Tariff of the Customs Union (in Russian) (http://www.tsouz.ru/db/ettr/ettwto/Pages/default.aspx).
‡ Interfax-UA, August 23, 2012 (http://interfax.com.ua/news/economic/115042.html).

of the Eurasian Customs Union contradict those of the Association Agreement/DCFTA and, if so, to what degree.

In any case, even if in November Ukraine signs an Association Agreement (and one or more states initial an Association Agreement), Russia will not stop trying to undermine the integration of EaP states into EU-led frameworks. Ratification takes time, Ukraine's financial challenges are growing, and the country's political situation is unpredictable in advance of its February 2015 presidential elections. Other EaP countries have their own issues which cannot be solved without Russia's involvement.

The key question that remains is whether it is possible for post-Soviet Eastern European states to cultivate good relations with both Europe and Russia simultaneously? At the moment, there are no grounds to answer positively. This will pose an ongoing challenge to regional stability over the next decade.

How Russia's Energy "Weapon" Turned into an Oil Pillow and Gas Rattle

PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo No. 294

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The transformation of the global energy market has been so swift that strategic thinkers have had difficulty internalizing the consequences of a massive expansion of supply. In the United States, the long-aspired epitome of energy independence arrived so unexpectedly that policy planners now appear lost in defining exactly what the country's national interests are in the Persian Gulf. In Russia, the path from ambition to become an "energy superpower" to suspicion of having been reduced to a "raw material appendage" has been so swift that the two perceptions have blended into an unhealthy obsession with the energy business. There is no intention here to add to this obsession, but it appears useful to examine Russia's residual capacity for instrumentalizing energy exports to achieve its political goals and to investigate the intrigue around control of this uncertain capacity.

Desperate Denial of Decline

It is remarkable, even ironic, that the material basis for Russia's energy ambitions and worries has not changed all that much since the shocking turmoil of the first year of Dmitry Medvedev's disappointing presidency. The production of both crude oil and natural gas increased slightly in 2012 compared with the pre-crisis level of 2007 and is expected to remain stable. The big news in Russia's energy sector over the last couple of years really has concerned the completion of "midstream" developments—the Nord Stream gas pipeline and the East Siberia-Pacific Ocean (ESPO) oil pipeline. In practical terms, the first of these export channels has only had a minor impact on Russia's ongoing transit and export travails vis-à-vis Ukraine (which are currently centered on its intention to sign the trade agreement with the EU), while the second has secured Russia a position as one of China's smaller suppliers of oil.

Newly-declassified Russian data on hydrocarbon reserves confirm that Russia is an overachiever in oil, producing nearly as much as Saudi Arabia while hanging on to the sixth or at worst eighth place in terms of global volume of potentially recoverable crude. Even in a period of market tightness, Moscow was never able to exert influence on the fluctuation of prices; now it is even more anxious due to fear of its imminent decline. Russian companies, including state-owned Rosneft, which became the dominant

player after its 2013 acquisition of conflict-ridden TNK-BP, effectively sabotage orders to develop underexplored fields in East Siberia because of uncertain tax breaks and poor cost-effectiveness. The most attractive proposition in the oil industry is to conclude partnerships with Western majors in order to rehabilitate older brownfields in Western Siberia and the Volga region, where new technologies make it possible to expand production from various tight sources.

The picture in the gas industry is strikingly different. The badly mismanaged Gazprom has begun production at the giant Bovanenkovo field on the Yamal peninsula, but it can neither secure the profit volume needed to sustain its investment nor increase its efficiency by introducing new know-how. Strictly speaking, Gazprom does not need to develop non-traditional sources. However, it cannot adjust to the fast-moving shale gas revolution and, paradoxically, is set to become a giant loser in the dawning "golden age" of gas. Gazprom has failed to secure useful entry eastward to Chinese demand and is trapped westward in the depressed European market, where its activities are investigated by the relentless European Commission. Gazprom's stubborn denial of the need to change its business strategy and culture does not impress investors or political masters, and its market value (as of August 2013) has dropped to barely a third of what it was in mid-2008.

The profit-maximization model in the Russian oil industry is not compatible with the political aims of weaponization, while the more politicized gas sector is dejected. While Gazprom is desperate for more political support, President Vladimir Putin is reluctant to waste his leadership capital on a succession of defensive skirmishes.

False Premises of Two Modernizations

Medvedev's vision of modernization should not be dismissed outright as a failed discourse, if only because it strongly advanced the proposition that Russia should overcome "oil dependency" by becoming a major producer of modern technologies. While Medvedev's claim for leadership can only be described as pathetic, a remarkably broad consensus on the urgent need for modernization did emerge. This meant that when Putin returned to the presidency, he could not recycle the "energy superpower" posture. However, Putin dislikes the word modernization and the gadgets associated with it, and he committed to a different version of this course, one centered on restoring Russia's traditional industrial strength, first of all by rehabilitating the military-industrial complex. There is a common premise in the two strategies-of-sorts: modernization requires a redistribution of resources from the energy sector to the chosen direction of strategic advances.

In real terms, Putin's "re-industrialization" makes no more economic sense than Medvedev's "innovations," but in either case the damage to the oil and gas industry is massive. There is no space here to elaborate on the unaffordable costs of Russia's colossal rearmament program (see PONARS Eurasia Memo No. 254 by Brian Taylor, "Kudrin's Complaint: Does Russia Face a Guns vs. Butter Dilemma?"). However, it can be safely asserted that the company UralVagonZavod, which has become the model

enterprise among dozens of aging defense super-plants, makes a far deeper "black hole" for disappearing budget allocations than the "high-tech village" Skolkovo could ever be.

The point is that the only realistic avenue for Russia's modernization lies in exploiting its rich natural advantage in the energy sector, which is in fact a cluster of extraordinary modern industries in which fundamental science meets applied technologies producing a menu of innovative byproducts, including "know-how" in environmental protection. Extraction of raw materials is certainly the central part of this industry, but value-added chains go in many directions – unless they are curtailed, which is exactly what happens in Russia due to over-taxation, political misdirection, and corruption.

The political need to confiscate revenues from energy companies—even Gazprom—clashes with the need to invest in key core businesses, with the net result being neither here nor there.

A Battle of Tweedledee and Tweedledum?

Confusion in setting guidelines for energy strategy and the general downgrading of energy interests translates into an escalation of tensions between the Gazprom/Rosneft/Novatek lobbies and the government, as well as quarrels among the masters of the energy empires. In some analyses, these conflicts are presented as fierce corporate wars involving larger-than-life characters, like Igor Sechin, or mysterious operators, like Gennady Timchenko; in others, these confrontations are reduced to petty squabbles between pathetic personalities resembling Tweedledee and Tweedledum who agree to have a battle but are ready to abandon it the moment Putin issues a croak of displeasure. (This author is inclined to take these matters seriously, if only because the financial stakes concerned often exceed the annual budget of his institute by three orders of magnitude.)

It stands to reason that the government's pressure to extract more revenues from the energy sector in order to cover ever-expanding budget expenditures produces a modicum of solidarity among the oil and gas companies, who consent to make Igor Sechin the champion of their resistance. The main vehicle for this lobby is a presidential Commission on the Issues of Strategy for Developing the Fuel-Energy Complex, which works in parallel (and in most cases, at cross purposes with) a governmental Commission on the Issues of the Fuel-Energy Complex, chaired by Deputy Prime Minister Arkady Dvorkovich. Sabotaging the government's initiatives as a matter of principle Sechin has few reservations about abusing his position as secretary of the presidential commission for advancing his own agenda, for instance derailing the plan to privatize Rosneft. He is nonetheless unable to prevent the confiscation of dividends earned by Rosneftegaz (the state-owned umbrella company that holds a 75 percent stake in Rosneft and 11 percent of Gazprom) into the federal budget as Putin becomes concerned about shrinking revenues.

Sechin's privileged position has turned the formerly competitive oil sector into a nearly monopolized domain. Some oligarchs, such as Mikhail Fridman and other owners of the Russian half of TNK-BP, have preferred to cash out their stakes and move

to different pastures. Others, like Lukoil owner Vagit Alekperov, opt to keep a low profile. Tensions are rising with Gazprom's boss Aleksei Miller (who is envious of Sechin's access to the "decider") and multiple owners of energy-grid companies, who suspect that Sechin neglects their needs in maintaining profitability as domestic tariffs on gas and electricity are increased only by about a half of their demand. While Gazprom and Rosneft stand together to protect their monopoly in developing hydrocarbon resources on the continental shelf, Sechin is moving incrementally toward curtailing Gazprom's monopoly control over gas pipelines and encouraging legislation on liberalizing LNG exports. In so doing, he is preparing the ground for a long-overdue reform of this over-stretched super-corporation which has become a political liability.

It is remarkable that the energy oligarchs are managing to keep themselves out of the squabbles among and reshuffling of the political clans caused by the evolving crisis of Putin's regime. For that matter, neither of the two major cadre dramas—the replacement of Minister of Defense Anatoly Serdyukov with Sergei Shoigu, and the replacement of Vladislav Surkov by the new "manager of democracy" Vyacheslav Volodin—has any direct relevance for the energy complex. Also, none of the three most visible politicians—Dmitry Rogozin, who champions the interests of the defense industry, Vladimir Yakunin, who is enmeshed in a nasty corruption scandal, and Sergei Sobyanin, who is fighting a difficult election campaign for the post of Moscow mayor, has any explicit connection to the oil and gas lobbies. Sechin is often portrayed as belonging to the clan (or rather alliance of hawkish clans) known as the *siloviki*, but there is in fact no hard evidence of any financial flows from Rosneft coffers to any so-called "power structure." The only business-political intrigue in which Sechin had a prominent role was the hostile takeover of Yukos back in 2003-2004.

So What Energy Weapon?

The oil and, to a remarkably lesser extent, gas industry are set to remain the major producers of revenue for Russia's economy, but the petro-oligarchs are keeping a low profile in Russia's unfolding domestic political crisis and are experiencing a diminishing influence in foreign policy-making. In the oil sector, the looming shadow of falling prices discourages investments in newer greenfields in East Siberia, so the immediate interest of focus is on untapped unconventional resources around and under the brownfields, which necessitates partnership with Western majors and service companies.

In the gas sector, the disreputable Gazprom is losing position in the crucial European market. Every attempt to mobilize Kremlin support against the probe launched by the European Commission or securing exemptions from the EU's "third energy package" backfires by inviting firm political countermeasures. Recurrent gas quarrels with Ukraine bring frustrated "not again!" signals from regular customers, who wearily observe how Gazprom is balancing on the brink of a major blunder with the start of construction of the hugely expensive South Stream pipeline across the Black Sea, which could not possibly make economic sense but is part of Putin's pet mega-project portfolio.

The record of Russian energy diplomacy is informative: its offers to partake in oil developments in Venezuela are fruitless; contracts in Libya are annulled; attempts to turn the Forum of Gas Exporting Countries into an operational cartel have come to naught. The culmination of the financial crisis in Cyprus last spring saw a flurry of baseless speculation about Gazprom seizing control over Aphrodite and other gasfields. The only place where Russia is making an impact is Northern Iraq; Gazprom Neft has signed three production-sharing agreements with the government of Kurdistan while paying scant attention to Baghdad's reservations.

The unusual stability of oil prices camouflages the depth of changes in the global energy market. Fears focused on a probable price drop prevent Russian policymakers from internalizing these changes. The underlying proposition behind the newly-established dominance of Sechin's Rosneft appears to be the added value of political control, which may turn out to be nonexistent. Gazprom constitutes proof positive of the maxim that political interference is bad for business, but it transpires that instrumentalizing gas export is bad for politics as well. Wielding an imaginary "energy weapon," Russia suddenly discovers itself armed with a rattle.

