

**Two Decades of the Russian Federation's Foreign
Policy in the Commonwealth of Independent States:
The Cases of Belarus and Ukraine**

by

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Introduction¹

In the decades since the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, the foreign policy of the Russian Federation (RF) has been extensively studied.² However, the existing research is largely descriptive, focusing on specific decisions and actions rather than analyzing the circumstances and revealing the factors that motivated these policies.

This paper focuses on the Russian Federation's foreign policy towards Belarus and Ukraine from 1991 to 2008, that is, during the presidencies of Boris Yeltsin and Vladimir Putin. It seeks to characterize the foreign policy of the RF towards these European states. In doing so, the paper underscores the factors that have influenced Russia in forming its foreign policy decisions. Another objective is to compare the pattern of Russian foreign policy at the time of Yeltsin's administration with that during Putin's presidency, with the aim of discerning similarities and differences in state management between these two periods – this, in order to identify patterns in Russia's foreign policy. In addition, Dmitri Medvedev's presidency is reviewed in order to give an updated picture of Russian foreign relations with the two states.

The literature survey analyzes international relations theories and decision-making approaches in the sphere of foreign policy in an attempt to identify variables that are instrumental in answering the research objectives. The paper does not give preference to any one alternative, but rather seeks to capitalize on theoretical insights gained from these approaches and propose an integrative research framework. The independent variables that are assumed to influence the foreign policy – which is considered to be the dependent variable – include: geopolitical considerations, threat perception, state power, interest groups and decision-makers' perception of the past. The study uses the method of structured, focused comparison combined with the process-tracing approach.

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² Neil Malcolm, Alex Pravda, Roy Allison and Margot Light, *Internal Factors in Russian Foreign Policy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); Michael Mandelbaum, *The New Russian Foreign Policy* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1998); Robert H. Donaldson and Joseph L. Noguee, *The Foreign Policy of Russia: Changing Systems, Enduring Interests*, 3rd ed. (New York: M. E. Sharp, 2005); Michael L. Bressler, ed., *Understanding Contemporary Russia* (London: Lynne Rienner, 2009); Ruth Deyermond, *Security and Sovereignty in the Former Soviet Union* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 2007).

This paper's contribution to academic discourse is that it characterizes interstate affairs that evolved under highly specific circumstances, namely, relations between a superpower that underwent an enormous trauma and its independent neighbors which only a short time before were its dependencies. It is hoped, therefore, that unraveling the complexity of the relations in the Slavic triangle in this post-traumatic period will not only shed light on Russia's foreign policy but may also be a step towards creating a research framework to analyze the foreign policy of other states.

Foreign Policy in International Relations

This chapter presents the review and analysis of foreign policy in such international relations theories as *Innenpolitik*, offensive and defensive realism, neoclassical realism, regional hegemony and constructivism. The discussion is then broadened to include decision-making approaches.

First, however, a definition of the term “foreign policy” is in order. For the purposes of the present discussion, the definition of Carlsnaes will be adopted, whereby “foreign policies consist of those actions which, expressed in the form of explicitly stated goals, commitments and/or directives, and pursued by governmental representatives acting on behalf of their sovereign communities, are directed towards objectives, conditions and actors – both governmental and non-governmental – which they want to affect and which lie beyond their territorial legitimacy.”³ This definition covers several aspects that are discussed in various approaches to foreign policy analysis. These approaches can be classified into four main types: theories of domestic politics, international system theories, the constructivist approach and decision-making theories.

The theories of domestic politics are designated by the term *Innenpolitik*. The supporters of these theories suggest that state’s actions are shaped by political, social and economic ideologies, the country’s geographical position, the state’s national character, the type of the regime or other intrastate factors.⁴ In Clement Atlee’s words, “the foreign policy of a Government is the reflection of its internal policy.”⁵

Neo-realists suggested a systemic model to explain the foreign policy of a state. This model comprises two sub-theories: defensive and offensive realism.⁶ While both sub-

³ Walter Carlsnaes, Thomas Risse and Beth A. Simmons, eds., *Handbook of International Relations* (London: Thousand Oaks, 2002), 335.

⁴ Andrew Moravcsik, “Taking Preferences Seriously: A Liberal Theory of International Politics,” *International Organization* 51, no. 4 (Fall 1997): 516-524; David Skidmore and Valerie M. Hudson, eds., *The Limits of State Autonomy: Societal Groups and Foreign Policy Formulation* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1993); Joe D. Hagan, “Domestic Political Systems and War Proneness,” *Mershon International Studies Review* 38, no. 2 (October 1994): 183-207; Joe D. Hagan, “Domestic Political Explanations in the Analysis of Foreign Policy,” in Laura Neack, Jeanne A. K. Hey and Patrick J. Haney, eds., *Foreign Policy Analysis: Continuity and Change in Its Second Generation* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1995).

⁵ Michael R. Gordon, *Conflict and Consensus in Labour’s Foreign Policy, 1914-1965* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1969), 6.

⁶ Fareed Zakaria, “Realism and Domestic Politics,” *International Security* 17, no. 1 (Summer 1992): 177-198; John J. Mearsheimer, “The False Promise of International Institutions,” *International Security* 19, no. 3 (Winter 1994/1995): 9-13; Benjamin Frankel, “The Reading List: Debating Realism,” *Security Studies* 5, no. 2 (Fall 1995): 185-187; Fareed Zakaria, *From Wealth to Power: The Unusual Origins of America’s World Role* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998); Randall L. Schweller, “Neorealism’s Status Quo Bias: What Security Dilemma?” *Security Studies* 5, no. 3 (Spring 1996): 114-115; Stephen M. Walt, “International Relations: One World, Many Theories,” *Foreign Policy* 110 (Spring 1998): 37.

theories are rooted in the classical realist paradigm,⁷ they differ with respect to insights about the formation of a state's foreign policy. Offensive realism assumes that the international anarchy is Hobbesian in nature and security is scarce and hard to achieve.⁸ The foreign policy of a state is analyzed by means of that state's relative capabilities and external environment. Defensive realists disagree, in that they see the international anarchy as more benign, where security is abundant. They argue that states react to external threats by "balancing" against them. However, both theories, as well as *Innenpolitik*, are problematic in analyzing the foreign policy of a state, since they underscore systemic or domestic factors while ignoring other variables.

In an attempt to correct the above inaccuracy of foreign policy analysis, Rose developed a theory which he called "neoclassical realism," claiming that "it explicitly incorporates both external and internal variables, updating and systematizing certain insights drawn from classical realist thought."⁹ Neoclassical realists contend that the international anarchy is hard to grasp, since it is obscure and uncertain. States respond to that uncertainty with the intention of managing their external environment. The neoclassical realists' main prediction is that "over the long term the relative amount of material power resources countries possess will shape the magnitude and ambition...of their foreign policies: as their relative power rises states will seek more influence abroad, and as it falls their actions and ambitions will be scaled back accordingly."¹⁰

Another set of theories which is rooted in the systemic level deals with a special status which may be achieved by a state – hegemony. A hegemonic system exists when a single strong state oversees or controls other states in the international arena.¹¹ Mearsheimer argues that there is no global hegemon, and the only form of hegemony in the international system is regional, i.e., hegemony that is limited to a distinct geographical area. According to Mearsheimer, a regional hegemon will always strive to safeguard the regional status quo through its foreign policy. However, should it confront a competitor,

⁷ Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, 5th ed. (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1973), 2-4.

⁸ John J. Mearsheimer, "Back to the Future: Instability in Europe after the Cold War," *International Security* 15, no. 1 (Summer 1990): 12.

⁹ Gideon Rose, "Neoclassical realism and theories of foreign policy," *World Politics* 51, no. 1 (October 1998): 146.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 152.

¹¹ John J. Mearsheimer, "Anarchy and the Struggle for Power," in *Globalization and State Power: A Reader*, ed. Joel Krieger (New York: Pearson, 2006), 57.

the hegemon will cease maintaining the status quo and will act to weaken or even to destroy its adversary.¹²

Researchers of regional hegemony examine the mechanisms through which a regional hegemon secures its domination. According to Pyrs, a regional hegemon projects its values on the area using a process of socialization that leads to long-term obedience.¹³ Pedersen argues that a regional hegemon may also advance its interests using cooperative hegemony, whereby the hegemon operates to institutionalize the region in order to mitigate the neighboring countries' perception of it as a threat.¹⁴

An additional approach which does not belong to any of the abovementioned theoretical schools is the constructivist approach. The central idea of constructivism is that reality is subjective because it is an outcome of enduring social construction. Individuals are agents of transformation who develop ideas and bestow meanings on their social environment. Ideas are significant when they are shared and approved by society. Institutional and collective norms and ideas shape state policies and construct identities, and hence also the national interests of society.¹⁵ Therefore, the foreign policy of a state is influenced by ideas through the mediation of structural agents and individuals. The external environment assists in providing for political initiators with original ideas a window of opportunities to present their views.¹⁶

Other theories which discuss a contribution of individuals to formation of foreign policy are theories of decision-making. The basic assumption of these theories is that a state action in international relations may be defined by a set of decisions which are made by identified decision units, namely, decision-makers. Snyder, Bruck and Sapin¹⁷ pioneered in applying decision-making theories to foreign policy analysis in their 1962

¹² Ibid., 58-59.

¹³ Miriam Pyrs, "Developing a contextually relevant concept of regional hegemony: The case of South Africa, Zimbabwe and 'Quiet Diplomacy,'" *GIGA Working Paper 77* (Hamburg: German Institute of Global and Area Studies, 2008): 10.

¹⁴ Thomas Pedersen, "Cooperative Hegemony: Power, Ideas and Institutions in Regional Integration," *Review of International Studies* 28 (2002): 677.

¹⁵ David P. Houghton, "Reinvigorating the Study of Foreign Policy Decision Making: Toward a Constructivist Approach," *Foreign Policy Analysis* 3 (2007): 28-29.

¹⁶ Jeffrey T. Checkel, *Ideas and International Political Change: Soviet/ Russian Behavior and the End of the Cold War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), xi.