How Much Would It Hurt?

EXPLORING RUSSIA'S VULNERABILITY TO A DROP IN ENERGY PRICES

PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo No. 295

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Russia's economy is obviously energy-reliant, but how vulnerable does that make it in practical terms? What would happen if global energy prices dropped significantly? In the shadow of the shale gas and oil revolution, this memo examines how a drop in energy revenues would affect Russia in three important areas: fiscal, financial, and political.

In each area, some of the effects of falling oil prices would be more or less automatic. For example, a decline in revenues would mean a rising budget deficit (keeping all other things equal). Such an effect is easy to predict: the deficit would simply be larger if the revenue loss were greater. Other implications, however, are more contingent, as they rely on choices made by individuals and groups. For instance, while observers sometimes imply or state outright that a government will be "forced" to respond to a crisis in a certain way, leaders always have some freedom to remain stubborn in the face of adversity. Likewise, there are multiple ways in which political alliances may react to stress. Those reactions are more difficult to foresee, but institutional arrangements and past patterns of behavior can guide observers' efforts.

The Nature and Performance of the Russian Economy

In order to understand how the Russian economy might react to a shock, it is important to recognize not only its weaknesses, but also the fact that it has so far avoided a number of pitfalls. The economy is not a basket case teetering on the edge of disaster; in fact, it is performing quite well on a number of economic indicators. The World Bank categorizes it as "high middle income" with a GDP per capita of almost $20,000 in terms of purchasing power parity and over $12,000 in nominal terms. Economic growth quickly returned to positive levels after the crisis in 2009-10, and the budget has generally been balanced over the past decade, again with the exception of the crisis years. Life expectancy has risen for men and women, poverty rates have been declining for a number of years, and unemployment remains low. Recent inflation has been surprisingly high, but a significant portion of that rise has been caused by domestic drought and a concomitant rise in commodity prices. Russia's external debt is far less than 50 percent of its GDP, and short-term debt is only about 12-17 percent of its total external debt. For these reasons and more, the Organization for Economic Cooperation

and Development (OECD)—mainly composed of North American and European states—describes Russia as "within the range of OECD countries, not an outlier."

Certainly, Russia is dependent on oil and gas to a great degree. Fuel exports represent approximately 66 percent of total merchandise exports, up from about 61 percent in 2007. Furthermore, while the overall budget is balanced, the *non-oil* budget deficit stands at about 10 percent of GDP, which has been the case since the crisis in 2009.

Even in that regard, however, things could be much worse. Compared to petro-states of the past, Russia has been remarkably successful since the early 2000s in dealing with the impersonal, automatic effects of high hydrocarbon revenues. It has sterilized oil revenues to counter upward pressure on the ruble, and it has stored excess funds away for when revenues decline. The Stabilization Fund reached $157 billion in 2008, when it was split into a Reserve Fund ($125 billion) and a National Welfare Fund. The former was depleted to barely $25 billion during the crisis, but both funds stand at about $85 billion today. Furthermore, even during the boom years, the country has generally resisted the policy temptation to borrow against future hydrocarbon revenues for investment. Finally, to Russia's good fortune, its economy contains other significant sectors, such that total natural resource "rents" are only about 22 percent of GDP. In terms of its economic structure and policy choices, Russia is not Saudi Arabia or Kuwait (which are more economically vulnerable) or Venezuela (which is more politically reckless).

The developments in Russia that have been most troubling during the hydrocarbon boom have really been in the country's political and economic structures. Most broadly and obviously, the political system has grown more authoritarian. A bit more subtly, a variety of informal networks of political and economic actors have developed within the state that compete with each other and with formal authorities. Within this environment, a particularly detrimental form of corruption has continued and even expanded. Corruption is not always inimical to growth, as China has demonstrated for more than 30 years. However, the Russian version of corruption seems to be confiscatory, with each bribe-taker or surplus-extractor taking as much as he or she can, rather than "lubricative," where bribes are a predictable cost of business that help get things done.

Oil and gas money does not cause these problems, however, even if it facilitates them. Many other countries have had similar issues without high oil prices, including the USSR in the 1980s and Russia in the 1990s. The effects of a revenue decline on these structures and the elites who benefit from them are the most contingent and, therefore, the most difficult to predict.

Hydrocarbons and the Budget

If oil and gas revenues fall significantly, the federal budget will go into deficit. This is a simple and automatic outcome, and we have seen it happen already. Indeed, it would occur in any country that saw the price and, therefore, tax revenues of a dominant export decline. The question is what would happen next.

In the short run, Russia would cover the shortfall with the excess oil revenues it has saved over the last several years. These funds were depleted by the crisis, however so they would not last long—perhaps a year or two if oil prices did not recover.

In the medium term, Russia would probably be able to borrow effectively (that is, at affordable rates) on international markets. Its low external debt would make it attractive. In addition, its economy has the potential for growth, including from a rebound in hydrocarbon prices. Even its authoritarianism might be attractive to bond traders, who would expect that the state would use its power to extract resources from society in order to repay investors. Russia's 1997 default would be a blemish on its record, but that happened under a different regime in different circumstances. In any case, lenders are not choosing from an array of enviable options at the moment. It is possible that Russia could take a different approach, quickly cutting expenditures and refusing to borrow internationally, but taking advantage of bond markets would be the path of least resistance.

Simply borrowing to cover deficits, of course, would not be infinitely sustainable. There are some fiscal changes the government could make in order to fix a persistent budget imbalance, but these would be difficult and not at all automatic. One option would be to raise taxes on non-hydrocarbon economic activity in order to replace lost revenues. Those taxes, however, would likely suppress economic growth even further. Another approach would be to continue reducing expenditures on social welfare, perhaps by raising retirement ages, but that would cause widespread pain among the citizenry. Another area where savings could be found is in military expenditures, but that seems highly unlikely given both the lobbying power of the military-industrial complex and the version of nationalism the current administration has employed to develop domestic support. The best hope for addressing a long-term budget deficit, therefore, is economic growth in non-hydrocarbon sectors. Some growth is likely to occur because of a decline in the profitability of oil and gas (see below), but the system is still beset by destructive corruption, which will not be alleviated just because natural resource prices decline.

If no structural changes occur over several years, Russia would eventually find itself in very difficult straits. If deficits were to remain high and debt levels continued to grow, international bond markets would finally stop lending at a manageable rate. The government would find itself in a vicious cycle of offering higher and higher interest rates in order to borrow; at some point, it would have to default. That, in turn, would produce a massive currency outflow, a collapse of the ruble, a spike in inflation, and a recession. All that is possible, but, fortunately for Russia, none of it seems very likely in the next ten years unless there is an additional shock to the world economy. The stabilization fund, the ability to borrow in the medium term, the opportunities for fiscal reform, and the possibility of growth in other sectors will all work against it.

Hydrocarbons and the Ruble

If the price of oil and gas fall on international markets, so will the value of the ruble. Again, this pressure is automatic: the less oil and gas cost, the fewer dollars and euros

consumers will need to exchange for rubles in order to buy Russian hydrocarbons. The way that pressure plays out, however, would depend on the speed of the decline and how the government and other actors react.

If the fall of the ruble were rapid, it would spell trouble for Russia, as it would for any other country with a currency collapse. Right away, it would mean rapid inflation, capital flight, and a near halt of foreign investment. (Ironically, the poor treatment of foreign investors by the Russian government in the past may make this loss lower than if foreign investment were currently high.) Perhaps even more important in the long run, the government would probably respond as governments typically do: with a significant hike in interest rates. This, in turn, would cause a recession, in which borrowing would slow, consumption would drop, businesses would fold, and workers would lose jobs. These effects would last far beyond any recovery of the ruble.

A slow decline in the value of the ruble, by contrast, could benefit the broader Russian economy. The automatic effects would be a decline in the attractiveness of imports and a rise in the attractiveness of Russian exports. Furthermore, there should be some pressure for diversification in the economy. Since oil and gas would be less lucrative, investment money should begin to flow elsewhere.

The good news for Russia is that a slow decline in oil and gas prices is more likely than a collapse. Furthermore, there is room for government policy to slow the decline of the ruble even if hydrocarbon prices fall quickly. Since the effect is the opposite of Dutch disease, the government could in theory relax the policies it has in place to mitigate Dutch disease. That is, it could reduce the degree to which it sterilizes revenues; indeed, this process is currently automated in the sense that the tax rate rises when the price of oil crosses a certain threshold. Certainly, oil and gas companies would lobby for a lower tax burden if the international economy turned against them.

Even then, however, the breadth and depth of any recovery would depend partly on the system of corruption that has developed in the country. If the process becomes less confiscatory, then investment in non-hydrocarbon sectors may be able to flourish. A drop in prices, however, would not in any way guarantee such a change.

Hydrocarbons and the Elite

It is important to remember that the Russian economic elite is not coterminous with the leaders of the oil and gas sectors, as it also includes figures from the military-industrial complex, the railways, the minerals industry, and banking (all of which also benefit from the success of oil and gas). At the same time, it would be foolish to understate the power of the hydrocarbon giants. Most important are the Gazprom leadership, whence came Dmitry Medvedev, and the Rosneft leadership, headed by chief *silovik* Igor Sechin, but there are many others. Gennady Timchenko, for example, an alleged associate of Putin, has made his fortune as the head of an oil trading company. Yuri Kovalchuk, also part of the inner circle, leads Bank Rossiya, which is worth billions because it administers Gazprom's pension fund, among other assets. Arkady Rotenberg, an old acquaintance of both Putin and Timchenko, owns North European Pipe Company, which supplies most of Gazprom's piping.

The political effects of a drop in oil and gas prices therefore depend in no small part on how they affect the elites connected to those sectors. The immediate and automatic impact will come from the fact that there is simply less money to go around. That will mean diminished riches for the leaders of the sector and fewer resources for paying off others in the system.

The contingent effects will depend on how those elites react. It is important to remember that their relationships are already tenuous, at best. Rosneft (Sechin) has been particularly uninterested in cooperation and appears bent on dominating both oil and gas in Russia. In oil, Rosneft grew from nothing by taking over the assets of Yukos, receiving state-sanctioned access to major oil deposits, and, most recently, purchasing the privately owned major, TNK-BP. In gas, Sechin prevented a merger with Gazprom shortly after the Yukos events, and Rosneft recently purchased Itera, once part of the Gazprom empire. Gazprom's share in Russian gas production has slipped, while Rosneft's has risen along with its oil output.

Such contentious relations among the Russian elite will not improve simply because oil and gas revenues decline. Instead, competition among the players in the system may become more aggressive and violent. Furthermore, Putin might feel compelled to turn over some of the leadership at the major hydrocarbon companies. Exactly who would fall and who would rise to replace them is unknowable, but a shake-up would be likely. There is no guarantee, however, that such a destabilization would improve the way the political economy works.

The Bottom Line

A drop in oil and gas revenue would be a significant blow for the Russian economy and its political system. Some of the effects would be virtually immediate and automatic: the budget deficit would rise; the ruble would weaken; and the elite would be shaken. The deeper impacts, however, would depend on the decisions and actions of the political and economic leadership. If they do everything wrong, both the fiscal situation and elite competition could become unmanageable. At several points along the way, however, Putin and his administration could make decisions that mitigate the damage of declining hydrocarbon revenues. If so, the system could continue to muddle along, with the economy slightly diversified and growing slowly, the system of corruption continuing with fewer resources, and the elite still fighting amongst themselves. The long-run outcome would depend less on oil and gas money than on the political acumen and authority of Putin and his successors.

Russia and the Geopolitics of Natural Gas
LEVERAGING OR SUCCUMBING TO REVOLUTION?

PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo No. 296

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The changing natural gas landscape—driven by the rise of liquid natural gas (LNG) projects, unconventional boom in North America, protracted global economic slowdown, post-Fukushima recalibration in the nuclear sector, and shifting geography of demand and supply—has renewed debate over the geopolitics of Russia's energy security. A common refrain is that the increasing interconnectedness and flexibility of global gas markets will introduce a welcome corrective to Russia's energy policies at home and abroad, encouraging pragmatic commercial dealings and political accommodation with European and Asian partners. Recent steps toward supply diversification and price renegotiation across Europe—especially among heavily import-dependent Lithuania, Bulgaria, and Ukraine— are seen as harbingers of this power shift in Eurasian energy diplomacy.

Others, including the leadership in Moscow, dismiss the enthusiasm for shale as a "soap bubble" destined to burst. They boast that Russia will continue to enjoy incremental supply advantages to promote political ambitions in relations with rival Eurasian producers and vulnerable transit states and European customers. They see new favorable long-term supply deals with Serbia and Armenia, the defeat of the Nabucco bypass pipeline, and the wooing of Gazprom in the sell-off of the insolvent Greek national gas company as suggestive of Moscow's lingering prowess and as evidence that its pooh-poohing of a global gas revolution may be more than wishful thinking.

This debate is traced to an underlying controversy between realism and its critics over the significance of energy resource nationalism. Yet this formulation presents a false dichotomy between globalization and geopolitics and neglects Moscow's mixed record with gas diplomacy. As well, talk of the demise of a petro-gas state counts Russia down prematurely by overlooking Gazprom's lasting competitive advantages in established markets across Eurasia. It also treats the revolutionary effects of the LNG-shale nexus as a given, without fully appreciating either the uncertainties of the latest trends or how Moscow's current choices can affect future opportunities. Jettisoning such blinders reveals the promise of elevating joint profit-seeking interests over atavistic power plays for Russian, European, and American energy security.

The Geopolitical Face of Russian Gas: A Mixed Bag

Under President Vladimir Putin, Russia's foreign energy posture has embraced the interrelated goals of protecting shares in established gas markets, preempting competition from other sources and suppliers, and leveraging such efforts for commercial and political gain. Relying on a variety of tactics—e.g. discretionary price cuts/hikes, take or pay obligations, state supported subsidies and centralized control over the domestic sector, export tax exemptions, physical supply disruptions, and veiled threats of orchestrating a new gas cartel and arbitrarily switching deliveries between established import dependent European customers and emerging markets in Asia—Moscow has repeatedly flexed Russia's tremendous natural gas endowments and diffused pipeline network against vulnerable post-Soviet customers and transit states. This has been pursued with seemingly little regard to the pain inflicted upon downstream customers in Europe and Central Asian supply partners. Hence, it is widely believed that geopolitical relief will come with the convergence of sustained weakness in Europe's demand for gas, growth in global LNG markets, the unconventional gas boom in the United States, and the aggressive pursuit of new markets by other suppliers. Together these factors are expected to transform the global gas landscape in ways largely inimical to Russia's great power ambitions, compelling Moscow to rethink its coercive strategy.

Yet this popular storyline is too crude for benchmarking changes to Russia's foreign energy posture. To date, energy policy has been neither well integrated into a coherent Russian grand strategy, nor the primary driver of international cooperation or conflict. At home, structural impediments and institutional opacity have fueled divergent interests across the sector concerning investments, greenfield development, pricing, taxes, distribution, access to pipelines, and corporate governance that, in turn, have marred the Kremlin's capacity to marshal national gas resources from both state and independent companies for discretionary strategic purposes. In retrospect, alarmist characterizations of natural gas as a substitute for the nuclear bulwark to Russia's superpower status simply have been off the mark.

Similarly, Moscow's bark has been greater than its bite. Notwithstanding pointed attempts at manipulating the fixed and regionally-defined natural gas infrastructure, success has been both more mixed and less effective than commonly presumed. To the extent that Moscow has realized gains by playing pipeline politics, it has been more successful at wrangling preferential commercial terms for prices and volumes than at altering the politics or foreign policies of highly dependent customers. Physical shutoffs too have been rare and, as evidenced by successive gas wars with Ukraine, have escalated uncontrollably and at great financial and reputational costs to Russian companies and the Kremlin. That Moscow had to follow through on threats to disrupt delivery and has been "co-dependent" on European gas exports to fill federal coffers and offset loss-making across the sector reveal the limited, if not double-edged, coercive potential of the gas weapon. Accordingly, any talk of a geopolitical chastening brought on by a shifting gas landscape must distinguish cheap talk from the nuances, dilemmas, and variation in Russia's track record of gas diplomacy.

Russia Down….

That said, there is no question that Russia as a conventional gas supplier, accustomed to relying on traditional pipelines and long-term contracts, is feeling the pinch of competition across all azimuths. The diversification of supply from the Middle East and West Africa, coupled with opportunities to purchase LNG displaced by the shale boom in the United States (which has overtaken Russia as the biggest producer) and prospects for unconventional production in Eastern Europe, has loosened Russia's grip over established markets in the EU. Disputes over gas prices and oil indexation spearheaded by France, Germany, and Italy in response to the global supply glut paved the way for renegotiating delivery terms. They also prompted the freezing of European joint development with Gazprom in the Barents Sea, as well as Norway to cut its prices and grab a larger EU market share in 2012. In addition, an adverse judgment in the ongoing EU antitrust probe may foil Moscow's strategy for restricting competition and dominating the European gas market via ownership of both supply and distribution. China's persistent harping on price differentials and success at keeping Moscow at bay on a new gas pipeline deal only underscore how Russia is likely to remain captive to its formerly captive gas markets.

Gazprom's market share also is being tested across post-Soviet Eurasia. Notwithstanding Russia's determination to advance the commercially suspect Nord and South Stream bypass pipelines, Ukraine is poised to cast off Gazprom's supply monopoly by attracting investment into domestic shale plays and diversifying procurement of natural gas from European suppliers. In an intriguing twist, Germany's RWE contracted to deliver small but growing supplies (some of Russian provenance via re-export rights) to Ukraine, using Polish and Hungarian transit services. This reversal of flow in European gas has caught on with the Visegrad Four and emboldened Kiev to renege on extant take-or-pay contracts with Gazprom for a second consecutive year. Lithuania, too, threatens to break out of Russia's stranglehold and discretionary pricing, with the development of an offshore LNG processing facility capable of eventually providing up to 60 percent of domestic needs. That the vessel slated to provide relief to this "energy island" of the EU is named "Independence" is especially pointed. Furthermore, the recent defeat of the Nabucco pipeline is likely a pyrrhic victory for Gazprom, given the uncertainty that confounds the South Stream project and that the preferred Trans-Adriatic Pipeline portends enhanced opportunities for rival Caspian gas in Russia's prized European and Balkan markets.

Diversification in foreign markets has been complemented by a deterioration of Gazprom's privileged position at home. Lower prices in Europe have put a crimp in Gazprom's revenues just as it confronts significantly higher costs for development of new fields and pipelines. Furthermore, pressure from independent gas companies has prodded the Russian government to double taxes on extraction. Competition stirred by independent gas producers, such as Novatek, and the state-owned oil behemoth, Rosneft, has lowered prices and lured away lucrative industrial clients. The decision to liberalize LNG exports in 2014, coupled with the transfer of assets to Novatek and that company's own opaque association with Putin, also betrays the Kremlin's preference for

a hedge against Gazprom's troubled position in the increasingly competitive European market.

…. But Not Out

Notwithstanding the blows to Gazprom's monopoly position, Russia is not on the ropes, especially in European gas markets. The main reason stems from the structure of the natural gas industry. What matters for energy security is not simply physical supply but reliable and affordable access. With knife-edged differences among competitors in the global economy, utilities, firms, and states are acutely sensitive to fluctuations in price. The sector's history of price volatility and need to lock in stable delivery for base-load power generation make it difficult to dislodge Russia and increase investment risks for ensuing future supply diversity amid episodes of cheap gas. Unlike the globally integrated oil sector, natural gas markets will remain regionally segmented for the foreseeable future. This is largely due to thorny above-ground problems related to storage and unlocking the transportation sector for gas, as well as to the high costs of long distance delivery and political resistance to market reforms in most countries. The deregulated U.S. gas market and attendant incentives for private and medium-sized gas-on-gas competition—so critical to spawning the shale revolution—are difficult to replicate, even in Europe where national energy companies and existing contracts remain entrenched. Although the U.S. shale boom has replaced or displaced previous natural gas supply, it has not fundamentally altered the import dependency of large gas customers in Europe or Asia. Should the knock-on effects eventually pose a drastic challenge to Russia's deliveries to Europe, they also will hurt the interests of key Caspian long-distance suppliers, post-Soviet transit states, and Turkey as an emerging gas hub—potentially driving them closer to Moscow.

This structure of the industry perpetuates Russia's competitive advantages in established European markets. Soviet legacy investment, production, and large-diameter cross-border pipelines effectively reduce actual costs and ensure Gazprom suitable margins for landing cheap gas to Europe. Although volumes and revenues may take a hit, Russia is nonetheless poised to increase market share in a coming era of spot price competition. It is also true that Russia faces daunting challenges and rising costs to opening up conventional greenfields in East Siberia to manage the decline in West Siberia or to realizing its shale potential. But such difficulties must be measured against the resistance to shale across Europe, startup costs for new LNG facilities worldwide, and prospects for tapping methane hydrates and other unconventionals in Russia and the Arctic.

Russia also does not cast a uniform shadow across Europe. As successive gas conflicts made clear, European customers are not equally dependent on Gazprom, with both prices and market shares varying widely among Eastern and Western customers. Recent studies underscore that these divisions not only cut across EU member states but also hound relationships between host governments and powerful energy firms within Western Europe, with the latter consistently welcoming established profit-maximizing business alliances that draw them closer to Gazprom. Despite Russia's tarnished

reputation as a reliable supplier, these intimate corporate relationships forged out of experience and mutual interests present it with a material and normative foothold in Europe that will be difficult to dislodge, and perhaps even an opportunity for imposing selective price discrimination.

Contending With Moving Targets

It is premature to predict Russia's geopolitical fate amid the uncertainty in scale and scope of the global transformation in gas. Although it will remain commercially significant, the political content and effectiveness of Moscow's gas diplomacy will be more circumscribed. Ultimately, this stature will turn on game changers beyond Moscow's control, including the future of U.S. gas exports; prospects for bringing conventional supplies on line from Iraq and Iran, offshore gas from the Arctic and Eastern Mediterranean, and unconventional exploitation across Eurasia and beyond; the fate of global climate change policy; the commercialization of gas in the transportation sector and appeal relative to cheap coal and other base-load sources; China's pursuit of energy diversity and security; and the implications of each of the above for rebalancing power between regional consumers and suppliers. Such developments will be interdependent and beyond the grasp of any one state to control.

Yet policymakers in Europe, Moscow, and Washington face choices on gas that could affect the character of their noncommercial relations. European customers could benefit from working closer with Russia's gas independents to extend reciprocal influence forged out of historical ties with Gazprom. They could invite different Russian firms to join in the development of diversity via new storage facilities, decoupled pricing, access to transmission lines, and shale exploration. This would limit Gazprom's room to maneuver while increasing the number of new Russian stakeholders in gas-on-gas development across the continent.