¹⁷ Richard C. Snyder, Henry W. Bruck and Burton Sapin, "Decision-making as an approach to the study of international politics," in *Foreign Policy Decision Making* ed. Richard C. Snyder et al. (New York: Free Press, 1962).

research. Rejecting the realist assumption that a state is a unitary actor, they argued that domestic factors influence foreign policy. This research triggered numerous studies.¹⁸

The decision-units approach attempts to deal with some of the drawbacks of the previous studies. This approach is based on foreign policy decision-making studies and rests on the premise that a decision unit is a mediating factor without which relations between the external environment and a state decision cannot be understood.

Herman argues that states are not homogeneous entities. When a foreign policy problem emerges, the response is decided upon by a particular forum. That is an authoritative decision unit, which can prevent other governmental entities from undermining its standpoint.¹⁹ There are three types of authoritative decision units: a predominant leader, a single group and a coalition of autonomous actors.²⁰

The latter kind of decision unit is created when a group of two or more entities is capable of recruiting state resources to deal with the problem on the agenda. Such a coalition may be composed of decision-makers, governmental agencies, interest groups, international organizations and corporations, state leaders and even foreign representatives.²¹ On other occasions, the decision unit may constitute a group, appointed to deal with a certain foreign policy problem. Members of such a unit belong to one organization and are expected to produce a joint response to a foreign policy dilemma under their authority.²² Finally, a predominant leader can function as a decision unit if s/he is able to defeat any opposition and, if necessary, to make a decision alone. A predominant leader may be a monarch, a single ruler or merely a person who is in charge of foreign policy. However, a predominant leader often reassigns his/her authority to another group – either because the decision to be made is not critical or because s/he prefers not to be the only deciding factor.²³

¹⁸ Hyam Gold, "Foreign policy decision making and the environment," *International Studies Quarterly* 22 (December 1978): 569-586; Joseph Frankel, *The Making of Foreign Policy: An Analysis of Decision-Making* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963); Michael Brecher, Blema Steinberg and Janice Gross Stein, "A framework for research on foreign policy behavior," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 13 (1969): 75-101.

¹⁹ Margaret G. Hermann, "How Decision Units Shape Foreign Policy: A Theoretical Framework," *International Studies Review* 3, no. 2 (Summer 2001), 48-55.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 48-55.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 61-63; Charles F. Hermann, "What decision units shape foreign policy: Individual, group, bureaucracy?" in *Foreign Policy Analysis*, ed. Richard L. Merritt (Lexington, Mass.: Lexington Books, 1975), 119-123.

²² Hermann, "How Decision Units Shape Foreign Policy," 60-61.

²³ *Ibid.*, 58-60.

Research Framework

Russia's foreign policy has been extensively examined by many researchers in recent years. The majority of studies describe Russia's foreign policy at the time of a specific leader²⁴ or deal with specific aspects of foreign policy, for example, the development of democratic norms,²⁵ Russian economic and strategic interests in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)²⁶ and other regions of the world, or Russian foreign policy towards the West.²⁷ However, previous research in this field has failed to create a theoretical framework which sheds light on the main factors shaping Russian foreign policy in general. This paper develops such a framework and applies it to Russia's relations with Ukraine and Belarus. The goals of the present research are to reveal the roots of Russian foreign policy and to examine whether a common pattern exists, regardless of the administration in power.

This paper addresses the question: Are there any specific factors which influenced Russian foreign policy towards Ukraine and Belarus during the period from 1991 to 2008? It is important to point out, however, that while the present research is concerned only with Russia's foreign policy towards the aforementioned European neighbors, the research framework is general enough to be applied to Russia's policy towards any other country.

At this point, the defining of the variables is in order. The dependent variable – foreign policy – has been defined in the previous chapter. The following discussion examines

²⁴ Lilia Shevtsova, *Yeltsin's Russia: Myths and Reality* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2000); Lilia Shevtsova, *Putin's Russia* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2005); Roy Allison, Margot Light and Stephen White, *Putin's Russia and the Enlarged Europe* (Oxford: Chatham House, 2006); Richard Sakwa, *Putin: Russia's Choice*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2008).

²⁵ Archie Brown, ed., *Contemporary Russian Politics: A Reader* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); Stephen White, Alex Pravda and Zvi Y. Gitelman, eds., *Developments in Russian Politics 5* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001); Michael McFaul, Nikolai Petrov and Andrei Ryabov, *Between Dictatorship and Democracy: Russian Post-Communist Political Reform* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2004).

²⁶ Marshall I. Goldman, *Petrostate: Putin, Power, and the New Russia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); Gabriela M. Thornton and Roger E. Kanet, "The Russian Federation and the Commonwealth of Independent States," in *The New Security Environment: The Impact on Russia, Central and Eastern Europe*, ed. Roger E. Kanet (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2005), 165-182; Bertil Nygren, *The Rebuilding of Greater Russia. Putin's Foreign Policy towards the CIS Countries* (London: Routledge, 2007).

²⁷ Robert Legvold, "All the Way: Crafting a US-Russia Alliance," *The National Interest* 70 (Winter 2002/03): 21-32; Dmitri Glinski-Vassiliev, "The Myth of the New Détente: The Roots of Putin's Pro-US Policy," *PONARS Policy Memo* 239 (January 2002): 1-5; Derek Averre, "'Sovereign Democracy' and Russia's Relations with the European Union," *Demokratizatsiya* 15, no. 2 (Spring 2007): 173-190; Mark Leonard and Nicu Popescu, *A Power Audit of EU-Russia Relations* (London: European Council on Foreign Relations, 2007); Dmitri Trenin, *Integratsiia i identichnost': Rossiia kak 'novyi zapad'* (Moscow: izdatel'stvo Evropa, 2006).

five independent variables which are expected to influence the formation of foreign policy: geopolitical considerations, threat perceptions, state power, interest groups and decision-makers' perception of the past.

Geopolitics is "a method of foreign policy analysis which seeks to understand, explain and predict international political behavior primarily in terms of geographical variables, such as location, size, climate, topography, demography, natural resources, technological development and potential."²⁸ Thus, geopolitical considerations are concerned with geographical factors which define the intentions and, as a result, actions of a state.²⁹

Geopolitical studies may be classified into several types, namely, studies of the sea,³⁰ the continent,³¹ the air,³² the climate,³³ the natural resources³⁴ and the distribution of population.³⁵ All these studies argue that geographical features are crucial in the formation of a state's foreign policy and international politics in general.

Although geopolitics may be valuable in analyzing a state's behavior, it can easily be abused, especially by those who transform it into a tool for propaganda or ideological agitation. For instance, the Third Reich used Haushofer's geopolitical concepts,³⁶ such as *Lebensraum* (living space), as a weapon in its war propaganda. Consequently, following World War II, the international community entirely ostracized geopolitical studies, and this ban was lifted only with the dissolution of the Soviet Union, whereupon the field of geopolitics flourished again.

Geopolitics has always been a fundamental element in Russian political thought. According to Parker, historically, Russia's core area was the Grand Duchy of Muscovy,

²⁸ Graham Evans and Jeffrey Newnham, *The Penguin Dictionary of International Relations* (London: Penguin Books, 1998), 197.

²⁹ Yuri N. Gladkii, *Rossia v labirintakh geograficheskoi sud'bi* (Saint Petersburg: Uridicheskii Center Press, 2006), 471.

³⁰ Alfred T. Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power upon History, 1660-1783* (New York: Sagamore Press, 1957).

³¹ Halford J. Mackinder, "The Geographical Pivot of History," *Geographical Journal* 23, no. 4 (1904): 421-444; Halford J. Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals and Reality*, ed. Anthony J. Pearce (New York: W. W. Norton, 1962); John P. LeDonne, *The Russian Empire and the World, 1700-1917: The Geopolitics of Expansion and Containment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Nicolas S. Spykmen, *American Strategy in World Politics: The United States and the Balance of Power* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1942).

³² Alexander P. De Seversky, *Air Power: Key to Survival* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1950).

³³ Aristotle, *Politics* 7, no. 7 (350 BCE), <http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/politics.7.seven.html> (accessed January 12, 2010).

³⁴ Woodruff D. Smith, "Friedrich Ratzel and the Origins of Lebensraum," *German Studies Review* 3, no. 1 (February 1980): 51-68.

³⁵ Gladkii, *Rossia v labirintakh geograficheskoi sud'bi*, 475.

³⁶ Karl E. Haushofer, *An English Translation and Analysis of Major General Karl Ernst Haushofer's Geopolitics of the Pacific Ocean: Studies on the Relationship between Geography and History* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2002).

around which Russia's rulers built a nation-state, and afterwards, the empire.³⁷ Russia is a giant continental power which is situated in the center of Eurasia. Its size, however, is its curse, for throughout history Russia's extensive territories have made it extremely vulnerable to foreign invasions.

Culturally, Russia is different from both Europe and Asia; therefore, neighboring states have always been suspicious of its potential and tried to restrain its influence and territorial growth. For this reason, Russia's foreign policy has often resembled that of an isolated and economically or politically threatened island state, rather than that of a continental power.³⁸

As any other substantial power, the Russian Federation strives to achieve regional recognition and influence in order to improve its security and to create optimal conditions for economic development. Hence, Russia directs a large amount of resources into establishing areas of influence along its borders. It strives to strengthen humanitarian, security and economic relations between itself and the CIS states and has initiated the founding of regional organizations and security regimes such as the Union State of Belarus and Russia, the Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC)³⁹ or the Customs Union, the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO)⁴⁰ and the Single Economic Space (SES)⁴¹ which secure it a dominant role in the region. It is obvious that Russia's foreign policy is largely determined by geographical considerations; therefore, although the geopolitical approach is open to criticism, this paper uses its concepts in the analysis of Russian foreign policy.

Another independent variable is threat perception. Here, the term threat is used in the sense of anticipation by decision-makers of possible danger to the state – be it political,

³⁷ Geoffrey Parker, *The Geopolitics of Domination* (London: Routledge, 1988), 66-67, 70-75.

³⁸ Vadim Tsimburskii, "Ostrov Rossiia," *Russikii arhipelag* (1993), http://www.archipelag.ru/ru_mir/ostrov-rus/cymbur/island_russia (accessed October 28, 2005).