Similarly, Moscow could enhance its commercial edge in both established and emerging gas markets, as well as reclaim its reputation as a reliable supplier, by continuing to open up Russia's domestic business to competitive non-Gazprom production and foreign investment. Even with retention of state ownership and Gazprom's export pipeline monopoly, by systematically redressing regulatory opacity, improving the competitive environment for domestic sales, and integrating renewed conventional production with new LNG projects into regional markets, the growth of Russian gas can benefit consumers at home and abroad.

U.S. policymakers, too, should remain cognizant that there will be winners and losers with a coming shale-LNG nexus in global gas markets. To the extent that the American gas boom displaces significant Russian and Caspian exports to Europe while raising the bar for entry into Asia, the concern will be with discouraging risky adventurism. Accordingly, by promoting reciprocal commercial ventures, technical assistance for managing the negative externalities of new production, and technology transfer to efficiently develop Russia's unconventional and LNG facilities, Washington can reinforce emerging Russian stakeholders in the new era of gas. This could facilitate, on the margins, the tough decisions needed in Moscow to confront the institutional

legacy of arbitrary regulation that could preserve the commercial competitiveness of Russian gas exports while escalating the political and economic costs to Moscow of aggressively flexing its waning and residual market power across Europe and Eurasia.

Central Asian Military and Security Forces
ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF FOREIGN ASSISTANCE

PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo No. 297

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As the drawdown of U.S. and coalition forces in Afghanistan has accelerated in preparation for the end of Operation Enduring Freedom in 2014, media attention has come to focus on the extent to which equipment being withdrawn from the region will be left behind for Central Asian states to use. At the same time, recent extensions of Russian military base agreements in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan have underlined Russia's own provision of military equipment and other forms of security assistance to the region. Central Asia has been receiving external military assistance since the mid-1990s, and the amount of such assistance has grown substantially in the last decade due to a combination of U.S. interest in using the region to provide access to Afghanistan and the Russian desire to ensure its continued predominance in regional security affairs.

Local leaders sense that the heightened interest in the region by foreign powers may fade once the withdrawal of NATO forces from Afghanistan is complete. They are therefore using the current situation to highlight the potential threats to the region and how these might affect the rest of the world. The goal is to ensure that outside powers provide the maximum possible amount of assistance in the short term, before their focus shifts to other parts of the world. This memo examines the extent of external support for military and security forces in Central Asia and analyzes the possible effects of such support on the security situation in the region. Since the vast majority of military assistance to the region comes from Russia and the United States, I focus on these countries in this memo. Other sources include Turkey, Israel, and several West European states. China, on the other hand, provides very little military assistance to the region.

Russia

Russia has been the primary source for military equipment and training for Central Asian states since the breakup of the Soviet Union. Because the Central Asian states in large part retain Soviet legacy forces, which are stocked with Soviet equipment and still largely follow Soviet doctrine, military personnel are familiar with Russian equipment and with Russian training methods. However, Russia does not have a real strategy in its military assistance policy toward the region beyond seeking to keep the Central Asian states in its orbit while making sure that U.S. and NATO forces leave the region after the

completion of the operation in Afghanistan. As one Russian interlocutor put it recently, "If the price of stability in Central Asia is [continued] U.S. presence, that price is too high for Russia." To ensure that the situation does not deteriorate to the point where that choice has to be made, Russia has been shoring up Central Asian regimes as best it can, through efforts to modernize their military forces and security services to improve their capabilities both to take on externally-based insurgents and to suppress potential domestic revolts. By providing assistance, Moscow has also sought to ensure that the region's governments remain relatively pliable. The entire policy was described by one Moscow observer as "playing preemptive defense."

Russian military assistance to the weaker Central Asian states can be described as a *quid pro quo* arrangement, whereby Russia provides political and military support for ruling regimes in exchange for basing rights and a certain level of acquiescence to Russian foreign policy priorities in the region. Kyrgyzstan provides the clearest case of this type of arrangement, with the institutionalization of a major Russian military presence in the country coming in conjunction with Russian expressions of support for the government of President Almazbek Atambaev. Tajikistan's reluctance to give final approval to its recent military base agreement with Russia may be related to Russia's refusal to provide guarantees of continued support for President Emomali Rahmon's rule. Moscow has been highlighting the potential danger of instability spreading from Afghanistan to Central Asia as a means of ensuring that local states feel the need to maintain close ties with Russian security forces. At the same time, Central Asian leaders use Russian foreign policy priorities to meet their own goals, including the development of more capable military and security forces.

There is less to Russian military assistance than meets the eye, however. Both Russia and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) have made numerous promises of assistance and expanded cooperation to Central Asian states. Only some of these promises have been met. In part, Russian military assistance is constrained by the limited capacity of the Russian defense industry. Exports to Central Asia remain the lowest priority for Russian defense corporations, behind both domestic military procurement requirements and exports to countries that pay full price for weapons and equipment. Most Central Asian states pay the lower prices charged on the Russian domestic market for equipment, while repercussions to the Russian defense industry for delays in the fulfillment of export contracts are not as serious as when dealing with the Russian Ministry of Defense. As a result, most military equipment provided to Central Asia consists of older used systems, primarily armored vehicles and helicopters, that are being replaced by more modern weapons and are therefore no longer needed by the Russian military.

United States

For much of the last decade, assuring continued access for transferring supplies and personnel to Afghanistan has been the highest priority for the United States in Central Asia. Other goals, including counterterrorism, counternarcotics, and democracy promotion, have been pursued but only rarely have they been allowed to infringe on the

priority of the Afghanistan mission. In a period of reduced budgets and limited resources, the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan will inevitably result in a decreased emphasis on all forms of assistance to Central Asia. The region will once again become a relatively low priority for the U.S. Department of Defense. Security assistance budgets for states in the region have already been cut in recent years and are likely to be cut further in years to come.

Central Asian leaders sense that the withdrawal period presents a final opportunity to receive significant amounts of military assistance from the United States. Several Central Asian states have developed so-called wish lists of military equipment that they would like to receive from the United States and its NATO allies through the donation of equipment left behind as NATO forces leave Afghanistan. The countries that are most interested in such equipment include Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan have the financial wherewithal to buy new equipment and are less interested in donations of used armaments.

To date, the U.S. government has not agreed to transfer any excess defense equipment from Afghanistan to Central Asian states. Most equipment is currently being returned to the United States or scrapped onsite in Afghanistan. Nonetheless, it seems likely that at least some EDA equipment will be transferred to Central Asian states at some point in the future. The extent of the transfers will depend on whether the United States signs a bilateral status of forces agreement with Afghanistan. The terms of this agreement will determine the force posture in the region, which will in turn affect how much equipment will need to be removed from Afghanistan and how quickly. In any case, the equipment is not likely to include major weapons systems or even small arms. More likely, it will be limited to items such as night-vision goggles, trucks, mine detection equipment, or reconnaissance UAVs to be used for border surveillance.

The timing of these donations reduces the likelihood that they will be provided as a *quid pro quo* for Central Asian states' permission to allow the reverse transit of personnel and equipment leaving Afghanistan. At this point, agreements on transit have all been signed and the process of withdrawal from Afghanistan is well under way. Since no public announcements of equipment donations have been made so far, it appears that the two processes have been working in parallel, with limited linkage. It is of course possible that promises of assistance have been made secretly and will be announced at a later date. However, even if such announcements are made in the coming months, the security consequences of such donations will be limited.

Much of the discussion about the extent of such assistance has overstated both the amount and significance of equipment likely to be provided and the potential impact of such assistance on regional security. Legally, the U.S. military is obligated to declare equipment to be "excess" before it can be donated to other states. Excess Defense Articles (EDA) then cannot be replaced with similar but new equipment back in the United States. This means that the EDA process cannot be used to avoid the expense of shipping equipment out of Afghanistan if the unit might still need such equipment in the future. Furthermore, states receiving EDA equipment would be responsible for its shipment from Afghanistan to their territory. Most Central Asian states would not be

able to afford the cost of transferring and maintaining major weapons systems, even should the United States agree to such a transfer.

Impact on Regional Security

As currently constituted, the military forces of Central Asian states are fairly limited in their capabilities. Local leaders have devoted more effort and resources to developing their internal security forces, since they see these forces as far more necessary for the survival of their regimes. Despite years of largely half-hearted reform efforts, Central Asian states' armed forces remain primarily based on Soviet-era equipment and doctrine. Efforts at modernization have progressed to some extent but have been limited in most states by a lack of financing (Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan) or a limited understanding of modern military strategy (Turkmenistan). Only Kazakhstan has begun to make some progress in transforming its military into a more modern force, and even there changes have been limited by continued adherence to Soviet legacy ideas.

Despite the extensive publicity generated by the deals for Russian military assistance in exchange for basing rights in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan and the possibility that the United States may be willing to donate excess military equipment as it departs from Afghanistan, the reality is that this assistance will at best have a modest impact on these states' military capabilities. Both Russia and the United States are likely to provide primarily non-lethal equipment. Given the limitations of the Russian defense industry, Russian assistance will consist primarily of older armaments and equipment that are being retired from the Russian armed forces. The United States will also donate used equipment that may have a limited lifespan. Furthermore, local military personnel are less familiar with Western military equipment, limiting its usefulness unless the receiving countries contract for training in its use.

External military assistance is unlikely to have much of an impact on regional security and stability, simply because none of the states in the region are receiving or are planning to receive in the future enough external support to shift regional power dynamics appreciably. The greater danger is in small arms and basic military equipment being provided to internal security agencies, either directly by donor states or through transfers from the relevant military forces. As seen in past events in Andijan, Osh, and Zhanaozen, relatively basic equipment can be used with great effect against domestic opponents, who are at most lightly armed and usually completely unarmed. The use of foreign equipment against unarmed domestic opponents has the potential to be highly embarrassing for the donor states, as shown by the extensive attention paid to the provenance of tear gas canisters used against protesters in Egypt during the Arab Spring.

Officials at the U.S. Department of Defense have highlighted that they do not provide lethal military equipment to internal security forces. They have also noted that any transfers of equipment provided by the United States from local armed forces to internal security services would be a violation of various agreements that could lead to a suspension of future assistance. The extent to which such safeguards would prove

effective in a situation where local leaders feel that regime survival is at stake remains unclear.

U.S. officials argue that U.S. training has had a positive impact on the behavior of units in internal conflict situations. They say that units that had received such training are less likely to use violent means to disperse unarmed protesters. According to Defense Department sources, during the 2010 events in Kyrgyzstan, U.S.-trained units returned to their barracks rather than participate in the violence. Similarly, during the May 2013 unrest in Kumtor, Kyrgyzstani special forces units fell out of communications, possibly in order to avoid shooting their own civilians. While it is impossible to independently confirm the extent to which such training has had a positive impact on the behavior of special forces, Central Asian armed forces do receive training in non-violent crowd control and are taught international human rights standards by U.S. military trainers.

At the same time, there is little doubt that local authorities would be able to find units from the military or security forces that would be willing to use violence against regime opponents should the future of the regime be at stake. The success of the two uprisings in Kyrgyzstan had more to do with the unwillingness of key officials in the regime to order the use of force on a large scale than with the refusal of units to follow such orders. Furthermore, Russia is unlikely to have problems with transferring equipment to security services or to put conditions on the transfer of such equipment to security services from the armed forces.

External military assistance to Central Asian states is thus unlikely to have a serious negative impact on regional stability and security. With the end of the NATO operation in Afghanistan, the region's decade-long position of prominence on the international arena is likely to fade. Instead the states of the region will increasingly be left to their own devices, with internal instability the most serious threat. External military assistance will be limited and will do little to strengthen local armed forces.