³⁹ The Eurasian Economic Community originated from the Commonwealth of Independent States Customs Union between Belarus, Russia and Kazakhstan on March 29, 1996. EurAsEC was established on October 10, 2000, and is an international economic organization vested with functions involving formation of the common external customs borders of its member countries. (http://www.evrazes.com/i/other/Evrazes_questions&answers_eng.pdf (accessed September 12, 2010))

⁴⁰ The CSTO was founded on October 7, 2002, by the presidents of Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan on the basis of the Collective Security Treaty (CST) of May 15, 1992. On June 23, 2006, Uzbekistan joined the CSTO. The organization's main task is to coordinate and deepen the military-political cooperation. (http://www.odkb.gov.ru/start/index_aengl.html (accessed September 12, 2010))

⁴¹ The creation of a Common Economic Space was announced by Russia, Ukraine, Belarus and Kazakhstan on February 23, 2003. The Single Economic Space was born on September 19, 2003, during a CIS Summit in Yalta. This space was supposed to become the material basis for a possible future interstate association – the Organization of the Regional Integration (ORI); however, the plan was suspended in 2005. (http://www.neg.by/publication/2003_07_15_2632.html (accessed October 18, 2010))

military or economic. The term “threat perception” is based on the “balance of threat” theory developed by Stephen Walt.⁴² Walt claims that states create alliances to balance against perceived threats and not merely against an opponent’s power. He believes the threat-perception level to be influenced by aggregate power, geographical proximity, offensive abilities and offensive intentions.⁴³

Aggregate power is a state’s total resources; a state with more resources poses a greater threat than one with less. Geographical proximity is also significant, since neighboring states are perceived as more threatening than distant ones. Offensive capabilities are determined by a state’s ability to threaten the sovereignty and territorial integrity of another state. Finally, offensive intentions of a state will strengthen the adversary’s tendency to react. Although Walt’s definitions of the aforementioned variables have been criticized,⁴⁴ his theory may nonetheless help to assess decision-makers’ threat perception, since it emphasizes the importance of offensive intentions over material power.

Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the RF, under its Foreign Minister Andrey Kozyrev, adopted a pro-Western policy. In an attempt to join the “civilized world,”⁴⁵ Russia repeatedly suggested that it would gain access to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and in the future even to the European Union (EU).⁴⁶ However, NATO has not only remained operational, unlike the dismantled Warsaw Pact, it also closed its doors to Russia and proclaimed its intentions to expand itself eastward. Russia felt disillusioned and threatened because of the rejection, and alleged that the West had breached the assurances not to proceed with the enlargement contemplated throughout the talks on German unification in 1990.⁴⁷ Additionally, the alliance’s military capacities and proximity to the CIS borders did not contribute to Russia’s sense of security.⁴⁸ Russia also felt deeply deceived,⁴⁹ perceiving NATO’s enlargement as a

⁴² Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987).

⁴³ Ibid., 9.

⁴⁴ Martin Griffiths, ed. *Encyclopedia of International Relations and Global Politics* (London: Routledge, 2005), 49-50.

⁴⁵ Uri M. Baturin, Alexandr L. Il’in, Vladimir F. Kadatskii, Vyacheslav V. Kostikov, Mikhail A. Krasnov, Alexandr Y. Livshits, Konstantin V. Nikiforov, Ludmila G. Pihoiia i Georgii A. Satarov, *Epokha Yeltsina: ocherki politicheskoi istorii* (Moscow: Vagrius, 2001), 473-474.

⁴⁶ Lionel Ponsard, *Russia, NATO and Cooperative Security: Bridging the Gap* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 16.

⁴⁷ Yevgenii Primakov, *Godi v bol’shoi politike* (Moscow: Sovershenno sekretno, 1999), 231-233; “Rasshirenie NATO i narushennii obeshanii Zapada,” *Der Spiegel*, November 27, 2009, <http://rus.ruvr.ru/2009/11/27/2432949.html> (accessed August 18, 2010).

⁴⁸ Sergei Bogdanov, “Problemy, kotorye nado reshat’ uzhe seichas,” *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, May 28, 1996.

challenge to its regional stance and to the strategic balance in Europe in general. This agenda was interpreted by Russia as persistence in “old modes of thinking,” namely, setting up a *cordon sanitaire* by establishing buffer states to contain Russia within its borders.

Threat perception is closely connected with yet another independent variable – power. In international relations, the term power is identified primarily with the realist school and the writings of Morgenthau, who defined power as “anything that establishes and maintains the power of man over man.”⁵⁰ According to him, the content of power and the way it is used are determined by the political and cultural environment. It includes all the relations in which a man influences the acts of other men by using physical, moral or constitutional means.⁵¹ However, this definition is extremely general and all-encompassing.⁵² In this article state power includes a state’s fiscal and “economic capacity; the size, health, educational levels and technical skills of the population; military capabilities, including the ability to project power globally; natural resources and mineral wealth”;⁵³ along with conceptual and symbolic resources. None of these power components has direct relation to the state’s power; instead they co-influence one another, and therefore must be weighed together.⁵⁴

Here, the term power reflects the approach that centers on control over resources, which maintains that control over resources leads to influence over actors and events. Many researchers have expanded this approach by using “abstract” resources such as leadership skills, the structure of armed forces and willingness to use force, and other non-tangible resources such as conceptual and symbolic ones, for instance, ideology and religion.⁵⁵

Even after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the RF has not ceased to be a powerful state. Russia is still the largest country in the world. Its military might, nuclear reserves, natural resources, large and skilled population, and international status (as a permanent

⁴⁹ Dmitri Trenin, *The End of Eurasia: Russia on the Border between Geopolitics and Globalization* (Moscow: Carnegie Moscow Center, 2001), 282.

⁵⁰ Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations*, 9.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Michael C. Williams, “Why Ideas Matter in International Relations: Hans Morgenthau, Classical Realism, and the Moral Construction of Power Politics,” *International Organization* 58, no. 4 (Autumn 2004): 639.

⁵³ Peter Shearman, “Personality, Politics and Power: Foreign Policy under Putin,” in *Russia after Yeltsin*, ed. Vladimir Tikhomirov (Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2001), 234.

⁵⁴ For example, the size of the population has a major effect on the economy and the military, helping the state create strategic depth when dealing with its adversaries.

⁵⁵ Michael Barnett and Raymond Duvall, “Power in International Politics,” *International Organization* 59, no. 1 (Winter 2005): 49-50.

member of the UN Security Council) rightfully grant it the title of a great power. However, a deep economic crisis and the loss of its superpower status in the early 1990s caused Russia to revise its power perception and recognize its decline. This decline was not merely in “hard” material factors of power, but also in “soft” ones relating to national morale and societal wellbeing.⁵⁶ Russians perceived themselves as a humiliated nation which “had surrendered to the mercy of the victors in the ‘Cold War.’”⁵⁷ The Russian political elite was desperately trying to boost Russia’s power image and to reconstruct the Russian state’s glory. However, when the diplomatic pro-Western approach proved unproductive, Russia appealed to its energy resources to persuade the West of its potential. Using its resources, the RF has gained a great deal of leverage on its neighbors in both the CIS and the West. Thus, Russia’s energy has proved to be not only the spine of its economy but also the muscle of its foreign policy.

Another independent variable influencing Russian foreign policy is interest groups, defined as “voluntary associations of individuals, firms, or smaller groups uniting in order to defend or fight for a common interest, with the intention of influencing and intervening in the political process, but without ambition to form a political party.”⁵⁸ With respect to foreign policy, interest groups that have an effect on the government operate on two levels: “they communicate information about the environment to the decision-making elite and they may also advocate policies to those who wield authority in the system.”⁵⁹ Such advocacy may exert pressure on the decision-makers and influence policy formation. Sometimes this process may be bidirectional, in that decision-makers can also affect interest groups and put pressure on them to promote the government’s policies. However, the influence of interest groups on foreign policy is hard to trace. As Salmin argues:

Foreign policy content is an area that is best compared to a “black box,” where the input is made up of virtually everything and the output represents the foreign policy *per se*. Various *agents* or *actors* operating in the foreign policy domain appear as forces that affect a certain political and administrative process...[and] will consistently seek to subordinate “foreign

⁵⁶ Shearman, “Personality,” 236.

⁵⁷ (Translation mine) Baturin, *Epokha Yeltsina*, 469.

⁵⁸ Hans J. Puhle, “Interest Groups, History of,” in *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences*, ed. Neil J. Smelser and Paul B. Baltes (New York: Elsevier, 2001), 7703.

⁵⁹ Brecher, Steinberg and Stein, “A framework,” 84.

policy” to their own “agenda”...and can be restrained only by other actors operating in the same field in accordance with the same logic. Consequently, what we call “foreign policy” will emerge as the resulting vector of the interaction of these actors ensuring from their striving to maximize their gains while minimizing their losses.⁶⁰

Though Articles 80(3) and 86(a) of the 1993 Russian Constitution state clearly that “the President of the Russian Federation shall determine the guidelines of the internal and foreign policies of the State”⁶¹ and will “govern the foreign policy of the Russian Federation,”⁶² Russia’s foreign policy has been profoundly influenced by strong interest groups in various fields. Both Yeltsin’s and Putin’s administrations had supporters who gained substantial political weight, which allowed them to intervene in the decision-making process concerning domestic and foreign policies by lobbying for their interests in the government.⁶³ Thus, the too-slow evolvement of the political union between Belarus and Russia during Yeltsin’s presidency is usually associated with strong opposition from the business and financial circles.⁶⁴

The final independent variable is decision-makers’ perception of the past. According to Wallace and Hill, an “effective foreign policy rests upon a shared sense of national identity, of a nation-state’s ‘place in the world,’ its friends and enemies, its interests and aspirations. These underlying assumptions are embedded in national history and myth, changing slowly over time as political leaders reinterpret them and external and internal developments reshape them.”⁶⁵

⁶⁰ Aleksei Salmin, “The Black Side of Foreign Policy: Internal Factors in the System of International Ties, Obligations and Projects of the Russian Federation” (2002), in *Russian Foreign Policy in Transition: Concepts and Realities*, ed. Andrei Melville and Tatiana Shakleina (Budapest: CEU Press, 2005), 404-405.

⁶¹ <http://www.constitution.ru/en/10003000-05.htm> (accessed September 23, 2010).

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Irina Kobrinskaia, “Vnutrennie faktori vneshnei politiki v postkommunisticheskoi Rossii,” in *Rossiia politicheskaiia*, ed. Lilia Shevtsova (Moscow: Moscow Carnegie Center, 1998), 273-319; Yuri Tsyganov, “Farewell to the Oligarchs? Presidency and Business Tycoons in Contemporary Russia,” in *Russia after Yeltsin*, ed. Vladimir Tikhomirov (Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2001), 79-102.

⁶⁴ Kobrinskaia, “Vnutrennie faktori,” 287; “O rossiisko-belorusskoi integratsii,” *Sovet po vneshnei i oboronnoi politike* (October 1, 1999), http://www.svip.ru/live/materials.asp?m_id=6936&r_id=6950 (accessed March 13, 2008); Michael McFaul, “A Precarious Peace: Domestic Politics in the Making of Russian Foreign Policy,” *International Security* 22, no. 3 (Winter 1997-1998): 27; Anatolii A. Rozanov, “Vneshniaia politika Belorussii: predstavleniia i real’nost,” *Pro et Contra* 3, no. 2 (Spring 1998): 2-3, http://uisrussia.msu.ru/docs/nov/pec/1998/2/ProEtContra_1998_2_05.pdf (accessed December 21, 2010).

⁶⁵ Christopher Hill and William Wallace, “Introduction: Actors and Actions,” in *The Actors in Europe’s Foreign Policy*, ed. Christopher Hill (London: Routledge, 1996), 8.

The perception of the past encompasses all the images, beliefs, insights and traditions that are based on the interpretation by the state elite of the state's collective memory and past experiences. The decision-makers', or rather, the elite's perception of the past is based on the knowledge that has been accumulated and passed down in the course of the state's history. In each period, the top leadership reinterprets past events, traditions and historical experiences of the nation and it is the meaning that it bestows on the past that shapes the foreign policy of the era.

Past perceptions influence decision-makers in three main ways. First, they provide the heuristics and generalizations to sort out information about the world. Second, they guide policymakers in the process of shaping their image of other states. Finally, they form the identity of the state.

Russia's negative reaction to the NATO bombing campaign against Yugoslavia in the spring of 1999 can be attributed to its perceptions of the past. Even though Russia realized the seriousness of the situation around Kosovo and eventually criticized the Yugoslavian leader, it still would not participate in or support U.S.-NATO policies against its Orthodox-Slavic brethren in Yugoslavia. There are four reasons for this position. The first is Russia's Orthodox-Slavic identity, which creates mutual sympathy between the two nations.⁶⁶ The second motive is Russia's entrenched view of Yugoslavia as a historically loyal ally, which dates back to the Yugoslavian resistance to the Nazi regime during World War II. The third reason is Russia's perception of its international role as a world power. Inasmuch as Russia believed that the United States and NATO had diminished its status in the previous Yugoslavian crisis in 1995, it now strongly opposed any military actions against Yugoslavia. The fourth reason is the RF's concern that the Yugoslavian scenario might be reenacted within its own borders. The first Chechen war (1994-1996) had a tremendous effect on the Russian political elite. Russia drew parallels from the Serbian war against Kosovo (1998-1999) to the situation in the North Caucasus, and from NATO's war against Yugoslavia (1999) to a possible Western intervention in the Chechen conflict under the "humanitarian mandate."

⁶⁶ Owing to the campaign, the Duma voted to form a new Slavic nation by uniting the countries of Russia, Belarus and Yugoslavia within the Union State of Russia and Belarus.

Methodology

The Russian-Ukrainian and Russian-Belarusian relations are examined and analyzed in light of the above variables. The two cases are compared with respect to the presidencies of Boris Yeltsin (1991-1999) and Vladimir Putin (2000-2008).

This paper analyzes presidential speeches, decision-makers' memoirs, audio and video recordings, decisions or absence thereof, and official declarations of the Russian government towards Ukraine and Belarus, as well as official agreements and empirical reality that exemplify the implementation of Russia's foreign policy. Russian foreign policy is analyzed using the method of structured, focused comparison combined with the process-tracing approach.⁶⁷ While the former involves a comparison of the two cases and "deals selectively with only those aspects of each case that are believed to be relevant to the research objectives and data requirements of the study,"⁶⁸ the latter allows detection of a causal chain linking independent and dependent variables. This linkage is examined and the findings are presented in the forthcoming chapters.

⁶⁷ Alexander L. George and Timothy J. McKeown, "Case studies and theories of organizational decision making," *Advances in Information Processing in Organizations* 2 (1985): 35.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 41-43.

Russian-Belarusian Relations 1991-2008

Geopolitical Considerations

After the dissolution of the USSR, Russia tried to maintain control over the post-Soviet space by creating, on December 8, 1991, a regional organization – the CIS⁶⁹ – and by signing the series of agreements over the years that followed. However, most of these agreements were not fulfilled; Belarus, along with other republics, began to drift away from Russia, which at that time was attempting to stabilize its broken economy and ties with the West.

Because of a pro-Western vector within the Russian foreign policy of the early 1990s, Russia was concerned that an involvement in the “near abroad”⁷⁰ would jeopardize its relations with the West. However, despite its great expectations, Russia was not incorporated into the western hemisphere and was not treated as it would have wished to be. NATO’s enlargement eastward was perceived as a Western political and military spread of influence. Russia found itself in a dire situation. On the one hand, it was facing a breakup of the large geopolitical bloc it had once owned; on the other, it felt that the West was trying to isolate it from the European environment by picking up the pieces of its former empire.⁷¹

The 1993 Foreign Policy Concept of the RF marked a change in Russia’s previous policy. While acknowledging Russia’s desire “to achieve the equal and natural incorporation...into the world community as a great power,”⁷² the new approach nevertheless stipulated that “Russia’s geopolitical situation dictates the need to conduct an active, pragmatic, and balanced policy.”⁷³ CIS countries were designated by the Concept as a number one priority of the foreign policy. Belarus, along with Ukraine and Kazakhstan, were singled out as high-priority states with which Russia “must seek to reach full-fledged political treaties... at the first opportunity.”⁷⁴

⁶⁹ The Baltic States never joined the organization and it included twelve post-Soviet states until Georgia’s secession on August 18, 2008, on account of the South Ossetia war.

⁷⁰ Russian Foreign Minister Kozyrev, initially used the term in 1992 to designate fourteen newly independent states which were once part of the USSR.

⁷¹ *Doklad ‘Rossiia-SNG’: nuzhdaetsia li v korrektyrovke pozitsiia Zapada?* (Moscow: Sluzhba vneshnei razvedki Rossii, 1994).

⁷² “Foreign Policy Conception of the Russian Federation” (1993), in *Russian Foreign Policy in Transition: Concepts and Realities*, ed. Andrei Melville and Tatiana Shakhleina (Budapest: CEU Press, 2005), 27.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 34.

Western failure to take Russia's interests into consideration pushed the Kremlin to regain its position in the "near abroad," and it was assumed that this goal could be achieved through reintegration of the post-Soviet space. The 1993 Russian "Monroe Doctrine"⁷⁵ declared Russia's relations with neighboring countries, as well as "the entire geopolitical space of the former Soviet Union,"⁷⁶ to be Russia's "sphere of its vital interests."⁷⁷

Belarus seemed an ideal candidate for integration. As President Yeltsin recollected after signing, in February 1995, the Treaty of Friendship, Good-Neighborliness and Cooperation with Belarus, "the two nations [had] shared a common historical experience over many centuries."⁷⁸ That, he declared, had "created the basis for signing the treaty and other documents on deeper integration of our two countries. Among all CIS countries, Belarus has the greatest rights to such a relationship due to its geographical location, its contacts with Russia, our friendship and the progress of its reforms."⁷⁹

An official integration process was launched on April 2, 1996, by forming the Commonwealth of Russia and Belarus. Exactly a year later, the Commonwealth was transformed into the Union of Belarus and Russia. Then, on December 25, 1998, after a long stagnation in the relations, the presidents of Belarus and Russia signed the Declaration on the Further Unification of Russia and Belarus. The culmination of integration was an establishment of a Union State between the RF and Belarus on December 8, 1999. Russian aspirations to form a union – as Yeltsin put it, "simply unite and there will be a Belo-Rus"⁸⁰ – stem from Russian geopolitical considerations.

First, the union of Belarus and Russia has allowed the latter to regain control over the western part of its former Soviet border. In line with the concept of double borders,⁸¹ "the

⁷⁵ Nikolai Lomagin, "Novye nezavisimye gosudarstva kak sfera interesov Rossii i USA," *Pro et Contra* 5, no. 2 (2000): 68-69.

⁷⁶ Konstantin Eggert, "Ambartsumov Foreign Policy Concept Viewed," *Izvestiya* (8 August 1992), in *Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States: Documents, Data, and Analysis*, ed. Zbigniew Brzezinski and Paige Sullivan (New York: Armonk, 1997), 98.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ "Yeltsin on Protecting CIS Border," *Itar-Tass* (22 February 1995), in *Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States: Documents, Data, and Analysis*, ed. Zbigniew Brzezinski and Paige Sullivan (New York: Armonk, 1997), 311.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ "Yeltsin Looking Forward to 'Belo-Rus,'" *Vesti newscast* (22 February 1995), in *Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States: Documents, Data, and Analysis*, ed. Zbigniew Brzezinski and Paige Sullivan (New York: Armonk, 1997), 314.

⁸¹ It was first presented in President Yeltsin's *Decree № 940 On a Strategic Course of the Russian Federation towards the Countries – Members of the CIS* (September 14, 1995), http://www.mosds.ru/Dokum/dokum_rosUZ940-1995.shtml (accessed June 17, 2009). Then, the concept was represented in *Fundamentals of the Border Policy of the Russian Federation* (October 5, 1996), http://www.fas.org/irp/world/russia/docs/border_policy.html (accessed August 25, 2010).

use of former Soviet border infrastructure along the perimeter of the USSR borders...would stabilize the situation and buy Russia time to build up its own borders.”⁸² Russia’s return to Europe not only affects the strategic balance in Europe but also Russia’s position in the CIS.