Revisiting Islamism
A FACTOR FOR DEMOCRATIZATION IN CENTRAL ASIA?

PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo No. 298

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This memo hopes to revisit the old Islamism/democratization paradigm in Central Asia and to provide some new avenues for debate. It sets out from three hypotheses:

1) Generational changes underway in the region are giving rise to new ways of formulating the place of Islam in the public space;
2) these new ways are vastly in favor of giving Islam an increased role, whether Islam is understood as an alternative ideology to the post-Soviet consensus still in place, or as a social practice to rival the operations of ruling regimes; and
3) these new kinds of Islamism and their proponents will likely be called upon to play a role in the upcoming broader ideological diversity of Central Asian public spaces.

Islamism and Democracy: Old Debates, New Contexts?

Policy and scholarly debates around the role of Islamism in the democratization of societies with a Muslim majority is an old subject dating from the 1960s, a time of great polemics between socialist-minded Arab nationalism and Islamism in the Middle East. The topic underwent a revival in the 1980s after the Iranian Islamic Revolution and the rise to power of jihadist ideologies in the subsequent decade. The Arab Spring of 2011 has quite obviously re-injected some vigor into the debate, as has the patent failure, in 2013, of the Islamic Tunisian and Egyptian governments to build a consensus among those who supported them against the previous secular authoritarian regimes.

But what definition might be given to Islamism? Islamism is a political ideology that aims for the capture of power, but the methods of capture can differ, from democratic competition to violent overthrow. Far away from internationalized jihadism, the majority of Islamisms believe in the nation-state, and their references to a global caliphate are merely rhetorical arguments in the same vein as the universalism of values in Christian cultures. They endorse a state in which reference to Islam is official—but the degree of Islamization of state organs can be very divergent, ranging from President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's still largely-secular Turkey to countries like Saudi Arabia where Sharia law forms the basis of the legal system.

The way I use Islamism here does not refer to a literal reading of the Koran or the transposing of religious transcendence into the political sphere, but to a political ideology based on identifiable actors, with their own social niches and practices, and who are able to articulate them with theoretical arguments.

Central Asia: from Democratic Islamo-Nationalism to Illiberal Salafism?

In Central Asia, the debate about the relationship between Islamism and democratization is not a recent one. From its creation clandestinely in 1973, the Party of Islamic Rebirth of the Soviet Union presented itself as the Muslim version of dissidence. In the *perestroika* years, many political movements with Islamo-nationalist leanings took up common cause with liberally-oriented pro-democratic groups in order to combat the Soviet regime and the apparatchiks who inherited it at the moment of independence: the Islamic Renaissance Party in Tajikistan (IRPT) got involved in the civil war alongside liberal-oriented parties such as Lali Badakhshan; in Uzbekistan, Birlik and Erk cooperated with pro-Western groups looking to counter Islam Karimov; and in Kazakhstan, Azat and Alash remained allied with the anti-Nazarbayev opposition alongside the Russian ethnic minority, the Communist party, the Greens, and the pensioners' movement, before being ultimately liquidated. The Tajik case remains exemplary: even today, despite its weakening both from external pressures at the hand of President Emomali Rakhmon's regime and from internal contestations by more radical tendencies, the IRPT constitutes a major element of Tajik political life and has obliged the authorities to be more liberal than their Uzbek, Turkmen, or even Kazakh counterparts.

In the 2000s, the Islamism/democratization paradigm seemed to disappear: Central Asian political diversity became reduced to a minimum with the exception of Kyrgyzstan, where political opposition forces expressed themselves through an ethnic prism more than a religious one. Media discussion on Islamic radicalism—aptly managed by the established regimes and based on the unique example of the alliance of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) to the Taliban and then to Al-Qaeda—dominated policy analysis and partially also scholarly study.

However, the internal evolutions of Central Asian societies urge us to re-open the debate on the relationship between Islamism and democratization. During the first two decades of independence, three main trends of Islam could be identified. The first of these are official representatives of Islam—elites trained in the mold of the Spiritual Boards and lower-ranking imams or muftis. These cannot be considered Islamist as they defend the *modus vivendi* of the secular state controlling spiritual power in a more or less authoritarian way.

Faced with these, supporters of Islamism as an alternative have been divided into two major categories. The first, educated between the 1960s and 1980s in dissident circles, was sometimes linked with Sufi tendencies but more often inspired by non-Hanafi schools of thought, in particular by Hanbalism. Its members were at the core of the Islamo-nationalist political parties built in the *perestroika* era and tried to participate in political life at the start of the 1990s by putting forward alternative models of the

future. Most of their leaders are exiled or were liquidated in the second half of the 1990s and the early part of the 2000s.

The second category, formed after independence, gathers movements of more Salafi persuasion that endorse a literal reading of the Koran, a re-Islamization of society from below, and campaign in favor of a more internationalized Islam. Most of their members have studied abroad in the large Islamic education centers, such as Al-Azhar in Cairo or the Sunni universities of Zahedan or Mashhad in Iran; have visited the main centers of the reformist proselyte movement Tablighi Jamaat in New Delhi, Deoband, and Lucknow; or have been to Pakistan or to Malaysia. These groups are in close contact with the increasingly active Muslim proselyte strands: Tablighi Jamaat and Ahmadiyya from the Indian subcontinent, the Suleymanci from Turkey, the Salafi groups from Russia (either from the Volga-Ural region or the North Caucasus), as well as Hizb ut-Tahrir. Added to this second category are groups that call for violent jihad, but these are very weak numerically.

New Central Asian Islamisms as a Sign of Democratization?

This binary division distorts the analysis, since it presupposes an almost mechanical transition from the Islamo-nationalism of the 1990s to the more internationalized Salafism of the 2000s, whereas the ideological spectrum is actually much more diversified and the transitions from one to the other are complex. The IMU, originally called Adolat, had Islamo-nationalist goals before some of its members converted to jihadism. Its remaining legitimacy in Uzbekistan is clearly more centered on its Islamo-nationalist heritage than on its rallying to the Taliban, which no one else in Central Asia takes as a model. Hizb ut-Tahrir, despite its internationalist rhetoric, is also itself above all rooted in national and not international debates.

More importantly, this binary division does not take into consideration the emergence of a third wave of Islamic movements. Although works to support the analysis are still rare, I classify them here into two major trends.

A new Islamo-nationalism

Anew Islamo-nationalism is to be found among the tens of thousands of young people coming out of the Turkish schools and universities in Central Asia who have been initiated to a moderate Islamism through Nurcu rhetoric, as well as among youth groups with ethno-nationalist sensibilities, present in particular in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan. These latter do not necessarily have associations that represent them officially; instead, it is a matter of youth sociability practices and narratives which spread via the Internet, social media, and blogs.

On the ideological level, this new Islamo-nationalism combines features of ethno-nationalism (pride in one's ethnic group, criticisms of the rights the state gives to minority groups, denunciation of "internationalized" elites, explicit rejection of Russia as a colonial power, popular mythology on the historical exploits of one's nation, and conspirological interpretations of the past and present) and of Islamism (state support for a growing role of Islam in public space and the denunciation of the secular character

of the elites, who are held responsible for their corruption). It is distinguished from Salafism in the sense that its call for state support for Islam is intrinsically linked to national identity and to the "revival of traditions," not to a mythical return to the original purity of Islam. Its ideological borders are flexible, however: secular ethno-nationalist movements also exist, pan-Turkic statements can also be affirmed or rejected here, and the relation to the West can be positive (liberal convictions at the economic or political levels) or negative.

On the social level, this Islamo-nationalist movement is to be found essentially among the new small middle-classes, educated in vocational schools, technical institutes, and countryside universities, and employed professionally in the private sector (businessmen, as well as employees of large companies with a legal or technical background) or low-ranking administration (teachers, provincial university professors, and state employees at the local and regional levels).

Grassroots Islamist activists

Under this vague term I classify two major (but relatively different) movements that are nonetheless united by two shared elements: a critique of state inefficiency due to its secular nature and a focus on community-based justice.

First are businessmen who act as religious patrons, sponsoring mosques and madrasas, and do not hide their Islamic convictions (with notable ideological divergences). These groups were in the media spotlight in 2005 at the time of the Andijon repression against the Akkromiyya group, a business association practicing Islam's principles of solidarity that had considerable popular support and financial capabilities outside of official streams. In Kazakhstan, Kayrat Satybaldy, former head of the Muslim party Aq Orda, is considered an influential pro-Islamic leader, who offers his protection to any network of Islamist businessmen. This model of Islamic business associations is spreading in Central Asia, whether underground or public depending on the country but always with the central idea that economic success goes hand-in-hand with piety and ought to serve the community. In contrast with Islamo-nationalism, these movements can be more inspired by Salafism.

Second is a mushrooming Islamic civil society, which operates on an issue-based advocacy system, with the goal of improving specific issues: defending property rights and housing in rural and urban contexts, delivering charitable services for the poor, accessing healthcare for the elderly or children, settling peaceful community or family conflicts, and campaigning for the improvement of women's rights within the framework of the Islamic legal system. Such groups assert that Islamic values are compatible with a state governed by the rule of law and appeal to a form of civic engagement in harmony with Islamic values. These groups are mainly active in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, where there is more room for maneuver than in the other Central Asian states.

It is also possible to observe timid attempts at transforming this grassroots activism into a political instrument. In Kyrgyzstan, for instance, Tursunbay Bakir Uulu, a former deputy ombudsman and president of the small democratic party Erkin, and

businessman Nurlan Matuev created first the Congress of Muslims of Kyrgyzstan and then the Union of True Muslims of Kyrgyzstan. Both called for economic development consistent with the canons of Islam by strengthening the fight against corruption and by making public life more moral. Among the Central Asian diasporas settled in Russia, in particular the Tajik and Kyrgyz ones, several businessmen aiming to transform their economic success into political leverage also appear to be soliciting the emerging Islamic vote.

The Effect of These Two Trends on the Islamism-Democratization Debate in Central Asia

First, statements in favor of a state support for Islam as a national or state ideology are today practically the only such *political* statements, as Central Asian political life is largely de-ideologized. By undermining the current *modus vivendi* of the state-religion relationship bequeathed by the Soviet regime, these movements provide a new avenue of debate concerning the interaction between state and society, and the legitimacy or illegitimacy of current regimes. They contribute to the democratization of public debate by giving voice to a greater diversity of arguments.

Second, these new Islamic actors are not political or Islamic 'professionals' but average citizens. They occupy professional niches, many of which emerged from the transition to the market economy in the 1990s.They generate alternative revenues to the established elites, and they often question the post-Soviet consensus of public rent redistribution through practices of social justice. They embody the growing economic and social diversity of Central Asian societies.

Third, both trends reveal the ideological evolutions underway in the region due to generational change. Islamo-nationalism; the link between economic success, piety, greater moral conservatism; and the question of social justice and citizen accountability are part of the new givens which will no longer be ignored. In need of new political legitimacy, the regimes that will emerge in future years in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, but also in other forms in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, will have to take into account these new sensibilities and the social influence of their actors.

These Islamist sensibilities, whatever they become—political parties aiming at power or otherwise—will contribute to a greater democratization of Central Asian societies. The debate on Islamism and democracy would thus do well to get out of the stranglehold pertaining to the IMU legacy and the risk of violent overthrow by Salafi radicals. Instead, it ought to move closer to this everyday Islamism, which is leaving its stamp on a rising number of young Central Asians.