Second, integration of Russia and Belarus was perceived by the Kremlin⁸³ as a centripetal force. A complete dysfunction of the CIS organization as an integration platform pushed Russia to look for other mechanisms that would allow it to prevent the centrifugal tendencies in the post-Soviet space.⁸⁴ This vision is echoed in Yeltsin’s statement, “After Belarus and Russia, it is possible that Kazakhstan may join the process. Thus in this way, a certain nucleus will emerge in the Commonwealth and states will be bolder and more resolute in coming together.”⁸⁵

Third, integration with Belarus was economically beneficial for Russia. The geographical location of Belarus allows Russia to transfer its goods and energy supplies, mainly oil and gas, to its European clients safely, inexpensively and quickly, using Belarusian developed transit infrastructure.⁸⁶ Belarusian heavy industry was also a source of the interest of the RF and its large companies.⁸⁷

Fourth, Russia has a strategic interest in Belarus, since the latter hosts Russian military facilities on its territory – the ballistic-missile early-warning Radar Node in Gantsevichi and the 43rd Communications Hub for the Russian navy in Vileyka.

Finally, for Russia, the geographical location of Belarus makes it Russia’s most preferable strategic ally. Belarusian significance was all the greater since Russia perceived the eastward enlargement of NATO as a Western attempt to build a modern *cordon sanitaire* along its borders from the Baltic States to the Black Sea. If such a buffer zone were created, it would threaten to isolate Russia from the West and to diminish its

⁸² Trenin, *The End*, 117-118.

⁸³ The Russian state institution of the presidency.

⁸⁴ Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko once confirmed: “Why did we create the Union of Belarus and Russia at that time? It was a reaction to the dissatisfaction with the policies that prevailed within the CIS. We went on with deeper integration and wanted to set an example.” (September 9, 2002) ((Translation mine) <http://www.mfa.gov.by/ru/press/news/2002+09+10+2.html> (accessed June 12, 2010))

⁸⁵ “Yeltsin’s Speech at Academy of Science,” *Radio Minsk* (22 February 1995), in *Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States: Documents, Data, and Analysis*, ed. Zbigniew Brzezinski and Paige Sullivan (New York: Armonk, 1997), 312.

⁸⁶ Arkady Moshes, “Russia’s Belarus Dilemma,” *PONARS Policy Memo Series* 182 (Washington: Council on Foreign Relations, December 2000): 2; Anastasia Nesvetailova, “Russia and Belarus: The quest for the union; or who will pay for Belarus’s path to recovery?” in *Contemporary Belarus: Between Democracy and Dictatorship*, ed. Elena A. Korosteleva, Colin W. Lawson and Rosalind J. Marsh (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 159.

⁸⁷ Nikolai Zen’kovich, *Tainy ushedshego veka: Granitsy, spory, obidy* (Moscow: Olma-Press, 2005), 126-127.

influence in both Europe and Eurasia. Moreover, Belarus serves as “Russia’s natural shield”⁸⁸ against military expansion from the West, since its territory is the closest gateway to Moscow. Yet, the benefit is reciprocal: Belarus facilitates a Russian access to its isolated district of Kaliningrad and solves communication and supply problems with the area.⁸⁹

The abovementioned geopolitical considerations have not changed since Vladimir Putin’s rise to the presidency. Belarus remained at the top of Russia’s priority list as the most important geopolitical ally on the Russian western flank.⁹⁰ Belarusian membership in Moscow-led regional organizations, such as the CIS, the CSTO, the CES, the EurAsEC or the Customs Union, had great importance for Russia. However, under President Putin integration has escalated into confrontation and an impasse in the relations between the two countries. Putin initiated a new phase of integration with Belarus, that is, the concrete formation of the Union State. Although the 1999 treaty announced that the two independent states would unite into a single Union State, a precise model of unification had not been defined.⁹¹ During President Putin’s first term in office, several attempts were made to deal with this issue; however, the turning point in integration between Belarus and Russia occurred in 2002. First, on June 11, during the Saint Petersburg meeting between Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko and President Putin, the latter claimed that Russia in its relations with Belarus must “separate flies from chops.”⁹² Then, at the Kremlin press conference on June 24, when asked about the Union State, Putin expressed his deep dissatisfaction with the current situation and criticized the 1999 treaty.⁹³ However, the climax occurred on August 14 when at a

⁸⁸ Hrihoriy Perepilitsa, “Belarusian-Russian integration and its impact on the security of Ukraine,” in *Belarus at the Crossroads*, ed. Sherman W. Garnett and Robert Legvold (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1999), 82-83.

⁸⁹ Nesvetailova, “Russia and Belarus,” 160.

⁹⁰ “Putin pro Belarus,” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vs-oLbWNcYE> (accessed June 15, 2010).

⁹¹ In January 2001, Lukashenko admitted that although the aims of the Union had long been defined, “tactics...are not yet agreed upon.” (*RFE/RL Newslines*, Part II (4 January 2002); *Belorusskaia delovaia gazeta* (6 January 2002))

⁹² The then chairman of the Duma International Affairs, Dmitry Rogozin, deciphered the expression: “Alexander Grigor’evich is a fly, and Belarusian people are the chops.” ((Translation mine) Irina Khalip, “Evangelia ot lukavogo 2,” *Novaya gazeta* 85 (6 August 2010), <http://www.novayagazeta.ru/data/2010/085/12.html?print=201016092133> (accessed September 15, 2010)) However, the most common decryption is that Putin warned Lukashenko of an attempt to create “something like the USSR” where Russians are the “chops” and the Belarusians are the “flies.” (“Pod kolpakom u Putina,” *Belorusskaia gazeta* (5 December 2002), <http://news.tut.by/society/33289.html> (accessed October 12, 2010))

⁹³ President Putin said: “The time has come to stop chewing gum after ten years. We must decide whether we want it or not and what we want.” ((Translation mine) “Stenograficheskii otchet o press-konferentsii dlia rossiiskikh i inostrannikh zhurnalistov,” *Kremlin.ru* (June 24, 2002))

meeting with Lukashenko, Putin proposed two models of the Union State. The first, as defined by Putin, was “the most straight-forward and the most specific”⁹⁴ – the creation of a single federal state. Accordingly, Belarus would join the RF as a single federation subject or as six separate provinces. Another variant was to proceed with unification similar to that in the European Union.⁹⁵ On September 4, in response to the Belarusian objections,⁹⁶ the Russian president in his letter to Minsk added to the aforementioned scenarios yet another one – the Belarusian version of integration – to preserve the status-quo,⁹⁷ while emphasizing that the first two were more suitable than the last.

As a result, while Putin’s first tenure (2000-2004) was characterized by several attempts to initiate concrete integration steps, his second one (2004-2008) might be described as a period of disillusion and took the form of an enduring confrontation accompanied by gas, oil and food wars. Putin’s Russia took into account geopolitical considerations shaping its foreign policy and continued Yeltsin’s legacy of integration with Belarus; however, the shift came in Putin’s perspective. The president’s pragmatic ideology and the “economic efficiency”⁹⁸ influenced Russia’s geopolitical vision. Even during his first official visit to Minsk on April 16, 2000, Putin stated that “the main direction of implementing the treaty establishing the Union State is precisely the economic direction,”⁹⁹ based on which the remaining processes would be developed. The Russian aspirations in Belarus, along with original geopolitical considerations, concentrated on gaining absolute control over the Belarusian transit infrastructure and economic space. However, Belarus was reluctant to give up its national assets and its sovereignty, whereas Russia was loath to capitulate to the Belarusian confederation formula and proceeded with the tense status quo.

⁹⁴ (Translation mine) “Otvety na voprosy zhurnalistov po okonchaniy rossiisko-belorusskikh peregovorov,” *Kremlin.ru* (August 14, 2002).

⁹⁵ Aleksey Penzin, “Korotkaia vstrecha, sensatsionnie provodi,” *SMI* (14 August 2002), <http://www.smi.ru/text/02/08/14/665705.html> (accessed August 21, 2010).

⁹⁶ <http://www.mfa.gov.by/ru/press/news/2002+09+10+2.html> (accessed June 12, 2010); <http://www1.voanews.com/russian/news/a7337a720027087237271.html?moddate=2002708723> (accessed October 25, 2009).

⁹⁷ Yekaterina Grigor’eva, “Ultimatum pochoi,” *Izvestiya* (5 September 2002), <http://www.izvestia.ru/politic/article23400/index.html> (accessed May 12, 2008).

⁹⁸ Vladimir Putin, “Poslanie Federal’nomu Sobraniyu Rossiiskoi Federatsii,” *Kremlin.ru* (July 8, 2000).

⁹⁹ (Translation mine) “Sostoialis’ peregovory ispolniaushego obiazannosti Prezidenta Rossii Vladimira Putina s Prezidentom Belorussii Alexandrom Lukashenko,” *Kremlin.ru* (April 16, 2000); Dmitri Gornostaev, “Pervii visit Vladimira Putina v souznni Minsk prines sensatsiu,” *Nezavisimaya gazeta* (18 April 2000), http://www.ng.ru/politics/2000-04-18/1_sensation.html (accessed April 25, 2009).

Threat Perception

At the outset of the 1990s, Russia's foreign policy had been profoundly affected by two main threat perceptions. First, Russia was alarmed by a possible spillover of military conflicts and of criminal groups from neighboring CIS states. Second, Russia was concerned about obtaining control over its conventional and, above all, non-conventional weapons which were located in Belarus, Kazakhstan and Ukraine. As Foreign Minister Kozyrev noted in January 1994, the CIS "is where Russia's vital top priority interests are concentrated. The main threats to these interests also originate there."¹⁰⁰

In the Belarusian case the first threat was irrelevant, since Belarus was the most security-stable state in the CIS region. The second one was removed smoothly with full cooperation of the Belarusian side,¹⁰¹ which was committed to establishing a nuclear-free zone due to the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster.

In the mid-1990s, however, to Russia's aforementioned threat perceptions was added the Western enlargement, involving NATO and the EU. This factor caused an increase in Belarus significance in Russian foreign policy during both Yeltsin's and Putin's eras.

From the start, Yeltsin's government made NATO membership "a long-term political aim"¹⁰² of the RF. The Soviet Union fell, the Warsaw Pact dismantled itself, Russian forces pulled out of Eastern Europe and Russia supported the independence of the post-Soviet republics, thereby demonstrating its sincere desire to be part of the European continent and abandon its Soviet legacy. However, NATO had not dissolved itself, but instead adopted a goal of expanding its membership to the new countries; it ignored Russia's aspirations to join, and engaged in its enlargement into Eastern Europe. The

¹⁰⁰ Deyermond, *Security*, 52.