States of Protest in Central Asia

PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo No. 299

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The nature of violent protest in Central Asia exhibits variation both in form and state response. In Kazakhstan, violent protest is rare and economically oriented, and it elicits accommodationist state responses. In Uzbekistan, violent protest is also rare, often has Islamic overtones, and elicits repressive state responses. In Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, violent protest is more frequent and elicits accommodationist state responses. In Kyrgyzstan, violent protest tends to be ethnonationalist in form. In Tajikistan, violent protest is regional and, at times, secessionist in orientation.

This memo seeks to explain these variations in the states of protest in Central Asia. The first section explores causes of violent protest and finds that Soviet-era legacies drive variations in violence, in addition to post-Soviet factors. The second section explores state responses to Central Asian violent protest and concludes that, contrary to what might be expected, it is not a regime's brute coercive strength but rather government ideology that shapes state responses. Fortunately, with the one exception of Uzbekistan, Central Asian states do not perceive episodic violent opposition as fundamentally threatening to existing modes of governance and, as such, states have been inclined to accommodate rather than repress protest movements.

I. Violent Protest

Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan have each experienced notable violent state-society clashes in the last two decades. Violent clashes have been more frequent in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan than in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, a variation that, to a large degree, stems from these countries' differing modes of transition to post-Soviet independence. Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan began independence with their political elites united whereas Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan entered the post-Soviet period with their elites fragmented and in disarray, inclining both countries toward political instability.

These structural variations, though they explain why violent protest is more frequent in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan than it is in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, do not explain variations in the forms of violent protest in Central Asia. To some degree, as I illustrate below, this variation is a product of contingency. Violence was not foreordained in any of these countries. That said, the varying nature of Central Asian protest is not entirely a product of chance. Grievances expressed during episodes of

post-Soviet Central Asian violent protests are grievances that have long been present in these polities.

Kazakh Violent Protest: Zhanaozen 2011

In December 2011, seventeen people died and an additional 100 people were injured in clashes between oil strikers and police in Zhanaozen, a city in western Kazakhstan. The violence was the culmination of seven months of contentious strikes in which worker demands for better pay and safer work conditions fell on deaf ears. The protests might have continued peacefully were it not for the sudden appearance of a symbolic target upon which the strikers could vent their anger. On the morning of December 16, Zhanaozen's central square was transformed with yurts, a central stage, and a fir tree in preparation for the day's celebrations—Kazakh Independence Day. Frustrated oil strikers dismantled the decorations, sparking the security services' heavy-handed response.

Beyond this degree of contingency, the economic nature of the Zhanaozen protests was far from unprecedented. Economic grievances—and protests based on economic grievances—have long been commonplace in Kazakhstan. *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, for example, reported in June 1989 that mass protests erupted in the Mangyshlak peninsula, in western Kazakhstan. The cause of the protests, according to the paper, was high youth unemployment.[*] In September 1990, "tens of thousands" in Ust-Kamenogorsk protested against unsafe working conditions "at the Ulbinsky metallurgical works" following an explosion that released radioactive gases into the air.[†] In the Ust-Kamenogorsk and Mangyshlak protests, as ultimately was the case in the Zhanaozen protests, the central government softened its tone toward the protestors and instituted reforms to address workers' grievances.

Uzbek Violent Protest: Andijan 2005

On May 12, 2005, armed men stormed a prison in Andijan, freeing twenty-three businessmen who had been jailed on charges of Islamist extremism. According to the Uzbek government's account of the 2005 events, the militants and now-freed businessmen occupied the regional government administrative building, taking government employees hostage in the process. The militants then fired on Uzbek government forces attempting to free the state employees. The gun battle left 187 dead, the majority of whom, according to the Uzbek government, were soldiers and militants.

Scholars dispute this Uzbek government's account of the Andijan events. Independent research suggests the businessmen were not Islamists, but rather religiously devout and savvy entrepreneurs whose enterprises employed a considerable portion of the local population. The businessmen's prominence unnerved the Uzbek government. Jailing them on charges of militant Islamism was an expedient way to check this growing prominence. There indeed was a jailbreak on May 12 to free the

[*] "Conflict in the Soviet Union: The Untold Story of the Clashes in Kazakhstan," Human Rights Watch, 1990, p. 52.

[†] David Remnick, "Kazakhs Protest After A-Plant Blast Looses Gases," *Washington Post*, September 29, 1990.

Muslim businessmen, and protesters did occupy the regional administrative building. The violence that followed, researchers have concluded, was disproportionately inflicted by government forces and against unarmed civilians protesting on Andijan's central square.

As in the Kazakh Zhanaozen conflict, so too in the Andijan violence can precursors of protest be found in the Soviet period. In the mid-1980s, the influence of both Moscow and Tashkent faded in Uzbekistan's regions. As central authority receded, new actors—charismatic and reformist imams—established large followings, particularly in the Fergana Valley.[*] In the summer of 1989, Moscow appointed a new first secretary, Islam Karimov, in an effort to reassert central control. Karimov, in contrast to his predecessor, was intolerant of the charismatic imams and systematically worked to undermine their influence. This late Soviet-era dynamic of charismatic local religious leaders amassing influence and power has continued into the post-Soviet period. So too, moreover, have Karimov's efforts at limiting—through repression and coercion—these imams' influence. The Andijan violence is the most prominent example of enduring Islam-centered state-society tensions stretching back to the late Soviet period.

Kyrgyz Violent Protest: Osh 2010

In April 2010, a coalition of northern Kyrgyz political elites ousted President Kurmanbek Bakiev. This was Kyrgyzstan's second post-Soviet revolution; Bakiev, who is from Kyrgyzstan's southern Jalalabad region, rose to power as a result of the March 2005 "Tulip Revolution." Significantly, Bakiev left regional patronage networks largely undisturbed. The April 2010 revolutionaries, in contrast, sought to weaken the patronage networks of the southern Kyrgyz political elite. To do this, the northern coalition government enlisted the support of ethnic Uzbeks living in southern Kyrgyzstan, most notably the support of the influential Jalalabad businessman, Kadyrjan Batyrov.

The central government's alliance of convenience with Batyrov and the perceived threat this alliance posed to southern power relations led to growing tension between southern Kyrgyz and the minority Uzbek population living in Jalalabad as well as in southern Kyrgyzstan's largest city, Osh. In June 2010, these tensions escalated into interethnic violence. Kyrgyz security services in the south, services loyal to local politicians now out of favor with the northern coalition government, were slow to intervene. At least 350 people—the majority of whom were ethnic Uzbeks—died in the violence.

The 2010 ethnic violence coincided with the twentieth anniversary of Kyrgyzstan's deadly 1990 Osh riots, which left 470 people, again mostly ethnic Uzbeks, dead. Then, as in the 2010 violence, a slight to a status quo that privileged titular interests above those of the Uzbek minority sparked the conflict. Osh, like many Kyrgyz cities, had seen an influx of rural ethnic Kyrgyz migrants in the late 1980s. In contrast to

[*] Noah Tucker, "Violent Extremism and Insurgency in Uzbekistan: A Risk Assesment," USAIS, August 2013.

other cities, however, much of Osh's housing stock was in the hands of ethnic Uzbeks. To redress this imbalance, the Osh city administration promised new ethnic Kyrgyz arrivals land on what was a predominantly Uzbek collective farm. The city administration backpedalled on this promise in June 1990, motivating ethnic Kyrgyz migrants to turn to violence.

The 1990 Soviet-era riots are not directly responsible for Kyrgyzstan's post-Soviet ethnic violence. If it were not for missteps of the 2010 interim government, Kyrgyzstan may have remained free of deadly ethnic conflict. What the 1990 riots did do, however, was introduce a mode of protest into state-society relations that could be replicated given a now familiar set of political contingencies.

Tajik Violent Protest: Khorog 2012

In July 2012, Tajik President Emomalii Rahmon sent troops to Khorog in an effort to detain the alleged killers of General Abdullo Nazarov, the central government's commander of border troops in the Gorno-Badakhshan autonomous region (GBAO). Militants loyal to a local warlord and former field commander of the United Tajik Opposition, Tolib Ayombekov, attacked the government troops. Seventeen soldiers and thirty militants died in the fighting. Ayombekov, it should also be noted, was General Nazarov's deputy commander, one of several government positions Ayombekov has held thanks to a 1997 UN-brokered power-sharing arrangement that ended five years of civil war.

The July 2012 Khorog violence can be viewed in multiple ways. Some argue the conflict was nothing more than a struggle between corrupt political elites for control of illicit trafficking networks.* Khorog is a short drive from the Ishkashim border post on the Afghan-Tajik border, where Nazarov was killed in a dispute over how to process a recently arrived goods shipment from Afghanistan. Others, however, see the July 2012 violence as emblematic of the long struggle of the GBAO to free itself from Dushanbe's rule. In March 1991, Pamiri nationalists, emboldened by independence movements elsewhere in the Soviet Union, formed Lali Badakhshan, a political party that upon Soviet collapse later that year pressed for the GBAO's secession from Tajikistan.† Although Lali Badakshan did not secure GBAO's independence, the central Tajik government has, for the most part, left the region to its own devices. The government's July 2012 dispatching of troops to the region was a rare departure for this arrangement of convenience between center and periphery, and one for which Dushanbe paid dearly.

II. State Responses to Violent Protest

Violent protest in Central Asia, in contrast to similar protest actions in the Middle East, South Asia, and North Africa, is notable in that it is fleeting rather than enduring. A key reason for the fleeting nature of Central Asian protest is that, with the exception of

* Farhod Milod, "Who Is Tolib Ayombekov?" July 30, 2012 (http://registan.net/2012/07/30/who-is-tolib-ayombekov/).

† Sebastien Peyrouse, "Economic Trends As an Identity Marker? The Pamiri Trade Niche with China and Afghanistan," *Problems of Post-Communism,* 59, 4 (July 2012): 7.

Uzbekistan, states in the region have gravitated toward accommodating rather than continuing to repress protest. Economic grievances throughout Kazakhstan, titular ethnonationalism in southern Kyrgyzstan, and secessionist pressures in Gorno-Badakhshan remain high and, in all these cases, central governments have sought to assuage rather than exacerbate these grievances.

In Kazakhstan, there have been multiple protests since the Zhanaozen uprising. Copper miners have gone on strike in Zhezkazgan, coal miners have picketed in Karaganda, and steel workers have forced production slowdowns in Temirtau. In each of these cases, the Kazakh government intervened on behalf of the striking workers. In Kyrgyzstan, the northern-led central government capitulated to the demands of southern Kyrgyz nationalists despite evidence that these southern elites played a direct role in fomenting the June 2010 ethnic violence. And in Tajikistan, Dushanbe has returned to the status quo of not intervening in the Pamiris' day-to-day governance of GBAO.

Notably, in none of these cases did violent protest pose a challenge to the legitimacy of central governments. Rather, following all of these violent protests, central governments effectively framed the conflicts as local and regional in origin.

In contrast, the Karimov government, in portraying itself as the only bulwark protecting society from radical Islamism, has transformed local conflicts into crises threatening Uzbek national identity. While this approach has won Karimov considerable support among many secular-minded Uzbeks, it has also forced the Uzbek government's hand. The Islam-related protest in Andijan was not merely Andijan's problem, but the Uzbek nation's problem.

Fortunately, Uzbeks will have a chance to rethink their current leadership's post-Soviet Islamist-alarmism. The Uzbek political elite will soon need to find a replacement for Karimov, who is now seventy-five and rumored to be in poor health. Karimov's successor would do well to follow the lead of his counterparts elsewhere in Central Asia and not stake central government legitimacy on an imaginary battle against Islamist extremism. Doing so would allow Tashkent to see protest in a more objective light, to see Uzbek protest for what it most often is: local actors voicing locally-directed grievances and not transnational Islamists seeking the militant overthrow of secular autocracy.