¹⁰¹ The removal of tactical nuclear weapons was completed in April 1992. Belarus signed the Lisbon Protocol in May 1992, ratified START-I and acceded to the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in February 1993. Withdrawal of Russian strategic nuclear forces was completed by late November 1996.

¹⁰² On December 20, 1991, Yeltsin declared that

This will contribute to creating a climate of mutual understanding and trust, strengthening stability and cooperation on the European continent. We consider these relations to be very serious and wish to develop this dialogue in each and every direction, both on the political and military levels. Today we are raising a question of Russia's membership in NATO, however regarding it as a long-term political aim.

Russian political elite began to doubt Western intentions. Russia felt deceived, disgruntled and primarily threatened.¹⁰³

Yet again, Belarus proved to be Russia's "western shield," as Perepelitsa noticed: "Its geographical location has always made Belarus hostage to whatever differences Russia may have had with the West."¹⁰⁴ Russia had decided to regain its control over the post-Soviet space and first and foremost in its immediate neighborhood. The Russian efforts to include Belarus in its security zone and to turn it into a Russian military ally eventually succeeded. Despite Belarus' aspirations at the outset of its independence to establish itself as a neutral state, it signed a comprehensive packet of military and economic agreements with Russia in July 1992.¹⁰⁵ The two countries, in line with these accords, committed themselves to the establishment of a unified strategic space and stated that "none of the contracting parties will allow its territory to be used by third country or countries for armed aggression or hostile activities against the other contracting party."¹⁰⁶ Although Russia secured Belarus' role as a buffer state, it was not enough to neutralize the perceived onslaught of the West. Therefore, a year later, upon Russia's demand,¹⁰⁷ Belarus joined the Collective Security Treaty and officially became Russia's military ally.

Concerns about NATO's expansion led Russia to uphold its "Monroe Doctrine" in the "near abroad." The 1993 Russian Military Doctrine declared that "the security interests of the Russian Federation and other states belonging to the CIS may require [Russian] troops (forces) and resources to be deployed outside the territory of the Russian Federation."¹⁰⁸ On April 1994, Yeltsin issued an official decree to establish military bases in the CIS and in Latvia so as "to ensure the security of the Russian Federation and the aforementioned states."¹⁰⁹ Consequently, Belarus military and strategic importance was enhanced. In January 1995, Russia and Belarus signed agreements regarding Russian access to the military facilities on Belarusian territory. Accordingly, Belarus agreed to

¹⁰³ On September 8, 1995, Yeltsin held a press conference at which he stated that Russia would not accept the expected NATO enlargement: "When NATO approaches Russia's borders, one must acknowledge the existence of two military blocs," hinting at the possible creation of a defense alliance in the post-Soviet space. (Shevtsova, *Yeltsin's Russia*, 140.)

¹⁰⁴ Perepelitsa, "Belarusian-Russian integration," 83.

¹⁰⁵ http://www.evolutio.info/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=444&Itemid=52 (accessed October 15, 2010).

¹⁰⁶ (Translation mine) <http://www.com.lawmix.ru/abro/9859> (accessed September 8, 2010).

¹⁰⁷ Zbigniew Brzezinski and Paige Sullivan, eds., *Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States: Documents, Data, and Analysis* (New York: Armonk, 1997), 295.

¹⁰⁸ <http://www.fas.org/nuke/guide/russia/doctrine/russia-mil-doc.html> (accessed May 11, 2010).

¹⁰⁹ *Interfax* (6 July 1995).

lease its land for twenty-five years for the ballistic-missile early-warning Radar Node in Gantsevichi near Baranovichi, which was supposed to replace the one in Latvia,¹¹⁰ and for the low-frequency radio station or the 43rd Communications Hub for the Russian navy in Vileyka. Moreover, Belarus signed an agreement with Russia on joint guarding of its external borders in February 1995. Yeltsin's relieved comments elucidated Belarus' centrality in Russia's defense concept of double borders: "What a saving it is: We protect the external border of the CIS; we protect the border of Belarus; we protect Russia, and we do it together, and we do it all in Belarus."¹¹¹

Under the 1999 Union State treaty, Belarus and Russia agreed to conduct joint defense and foreign policies, coordinate military buildup activities, develop armed forces of the parties, use military infrastructure jointly, practice other measures for maintaining national defense of the Union State, and to cooperate on military and border issues.¹¹²

With Putin's arrival to the presidency, Belarus military importance increased. In the 2000 Russian Military Doctrine, priority was given to Belarus. The doctrine stated that the RF "implements a joint defense policy together with the Republic of Belarus, coordinates with it activities in the sphere of military organizational development of the armed forces of the member states of the Union State, and the employment of military infrastructure, and takes other measures to maintain the defense capabilities of the Union State."¹¹³

The strategic value of Belarus seemed to be gaining momentum in Russia's security perception in light of international developments. First, there has been an increase of U.S. military activity in the post-Soviet space since September 11, 2001;¹¹⁴ second, the Baltic States joined NATO on March 2004, thereby changing the regional status quo; third, in July 2004 talks began between the U.S. and the new NATO members – the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland – regarding the possible deployment of a U.S. ballistic-

¹¹⁰ In 1994 Russia began negotiating with Latvia on the extension of the use of Skrunda facilities, where Russian ballistic-missile warning systems were stationed. In April the parties reached an agreement whereby Latvia consented to lease Russia its territory in Skrunda for four years in exchange for \$5 million annually until August 1998. Without Skrunda radar, a western Russian security network had become extremely vulnerable. (<http://www.globalsecurity.org/wmd/world/russia/skrunda.htm> (accessed July 15, 2010)) The declining efficiency of the Russian space-based network of Oko and Prognoz early-warning military satellites further enhanced the military significance of the Baranovichi Radar Node. ("Russia's military satellites," *International Institute for Strategic Studies* 7, no. 6 (July 2001))

¹¹¹ "Yeltsin's Speech," 312.

¹¹² <http://www.soyuz.by/ru/?guid=10447> (accessed October 10, 2010).

¹¹³ "Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation" (21 April 2000), in *Russian Foreign Policy in Transition: Concepts and Realities*, ed. Andrei Melville and Tatiana Shackleina (Budapest: CEU Press, 2005), 109 (pp. 105-127).

¹¹⁴ The post-Soviet space and especially the states of Central Asia were extremely important for the U.S. in its war against terrorism.

missile defense system in one of these countries; and fourth, Russian influence in the CIS has been shaken by pro-Western moods in the region in the wake of the upheavals known as the “Colored Revolutions.”¹¹⁵

As a result, despite setbacks in political and economic integration, Russia under President Putin continued to accelerate military-integration processes between the two states. These included regular sessions of the Joint Collegium of the Belarusian and Russian defense ministries; joint air defense forces operations;¹¹⁶ joint logistical support for the regional group of troops of the Russian and Belarusian armed forces;¹¹⁷ conduction of joint military exercises¹¹⁸ and the transfer of Russian weaponry to Belarus.¹¹⁹ Consequently, in Russia’s security perception, Belarus remained the key geostrategic and military ally on the western flank and constituted a platform for early warning of a possible attack, while military cooperation under the Union State counterbalanced NATO’s threat.

Power

Russia’s power resources and potential capabilities clearly prevail over those of Belarus. However, there were limits to a Russian power application in relation to its western neighbor. It is worth noting that a military option was hardly possible in the relations between the two states. Belarus and Russia not only shared a common Slavic-Orthodox origin, linguistic and kinship ties but the majority of the two nations’ public and political elites professed strong allegiance towards each other.

Diplomatic measures that Russia might have applied to Belarus were also rather ineffective, since Belarus international image as “Europe’s last dictatorship,”¹²⁰ at least under President Lukashenko’s regime, could not have been damaged any further. In the Russian power arsenal, though, there were other tools to manipulate Belarus; most of

¹¹⁵ A wave of “democratic revolutions” which took place in Georgia (2003), Ukraine (2004) and Kyrgyzstan (2005).

¹¹⁶ *Rossiiskaya gazeta* (8 April 2004); John C. K. Daly, “Russia and its allies conduct Eurasian air defense drill,” *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 5, no. 79 (25 April 2008), [http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=33580](http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews[tt_news]=33580) (accessed September 12, 2010).

¹¹⁷ <http://www.com.lawmix.ru/abro.php?id=2654> (accessed October 11, 2010).

¹¹⁸ “On Military Exercise ‘Clear Sky-2003,’” <http://www.mfa.gov.by/en/press/news/2003-09-30-2.html> (accessed June 13, 2010); “Russia suggests establishment of joint European air defense system,” *Pravda* (31 August 2005), <http://english.pravda.ru/russia/31-08-2005/8849-abm-1/> (accessed October 10, 2010); <http://www.data.minsk.by/belarusnews/062006/87.html> (accessed October 15, 2010).

¹¹⁹ Yuras Karmanau, “Russia Delivers Missiles to Belarus,” *Washington Post*, 22 April 2006.

¹²⁰ David R. Marples, “Europe’s Last Dictatorship: The Roots and Perspectives of Authoritarianism in ‘White Russia,’” *Europe-Asia Studies* 57, no. 6 (September 2005): 895-908.

them were of an economic nature and could be concisely characterized as “valve diplomacy” (*ventil’naya diplomatiya*).¹²¹ In that sense, despite a common view that the Russian government under President Yeltsin did not pursue imperial objectives and hesitated to use Russia’s power to pressure Belarus, the fact is that President Putin has not invented anything new; the road had been trodden by his predecessor. The only differences were in Putin’s management style and a favorable political and economic climate within Russia during his presidency.

In an assessment of Russia’s reintegration policies in the post-Soviet space, Solovyev concluded that an ambition to establish a “union of equals” could never be fulfilled because of the power asymmetry that exists between Russia and other CIS states. He noted,

This will not be either a reanimation of the Soviet empire or the revival of the Russian empire. Russia has no need to erase state borders or to consolidate the state political structures of the new independent states. The Russian ruble and Russian energy sources will successfully replace the general secretary of the Communist Party. This will be an empire of a “new” type, a “velvet” empire, that establishes itself on the financial-economic and military dependence of the post-Soviet space.¹²²

Consequently, the Russian decision-makers in both Yeltsin’s and Putin’s periods made use of the power asymmetry between Russian and Belarus. Russia used its energy levers to pressure Belarus, thereby exploiting the total dependence of the latter on Russia’s gas, oil and electricity. Belarus vulnerability was manipulated by Russia to achieve its foreign policy goals in three ways.¹²³ First, Russia regulated a pricing policy for its energy resources. It either subsidized or threatened to increase the price in accordance with Belarus’ cooperation or lack thereof. The same principle governed the Russian loans and investments in Belarus. Second, by exploiting Belarus’ default-debt problems, Russia suggested debt-management solutions that were linked to other Belarusian economic,

¹²¹ Keith Smith, “Ventil’naia diplomatiia,” *Kommersant* 107, no. 3438 (16 June 2006), <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc.aspx?DocsID=682844> (accessed October 14, 2010).