Food Security in Central Asia

A Public Policy Challenge

PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo No. 300

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Central Asian public policies often tend to assert that an increase of GDP mechanically ensures better food security. This is a problematic assumption, however, as food security mainly affects pauperized populations for which per capita GDP does not increase at the same rate as national GDP. Existing programs for countering food insecurity are often superficial measures that do not get at the root of the problem and almost never take into account the quality of nutrition, which has a long-term impact on the health of younger generations. More importantly, the central plank of the fight against food insecurity has to be a fight against rural poverty. This means that states must address issues such as water management and energy access. In addition, public policies in agrarian states like Uzbekistan and Tajikistan are centered on patronal practices. Centralized cotton or—to a lesser extent—wheat production—are necessary to the functioning of the ruling regime's political system; diversified agricultural production for domestic markets does not offer rents to ruling elites.

This memo argues that food insecurity in Central Asia is not a challenge related to difficult environmental conditions—even if such must be taken into account—but a public policy issue. It discusses the main reasons behind the growing food insecurities in the region, in particular the patterns of extensive production, and ill-calibrated import and subsidy policies.

Food Security and Food Safety: Some Data

More than 850 million individuals in the world face malnutrition: a majority of them live in developing countries, and 28 million are in post-Soviet Eurasia. In Central Asia, more than 5 million individuals out of a population of about 62 million have no access to staple food products. In Central Asia, as elsewhere, food insecurity mainly affects rural populations and marginalized populations of urban centers, especially the youth and women, who are often malnourished. According to the U.S. Agency for International Development, Central Asia's dependence on a single commodity—wheat—is considerably higher than in other regions of the world that are vulnerable to food insecurity.

Food insecurity affects all Central Asian states, if to varying degrees. Tajikistan is able to cover only 31 percent of its food consumption needs, while Kyrgyzstan,

Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan cover around 50 percent of theirs. Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan are the focus of particular concern: according to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), 30 percent of Tajiks and 27 percent of Kyrgyz have difficulty feeding themselves. In 2009, the United Nations announced that more than two million Tajiks and one million Kyrgyz were in a state of food insecurity, and 800,000 Tajiks were directly threatened by famine. Since the onset of the global economic crisis of 2008, about 60 percent of Tajik homes claim to have reduced their food consumption. In Kyrgyzstan, chronic insecurity has been aggravated by the severe political and social troubles of 2010, during which the country experienced the highest rise in wheat prices in the world (54 percent).

Although they have greater agricultural and hydrocarbon resources, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan have not been spared. It is estimated that more than 30 percent of the Uzbek population subsists below the food poverty level. This is a particularly acute problem in regions far removed from the major fertile areas and from the capital, for example in the provinces of Khorezm and Karakalpakstan. In Turkmenistan, the Tashauz region is one of the most fragile in terms of food security.

The stakes of food safety—malnutrition or undernutrition—are just as important as that of food security (typically defined as having "access" to food). About 8 percent of all children in Tajikistan and 11 percent in Turkmenistan are malnourished to the point of being underweight and 15 percent to the point that their growth is stunted. A greater number of women have diets deficient in proteins and fundamental microelements such as iodine, A vitamins, and iron. According to the World Bank's Living Standards Assessment, many Central Asians will not attain an average of 3,000 calories/day until 2030, or even 2050. These forecasts contradict official data on living standards, a telltale sign of the inflated character of national GDPs.

The macroeconomic givens of the states of Central Asia are often skewed, making it impossible to measure the real living standards of households. Poverty is clearly one of the major causes of food insecurity. The share of household expenditure devoted to food remains very high: 80 percent in Uzbekistan and in Tajikistan, 58 percent in Kyrgyzstan, and as much as 42 percent in Kazakhstan (an unparalleled share for a country with decent macroeconomic indicators).

Most of the remittances Central Asian migrants in Russia send to their families are earmarked for the purchase of food, thus showing a strong connection between rural poverty and food insecurity.

The regular inflation affecting Central Asian currencies has consequences on nutrition in not only quantitative but also qualitative terms. In every state in the region except Kazakhstan, the quality of wheat is so low that it is used mostly as animal feed, while higher quality wheat is imported. In all global peak periods of wheat prices, Tajik and Kyrgyz populations tend to revert to local wheat, which is less expensive but also less nutritious.

Paradoxical Public Policy Responses

In responding to this situation, Central Asian governments have adopted a range of public policies, from extensive development of agricultural production and promotion of food self-sufficiency to subsidy programs designed to facilitate the import of staple products. The strategies chosen in many cases overstep the food stakes and highlight the political practices prevalent in the region. For the authorities, food security is more a symbol of state sovereignty and economic success than a human security challenge. Moreover, in regimes mired in neo-patrimonial practices, agricultural policy pertains essentially to financial and power interests, the objective being to ensure the survival of the political regime through the bolstering of the elite's financial manna.

Central Asian public policies, moreover, suffer from both the Soviet legacy (a preference given to extensive over intensive/quality methods) and its abandonment (lack of infrastructure maintenance). The degradation of agricultural installations and materials that have not been modernized for two decades has profoundly affected agricultural production, and livestock farming has suffered unprecedented decreases. Moreover, tariff fluctuations for material inputs (like fertilizers and insecticides) have considerably limited utilization of the latter. Finally, the whole region is subject to soil degradation: more than 60 percent of irrigated lands in Central Asia are affected by salination. In Kazakhstan, a brutal drop in wheat production—from 3,000 kg per hectare in 2011 to 800 in 2012—is not only the consequence of drought but also a result of the poor quality of seeds used, as well as of poor management of the land, which is polluted and has high salinity.

The Soviet-inspired choice of extensive production

The concentration on cotton and wheat production, which uses up to 80 percent of cultivated lands in Uzbekistan, raises the difficult question of diversification, which the relevant public policies do not seek to promote.

In all Central Asian states, and Uzbekistan in particular, the private farmers or *dehqan*, largely in the minority in terms of surface areas farmed, contribute to the production of more than one-third of food produce and almost all livestock farming. The productivity of the *dehqan* has increased more rapidly than that of the large private or collective farms. This has had a positive effect on food availability but means that the latter remains in the hands of a still delicate private sector, not state-run public policy.

In the name of food self-sufficiency as a symbol of state sovereignty, public policies have led to a considerable increase of surface area for the exploitation of wheat, for example from 488,000 to 1.5 million hectares between 1991 and 2006 in Uzbekistan. This policy has enabled Tashkent to produce more flour and hence provide the population with better access to staple foods. Turkmenistan has also made land available for cereal harvesting. However, the choice of extensive harvests required for food self-sufficiency is the cause of much debate. The famous "green revolution," which permitted significant technological innovations in the agribusiness sector (new types of seed, modernization of agricultural machines, massive use of fertilizers and pesticides, and investments in mechanization) is criticized for its lack of sustainability. In fact, if

extensive agriculture leads to a clear increase in production, this is often followed by stagnation or even decline as a result of a drop in soil fertility. Hence, Kazakhstan has increased its total planted area by almost 42 percent since 2001; however, the wheat yield has declined by 30 percent over the last ten years.

The practice of developing wheat harvests at any price also leads to a considerable extension of farming areas in regions that are sometimes ill-suited to it. Thus, in Uzbekistan, only three out of fifteen provinces—Andijon, Bukhara, and Ferghana—manage a yield of five tons per hectare, whereas others such as Karakalpakstan and Djizzak are limited to 2.5 tons, a low figure for irrigated areas. Despite this low productivity, the harvest areas for wheat have continued to be extended. This leads to immense misuse, both in terms of harvested areas and water consumption.

Moreover, policies of extensive production bear social risk. The increase of crop yields induces a fall in the sale prices of agricultural products but simultaneously causes those of material inputs to skyrocket, the upshot of which is a reduction of farmers' profit margins and, as a result, their standard of living.

The question of debt of Central Asian farmers is a recurrent one throughout all the states, Tajikistan in particular. In order to protect consumer interests, governments have tried to set ceiling tariffs or limits to rising prices, but this has once again contributed to diminishing the revenues of local producers. In the end, efforts at extensive production do not contribute to the sustainability of the farming profession and thus are directly implicated in the rural population's massive labor migration abroad.

The importing/subsiding strategy and its limits

Despite policies designed to increase production, of the five states in Central Asia only Kazakhstan has been able to meet its own cereal needs. The other four states have no choice but to import massively. Kyrgyzstan has to import 43 percent of its wheat. Tajikistan buys more than 50 percent of its cereals from abroad, as well as 30 percent of its beef, 80 percent of its poultry, three quarters of its vegetable oils, and nearly all its sugar.

Some states, such as Uzbekistan, have opted for increased protectionism, which safeguards the domestic market from international fluctuations. However, this policy produces price rises in the domestic market and thus reduces the choice of available products, further affecting underprivileged sectors of the population. Protectionism thus contributes in many cases to developing what is termed "hidden hunger"—access to better quality products, replete with the necessary nutritional elements, solely to the more privileged sectors of the population while depriving growing numbers of food safety.

States also use customs barriers, which have parallel consequences in the shadow economy. Restrictions on wheat imports in Uzbekistan have provoked a major increase in trafficking: if in 2005, after Uzbekistan enforced strict customs barriers, only 200,000 tons of flour were allegedly imported into Uzbek territory, it is estimated that 800,000

tons more entered the country clandestinely. The cost of Kazakh flour through trafficking ($120-160 per ton) remains more appealing than the official route, which incurs accumulated costs of insurance, transport, and customs duties ($210).

Subsidy programs for products of first necessity accompanying isolationist policies have been pursued in the states that are most reticent to reform, such as Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. Although consumer subsidies can stabilize and control the cost of food items and prevent a political backlash, these programs are somewhat ineffective given their high economic cost. Moreover, subsidies for wheat and flour do not prioritize assistance to the neediest populations but urban populations instead. International organizations, on the contrary, privilege "targeted food assistance programs," which aim to ensure the food security of specific groups of the population, as well as provide better redistribution to the neediest.

Conclusion

Food security has been a steadily growing concern for many citizens in Central Asia, the social and economic strains of which have political ramifications. Compared to post-WWII Soviet times, food access has deteriorated in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, as well as in certain regions of the neighboring Central Asian states. Government policies on the matter have often been flawed, both regarding domestic food production projects and an ongoing and detrimental reliance on food staple imports.

Spinning the Spillover

WHY NATO WITHDRAWAL FROM AFGHANISTAN DOES NOT POSE A THREAT TO CENTRAL ASIA

PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo No. 301

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As the war in Afghanistan winds down, the United States is at a turning point in fashioning policy toward Central Asia. If the 10 years beginning in 1991 focused broadly on issues of "transition," or support for economic and political reform, since late 2001 policy toward the region has revolved around the Global War on Terror (GWOT), during which time domestic issues have been subordinated to security concerns. Due to the impending NATO withdrawal from Afghanistan and the probable closing of the last U.S. base in Central Asia, 2014 marks the end of this second phase in U.S. policy. What comes next? The potential vectors of future U.S. policy in Central Asia are already clear, articulated in two grand strategic visions for the region: the New Silk Road (NSR) and the Spillover.