¹²² Valeriy Solovyev, “Moscow’s CIS Policy Changes Assessed,” *Nezavisimaya gazeta* (9 February 1995), in *Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States: Documents, Data, and Analysis*, ed. Zbigniew Brzezinski and Paige Sullivan (New York: Armonk, 1997), 141.

¹²³ Chloë Bruce, *Fraternal Friction or Fraternal Fiction? The Gas Factor in Russian-Belarusian Relations* (Oxford: Oxford Institute for Energy Studies, March 2005), 3.

military or political concessions. Finally, Belarus was pressured by Russia's threats to reduce energy supplies or even to cut them off if the former did not uphold the anticipated obligations.¹²⁴

In March 1993 began the first energy conflict between Belarus and Russia. Russia's government raised energy prices and reduced its energy supplies to Belarus. The declared reason was that the measures were a response to Belarus' energy debts, which stood at \$100 million for gas.¹²⁵ However, the actual rationale behind these policies was Russia's aspiration to keep Belarus within its sphere of influence and to gain the Belarusian signature on the CIS Collective Security Treaty and the CIS Economic Union, which Belarus refused to sign in 1992, claiming that it would contradict its principle of neutrality. The pressure on Belarus was not eased until it eventually paid with the help of an IMF loan and signed the treaties.¹²⁶

However, it is worth mentioning other debt solutions that Russia applied to Belarus. For instance, though in January 1995 Belarus' gas debt stood at \$428 million,¹²⁷ Russia did not cut off its energy supplies to Belarus, since the latter signed the treaties on a Customs Union and on Russian military bases stationed in its territory. In 1996, the Belarusian debt had reached \$1 billion,¹²⁸ and again there was no cutoff. In February 1996, Russia and Belarus signed an agreement on the mutual settlement of financial claims, in line with a "zero option." Under the terms of the treaty, Belarus wrote off Russia's debts of about \$300 million. In exchange, Russia wrote off Belarus' debt of \$470 million on loans. Later the Belarusian debt of about \$1 billion was completely written off by Russia.¹²⁹

The effectiveness of Russia's energy levers was also proved in the 1997 journalist scandal, when the Russian journalist Pavel Sheremet was arrested and then imprisoned in Belarus for having allegedly illegally crossed the Belarusian-Lithuanian border. Russia demanded his immediate release and when Lukashenko refused, President Yeltsin ordered not to provide Russia's air corridor for the Belarusian president. The act,

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 8.

¹²⁶ Brzezinski and Sullivan, *Russia*, 295.

¹²⁷ Bruce, *Fraternal Friction*, 9.

¹²⁸ Nikolai Nekrashevich, "Kak veli sebia v gazovikh voynakh Rossiia i Belarus," *Zautra* (22 June 2010), <http://www.inosmi.ru/belorusia/20100622/160774896.html> (accessed October 15, 2010).

¹²⁹ Irina Selivanova, "Ekonomicheskaiia integratsiia Rossii i Belorussii i ee vliianie na razvitie narodnogo khoziaistva Belorussii," *Belorussiia i Rossiia: obshestva i gosudarstva*, ed. Dmitri Y. Furman (Moscow: "Prava cheloveka," 1998), 316-338, <http://www.yabloko.ru/Themes/Belarus/belarus-25.html> (accessed October 15, 2010).

nevertheless, was ineffective. However, when Boris Nemtsov, the then energy minister, ordered Gazprom to cut off gas to Belarus, Lukashenko immediately relented and released the journalist.¹³⁰

In Yeltsin's period another phenomenon emerged, namely, a keen interest of the Russian government in Belarus' energy transit infrastructure. As early as 1993, Gazprom¹³¹ and the Russian government recognized the strategic importance of Belarus as a transit state. They made efforts to gain control over Belarus' energy transit assets. In September 1993, an agreement was signed between Russia and Belarus on the transfer of Beltransgaz, the state-owned operator of Belarus' gas-pipeline network, to the Russian company, Gazprom. Although the agreement was not ratified by the Belarusian parliament and therefore was not implemented, it shed light on the Russian objectives in Belarus that have not changed since.

Similar scenarios but with different actors occurred under President Putin. One lucid example illustrates the similarity between Yeltsin's and Putin's periods. In the winter of 2004, a gas war erupted between Belarus and Russia. Its climax became apparent on February 18, 2004, when Putin ordered¹³² Gazprom to cut off all gas supplies to Belarus for twenty hours in response to an energy debt of the latter, which stood at \$200 million, and because of Belarus' refusal to sign new gas contracts for 2004.¹³³ However, the timing of the crisis suggested that additional factors had intervened. As Bruce points out: "The deteriorating gas relationship coincided with Putin's attempts to form an integration agreement most favourable to Russia, as well as negotiations over the terms of the CES [Common Economic Space] and currency union. If Lukashenko had been prepared to accept Putin's union proposals the gas conflict might never have occurred."¹³⁴

The crisis broke out for several reasons. The official motive was presented by Gazprom, which claimed that "the decision to cut off the gas flow across Belarus was taken after Beltransgaz [the Belarusian gas transportation company] exhausted contracted

¹³⁰ Mikhail Zygar, Valeri Paniushkin i Irina Reznik, *Gazprom: novoe russkoe oruzhie* (Moscow: Zaharov, 2008), 131.

¹³¹ Gazprom is the largest gas company in the world. It extracts 90 percent of the natural gas in Russia.

¹³² Mikhail Kasyanov, *Bez Putina: Politicheskie dialogi s Yevgeniem Kiselevim* (Moscow: Novaya gazeta, 2009), 234-235.

¹³³ <http://www.novayagazeta.ru/data/2010/085/12.html?print=201016092133> (accessed October 5, 2010); <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc.aspx?fromsearch=9b95697d-59a4-43ec-aeb7-206c40c4fdbb&docid=450236> (accessed October 12, 2010).

¹³⁴ Bruce, *Fraternal Friction*, 18.

gas quotas and began to siphon off Russian gas flowing in transit to ‘third countries.’”¹³⁵ However, the actual reason was Gazprom and the Russian government’s dissatisfaction with Lukashenko’s failure to transfer¹³⁶ the shares of Beltransgaz, to pay the country’s gas bills in hard currency and to accept new prices. Already in October 2003, Putin announced that “Russia will not relinquish control over the pipeline infrastructure on the territory of the former Soviet republics. The gas-pipeline system was built by the Soviet Union and only Russia is in a position to keep it in working order, even those parts of the system that are beyond Russia’s borders.”¹³⁷ In February 2004, speaking to his trustees days before the crisis reached its climax, Putin declared that Russia “must stop being a milk [cash] cow for everybody and everyone. We comply with our partners’ demands, taking into account their interests, and we are entitled to demand the same consideration of our interests on their part.”¹³⁸ The solution of the crisis was reached in part following Belarus’ agreement to repay its debts, much of them in return for a Russian loan, to pay a new price for gas and to ratify Belarus’ entry to the CES. It was agreed by all sides that Beltransgaz would be evaluated by an independent auditor.¹³⁹

Gas and oil¹⁴⁰ wars were part of Moscow’s well-functioning “valve policy.” Russia used its energy levers in Yeltsin’s as well as Putin’s times to gain political and economic control over Belarus. Nevertheless, under Putin the use of energy levers became assertive and public; it reminded Belarus of the power asymmetry and demanded hard cash in exchange for Russian energy resources. Putin’s pragmatic approach to transit countries encouraged Gazprom to revive its previous policies from Yeltsin’s period¹⁴¹ regarding the diversification of the Russian energy-supply routes to Europe.¹⁴² Recognizing Belarus’ significance as a transit country, Russian energy companies started to develop

¹³⁵ “Russia stops gas flow across Belarus,” *RFE/RL Newsline* (19 February 2004), <http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1143100.html> (accessed October 12, 2010).

¹³⁶ Lukashenko demanded \$5 billion for Beltransgaz’ shares, instead of Gazprom’s proposal, which stood at \$600 million. Eventually the agreement was signed on December 31, 2006, according to which the price was set at \$2.5 billion. (<http://www.kommersant.ru/doc.aspx?fromsearch=a4468b04-75cf-4c83-9c60-396563563f76&docid=451218> (accessed October 12, 2010))

¹³⁷ “Moscow says it will keep control of the CIS pipelines,” *RFE/RL Newsline* (9 October 2003), <http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1143020.html> (accessed October 16, 2010).

¹³⁸ (Translation mine) Genadi Sisoiev, “Rossiia vynesla sor iz truby,” *Kommersant* 30, no. 2869 (19 February 2004), <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc.aspx?fromsearch=97190269-9407-4811-a2bd-226b365aad48&docid=451190> (accessed October 12, 2010).

¹³⁹ Bruce, *Fraternal Friction*, 17.

¹⁴⁰ The oil war between the two states erupted in January 2007. (Dmitri Baturin, Natalia Grib, Petr Netreba i Denis Rebrov, “Rossiia i Belorussiia obmyli konflikt نفت’u,” *Kommersant* 1, no. 3577 (15 January 2007), <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc.aspx?DocsID=733940> (accessed November 12, 2010)).

¹⁴¹ The 1996 Yamal-Europe pipeline project passing through Belarus was designed to limit Russia’s dependence on Ukraine.

¹⁴² Vladimir Putin, “Poslanie Federal’nomu Sobraniu Rossiiskoi Federatsii,” *Kremlin.ru* (May 26, 2004).

new projects to limit their dependency on Belarus.¹⁴³ The Kremlin, therefore, gradually sawed away the last bough on which the Belarusian president was sitting.

Interest Groups

The influence of interest groups on the formation of Russian foreign policy is difficult to trace, since the transactions between these two variables are secretive and, as a result, the coherent linkage is hard to establish, and above all, to prove.