The NSR has received more attention to date, as the concept has been operative in policy circles since at least 2006, in anticipation of a non-GWOT world in which Russia, China, and, to a lesser degree, Iran—rather than Islamic extremists—are the primary threat to U.S. interests in the region. The phrase refers to a network of trade, open borders, and improved infrastructure extending from Kazakhstan to India, sparking a self-reinforcing dynamic of better interstate relations, shared prosperity, and, perhaps someday, improved governance.* There is a strong geopolitical component, as the region's largest trading partners, Russia and China, are left out of the network, while Afghanistan, which produces little of value to Central Asian states (besides narcotics) and has a small domestic market, is an integral part of it. One suspects, in reading the rationales behind it, the NSR is designed more to facilitate U.S. interest in salvaging stability in Afghanistan and reducing the influence of local hegemons than to aid the political transformation or economic development of Central Asia.† Nonetheless, this approach represents a rare vision—an optimistic counterfactual—for a region the potentialities of which are often overlooked.

* See S. Frederick Starr, ed., "The New Silk Roads Transport and Trade in Greater Central Asia," Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program, 2007.
† Richard A. Boucher, "U.S. Policy in Central Asia: Balancing Priorities (Part II)," Statement to the House International Relations Committee Subcommittee on the Middle East and Central Asia, April 26, 2006.

The Spillover, by contrast, is a worst-case scenario that requires intensive planning merely to stave off disaster. It envisions a chain reaction beginning with the withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2014 and triggering a civil war between a weak Afghan government and a resurgent Taliban. Afghanistan becomes a training ground for insurgents, and Islamist militants and war refugees stream across borders, some winding up in Central Asia, a region plagued with corrupt and repressive governments and aggrieved citizens. Afghan chaos thereby infects Central Asia, leaving failed states, violence, and extremism in its wake.

The Spillover is the "evil twin" of the NSR. Whereas the NSR sees Afghanistan as an opportunity—a buyer of Central Asian electricity and a transit country for oil and gas—the Spillover sees it as a fount of extremism and anarchy. Whereas the NSR sees borders as a hindrance to trade and emphasizes the benefits of cross-border exchange, the Spillover sees borders as a necessary defense against unwanted incursions and in need of strengthening. Finally, while the NSR imagines how Central Asia's natural and human resources can be put to productive use to the benefit of the region as a whole, the Spillover focuses on the sources of instability and imagines regimes to be so fragile that the introduction of malevolent influences from Afghanistan could cause them to collapse.

Because the NSR has been critiqued elsewhere, while the Spillover has not been subject to extensive scrutiny, I focus on the latter in the remainder of this memo: why it is a seductive narrative to buy into, why it is flawed, and how policymakers might use different assumptions to prepare for neither the most fanciful nor dire scenario, but instead the most likely.

The Thrill of Spill

The idea of a Spillover has proponents in several camps. In fact, it is not only an American vision; Russian and Central Asian officials have done even more to promote the same theme. In Russia's case, the putative Spillover provides a pretext for symbolically reasserting dominance in the region, which was (in the view of some) disrupted dramatically by the U.S. military presence in southwest Asia. Thus, Russia has an interest in emphasizing the notion of a new threat to justify its role as a security guarantor for the Central Asian states. This enables Russia to strengthen the Collective Operation Reaction Force of the Collective Security Treaty Organization, which also involves Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan.[*] It also helps Russia justify its continued military presence in the latter two states.

Central Asian leaders also have an interest in highlighting the potential threat from Afghanistan. They have consequently invoked two tropes that have a long pedigree in Central Asia's short history as independent states. The first, *We are threatened and therefore need help*, has been instrumental in obtaining security assistance from external powers; even if the U.S. military presence comes to an end, it argues for the

[*] "CSTO to assist in stability efforts of Afghan authorities," Voice of Russia, May 28, 2013 (http://english.ruvr.ru/news/2013_05_28/CSTO-to-assist-in-stability-efforts-of-Afghan-authorities/).

continued flow of aid.* The second, *All bad things come from abroad*, helps to distract from problems of governance while also justifying repression against domestic opponents by linking them to foreign threats. Thus, Kyrgyzstan's 1990 Osh riots were believed to be a KGB plot to keep the republic dependent on Moscow, the 2010 violence was blamed on Tajik mercenaries,† and Uzbekistan's 2005 massacre of protesters in Andijan pinned on Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Hizb ut-Tahrir, and al-Qaeda.‡

These two claims, despite their self-serving nature, coincide with U.S. bureaucratic interests. The foreign policy bureaucracy is designed for officials to collaborate with their counterparts in other states on an equal basis and presupposes common interests, in this case stability in Central Asia. U.S. officials have little to gain professionally by considering whether their counterparts' actions may serve to undermine, rather than promote, stability, or vocalizing suspicions that politicians exaggerate threats purely for financial benefit.

Furthermore, the programs that stem from the Spillover narrative serve political, as well as bureaucratic, interests. Technical programs like border security and military training conform to a worldview in which righteous states defend themselves from nefarious adversaries. And because defense-related programs require no political concessions of a state's leaders, as is often the case with other foreign policy instruments like democracy promotion, they can be touted as successful episodes of cooperation in an otherwise fraught relationship.

The Spillover also appeals to strategic thinkers because it acts as a template that explains otherwise complex regional dynamics. Under the rubric of geographic proximity, the diffusion of Afghan chaos beyond its borders has a surface plausibility. After all, Afghanistan and post-Soviet Central Asia have a common religious identity and similar languages and cultures, and they are all weak and corrupt states. However, facile assumptions based on maps overlook important historical, political, and cultural factors that complicate the Spillover narrative upon closer inspection.

Shock and Flaw

First, state failure does not spread organically like a virus. Instead, diffusion depends on the receptivity of neighboring states. Recently, fears have risen that the Sahel region of Africa is susceptible to militancy as a result of instability in Libya. As evidence, some have pointed to the Islamist takeover of northern Mali. Yet Mali suffered from instability to begin with: a Tuareg insurgency, coupled with a weak regime at odds with a

* For example, according to Uzbek President Islam Karimov: "We have serious concerns [about] the withdrawal of troops…and it cannot be denied that, first, terrorist and extremist activity, drug trafficking, their size and scale, will grow, and second, terrorist and extremist activity will not remain only within Afghanistan—it will spill out of Afghanistan." "Visit in Uzbekistan," June 4, 2012 (http://kremlin.ru/news/15548).

† "Kyrgyzstan: Ferghan.Ru sources confirm the involvement of Tajik contractors in the Osh massacre," fergananews.com, June 15, 2010 (http://enews.fergananews.com/news.php?id=1739&mode=snews).

‡ Erica Marat, "Karimov Accuses Kyrgyzstan of Assisting Terrorists," Eurasia Daily Monitor, September 20, 2005 (http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews[tt_news]=30874#.Ues0Dm37ZaE); "Uzbekistan Presses Information Cleansing Campaign on Andijan Events," September 12, 2005 (http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav091205.shtml).

politicized army. By contrast, Algeria, which has had a stable political regime for 15 years, has weathered uprisings in neighboring states and potential "spillover" from militants. The seizure of a gas refinery in January 2013 is the lone exception that appears to prove the rule.

In Central Asia, regimes are repressive but states do not face ongoing insurgencies or possess a reservoir of potential recruits for would-be militant proselytizers. With the exception of Kyrgyzstan, there has been no serious contestation for power in Central Asia since 1994 (in Tajikistan), armies are under civilian control, and regimes have the ability to shut borders to most traffic when they are motivated to do so.* Tajikistan, whose government is only weakly in control of the provinces, may be the exception, but there a natural boundary—the Pamir Mountains—prevents large-scale incursions from Afghanistan.

A second flaw in the Spillover narrative is the exaggerated ability of the NATO contingent of 100,000 troops to guard the border—ostensibly holding back the deluge of militancy with its proverbial finger in the dike. If militants were intent on undermining Central Asian regimes, they could do so now, just as thousands of fighters crossed into Iraq during the U.S. occupation despite the efforts of U.S. troops to police the border.† NATO troops are dispersed around the country, with the vast majority located in the south and east, so 2014 is not a magic date after which Afghanistan's neighbors suddenly become vulnerable. If Taliban fighters were headed across the Amu Darya, we would see credible evidence of it now, but we do not. And in the unlikely case that the Taliban were to take power in Afghanistan, it would find Pakistan a more attractive target, what with its long, porous border, personal and family connections, and an army that has waged a brutal but unsuccessful campaign against Taliban-affiliated groups.

A third flaw in the narrative is the assumption that ethnic and (superficial) religious affinities will aid in the spread of extremism. Yet Central Asians are little enamored with either Taliban ideology or Afghanistan itself. During the Afghan Civil War (1992-96) and the reign of the Taliban, Central Asians did not try to import Taliban ideology, and the domestic repression of Islamists did not lead to the further radicalization of the population. Neither did the mujahedeen in the 1980s inspire Soviet Central Asian soldiers to defect or take up the cause of jihad against the USSR. Today's Central Asians, dissatisfied as they may be with their governments, are unlikely to be inspired by a bloody civil war next door. On the contrary, the specter of anarchy followed by the resumption of severe Taliban Islamic law will only discredit Central Asian Islamists and strengthen the case for secular dictators, the devils people already know.

* "Kazakh-Kyrgyz Border Remains Closed, Despite Nazarbaev Promise," RFE-RL, May 6, 2010 (http://www.rferl.org/content/KazakhKyrgyz_Border_Remains_Closed_Despite_Nazarbaev_Promise/2033942.html).

† Jim Garamone, "Border Police Take on Mission of Securing Iraq's Frontier," defense.gov, May 7, 2006 (http://www.defense.gov/News/NewsArticle.aspx?ID=15842).

Trouble Begins at Home

In fact, there is a threat to Central Asian instability, but it comes from within. Compared with the 1990s, Central Asian regimes today are more well-entrenched—better protected *from* society—and yet less legitimate, as the "founding fathers" of the republics are now seen more as predatory than heroic. This decreases the likelihood of spillover from abroad but heightens the risk of internal challenges. For a glimpse of a dire future with domestic roots, one need only look at ethnic violence in Kyrgyzstan or violent struggles over narcotrafficking routes in Tajikistan. If the worst-case scenario came to pass, Afghanistan might come into play as a haven for refugees or a staging ground for combatants in a Central Asian civil war, as it did during the Tajik Civil War. If elements of Afghan society then became involved, the result would be *suck-in* rather than *spill-over*.

The United States has an interest in preventing such an eventuality. This is best accomplished not from containment of notional Afghan threats but through efforts to halt state erosion culminating in failure during the rule of the second generation after independence (as some African states experienced). A high return on investment can come from prosaic programs to develop human capital, in order to ensure that a cohort of competent personnel is capable of running the state after the last generation of Soviet-educated professionals retires. This would involve educational exchanges, training programs, and a focus on strengthening the quality of educational institutions. In a similar vein, humanitarian aid and infrastructure development can address issues of long-term human and physical capital without necessarily strengthening illegitimate regimes. More generally, a healthy dose of skepticism at the self-serving proclamations of Central Asian regimes can help shift scarce aid dollars from simplistic short-term fixes to more sustainable programs that address serious long-term challenges—challenges that stem from the mundane scourge of poor governance, not from the chimera of foreign Islamists.

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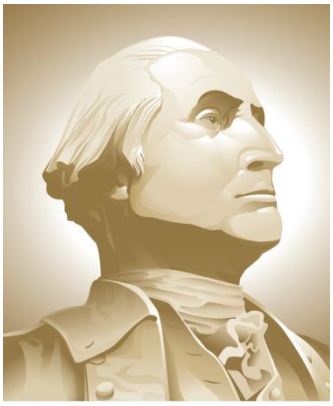

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