At the outset of the RF, the first Russian president, Yeltsin, was overwhelmed by the domestic political problems and as a result was unable, and according to some experts, incompetent to manage foreign policy issues.¹⁴⁴ Therefore, during 1991-1993 foreign policy was a prerogative of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA).¹⁴⁵ Foreign Minister Kozyrev advocated a pro-Western approach and detachment from the post-Soviet space. Belarus, in this sense, was not an exception. However, the winds of change blew in 1995, when Kozyrev's policy was criticized not only by the Russian political establishment but also by the president himself.¹⁴⁶ Hence, the center of influence of Russian foreign policy shifted from the MFA to the Defense Ministry, where the policy towards the CIS states was formulated according to traditional security postulates.¹⁴⁷ Particularly, policy initiatives included the regulation of peacekeeping activities and the creation of a legal framework defining the status of Russian military troops and bases abroad. Because of its geopolitical, military and strategic potential, Belarus was assigned a special role as an "experiment" country, which in the case of success would be an example of military cooperation for other post-Soviet states. This vision led to the signing of several military contracts between the two states in 1995.

Furthermore, Belarus' importance was significantly enhanced in light of the Russian elections in July 1996. Under the framework of Yeltsin's reelection campaign, his team advised the president to conclude a union with Belarus to bolster approval rates and electoral performance among the public. However, the interest in union with Belarus was

¹⁴³ These projects include the Nord Stream – the gas pipeline on the Baltic seabed; the South Stream – the gas pipeline on the Black seabed; and the Primorsk oil terminal, which provides stevedoring services for Russian oil companies in the course of transferring export crude oil.

¹⁴⁴ Baturin, *Epokha Yeltsina*, 468-469, 479.

¹⁴⁵ Kobrinskaia, "Vnutrennie faktori," 276.

¹⁴⁶ Baturin, *Epokha Yeltsina*, 480.

¹⁴⁷ Kobrinskaia, "Vnutrennie faktori," 277.

purely political, “to knock the integration card out of Zyuganov’s [the Communists’ leader] hands,”¹⁴⁸ and therefore its mechanisms had not been well developed.

By helping unhealthy Yeltsin win the elections, the oligarchs¹⁴⁹ expected to improve their economic and political position; by creating a “corporative government” they would act as “a shadow board of directors.”¹⁵⁰ Although the oligarchs had a strong influence on Russian domestic politics, their role in foreign affairs, in some experts’ assessments, was minor.¹⁵¹ During Yeltsin’s second tenure, there were other strong interest groups to which some of the oligarchs adhered. Their role was mainly instrumental, namely, they grafted their media and financial resources to the needs of a specific political group they favored.

Russia’s political establishment was split into two groups: opponents¹⁵² and proponents¹⁵³ of Russian-Belarusian union.¹⁵⁴ On the one hand, the anti-integrationist camp claimed that reunion with Belarus, given its predominantly non-market economy, would create additional expenditures for the Russian budget.¹⁵⁵ Democrats were reluctant to consider authoritarian Lukashenko as an acceptable partner of modern Russia. Some were also concerned about the Belarusian president’s intervention in the Russian internal political life and the strengthening of the nationalist opposition;¹⁵⁶ as Tatyana Umasheva¹⁵⁷ argued on her blog: “As if it were not for Chubais, we would have lived under the leadership of the new state president Alexander Grigorevich Lukashenko.”¹⁵⁸

On the other hand, the supporters of reintegration spoke of the geopolitical, military and historical advantages of this process. Inasmuch as they agreed that immediate

¹⁴⁸ Shevtsova, *Yeltsin’s Russia*, 173.

¹⁴⁹ The powerful Russian business tycoons are often called “the oligarchs, the men who owned and ruled the new Russia.” (David E. Hoffman, *The Oligarchs: Wealth and Power in the New Russia* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2002), 2.)

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Stephen Fortescue, *Russia’s Oil Barons and Metal Magnates: Oligarchs and the State of Transition* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006), 101-103; Shevtsova, *Yeltsin’s Russia*, 277-278.

¹⁵² The opponents included the political parties “Yabloko” and the Democratic Choice of Russia, A. Chubais, B. Nemtsov, A. Kokh and Y. Urinson, the chief of the Russian presidential administration V. Umashev, and television Channels 1, 2 and 4.

¹⁵³ Support for the union was explicitly stated by Prime Minister V. Chernomirdin, Vice-Prime Minister V. Serov, Foreign Minister Y. Primakov and his deputy B. Pastuchov, the “power” ministers, Moscow mayor Y. Luzhkov, presidential aide D. Rurikov, the Communists and the nationalist opposition, the heads of both houses of parliament, and television Channels 3 and 5.

¹⁵⁴ Vyacheslav Nikonov, *Epokha peremen: Rossiia 90-kh glazami konservatora* (Moscow: Iaziki Russkoi kul’tury, 1999), 785-786; Primakov, *Godi v bol’shoi*, 387-388; Vyacheslav Nikonov, “The place of Belarus on Russia’s foreign policy agenda,” in *Belarus at the Crossroads*, ed. Sherman W. Garnett and Robert Legvold (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1999), 110-114.

¹⁵⁵ Nikonov, *Epokha peremen*, 783.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 786; see Chubais’ interview on the matter in Zygar, *Gazprom*, 129.

¹⁵⁷ Yeltsin’s young daughter and his presidential adviser during his second term of the presidency.

¹⁵⁸ (Translation mine) Tatyana Yumasheva, “Kak mi chut’ ne okazalis’ v drugoi strane,” *Livejournal blog* (10 December 2009), <http://t-yumasheva.livejournal.com/2009/12/10/> (accessed October 15, 2010).

financial expenses would be high, they argued that, in the long run, Russia would benefit economically at least from the transport and pipeline corridor of Belarus to the West. Democrats' claims about Lukashenko's authoritarian regime had not convinced the supporters, who were tolerant of similar regimes in the CIS; and as for political ambitions of the Belarusian leader, they were simply dismissed.¹⁵⁹

As Shevtsova noted, "numerous centers of power, which are the principal channels for harmonizing the interests of the elite groups, have become an important element of Yeltsin's regime."¹⁶⁰ Therefore, Yeltsin's integration policy towards Belarus reflected an attempt to balance between these poles.

However, by the end of Yeltsin's last presidential tenure, other players, which had previously kept a low profile in relations with Belarus, had appeared to influence Russian foreign policy – the fuel and energy complex or, specifically, Gazprom and LUKoil,¹⁶¹ as well as other Russian companies.¹⁶² The geographical orientation of Gazprom's export activities caused its strong interest in stabilization and improvement of relations with the European CIS countries, primarily with Belarus and Ukraine. A branched lobby system allowed Gazprom to influence the formation of the policy by the MFA, or at least its intensification on the European vector.¹⁶³ Like Gazprom, which was interested in Belarus' transit infrastructure and specifically Beltransgaz,¹⁶⁴ LUKoil was also interested in strengthening ties with Belarus. Although LUKoil's geographical interests lie to the south, its attention to Belarus can be attributed to the latter's petroleum-refining industry¹⁶⁵ and the prospect of participation in the largest oil refineries.¹⁶⁶

In President Putin's period, lobbyism remained but the impact and the identity of interest groups changed. Putin's policies against the oligarchs and his gradual construction of the power vertical gave him an essential advantage over his predecessor, namely, the support of the public and the state's backing. This greatly helped Putin to oust the lobbyists of Yeltsin's era from the political scene. An unofficial contract between

¹⁵⁹ Nikonov, *Epokha peremen*, 786.

¹⁶⁰ Shevtsova, *Yeltsin's Russia*, 278.

¹⁶¹ LUKoil is one of the world's leading oil and gas companies. Its main activities are exploration and production of oil, gas, petroleum products and petrochemicals.

¹⁶² The Russian oil pipeline monopoly, Transneft, and Russian oil companies, Yukos and Slavneft.

¹⁶³ Kobrinskaia, "Vnutrennie faktori," 284.

¹⁶⁴ "Belarus, Russia Sign Last-Minute Gas Deal," *RFE/RL Newline* (1 January 2007), <http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1073763.html> (accessed October 16, 2010).

¹⁶⁵ Kobrinskaia, "Vnutrennie faktori," 284-285; Margarita M. Balmaceda, "Russian energy companies in the new Eastern Europe: The cases of Ukraine and Belarus," in *Russian Business Power: The Role of Russian Business in Foreign and Security Relations*, ed. Andreas Wenger, Jeronim Perovic and Robert W. Orttung (New York: Routledge, 2006), 79-80.

¹⁶⁶ Yaroslavnefteorgsintez, Mozyr and Novoplotsk.

Putin and the oligarchs from July 2000 regarding their “equidistance” (*ravnoudalennost*) from Russian politics, set new rules – “the state [was] refusing to do any favours for any oligarchs.”¹⁶⁷ However, Putin had not destroyed the oligarchy; he had merely replaced Yeltsin’s oligarchs with his own – *siloviki*,¹⁶⁸ or as Shevtsova has termed them, “bureaucrat-oligarchs.”¹⁶⁹ As a result, companies exporting energy resources, raw materials and arms, which enjoyed relatively low influence during Yeltsin’s rule, not only retained their influence on Russian foreign policy but also strengthened their position in forming this policy by means of new Putin-made oligarchs.¹⁷⁰ As the executive chief of Gazprom, Alexei Miller, noted at the shareholders’ meeting in June 2004, “Gazprom would not be just a significant player in the energy market, but it would set the rules of the game.”¹⁷¹ On another occasion Miller openly admitted that “his company is a tool of Kremlin policy and that its expansion goals dovetail nicely with Kremlin efforts to boost Russian prestige abroad.”¹⁷² Therefore, the Kremlin and Russia’s large corporations worked hand in hand, so that the latter were tools and instigators of Russian foreign policy. To quote Trenin, “Russia is run and largely owned by the same people.”¹⁷³

The drift to the European vector in Russia’s foreign policy under President Putin had negative consequences for Belarus and the integration agenda. Both the Kremlin and the Russian companies saw the European market as a key to Russia’s economic modernization.¹⁷⁴ The market-oriented interests of the energy corporations forced Moscow to reassess its previous policies towards its closest ally, i.e., subsidizing the outmoded Belarusian economy with no possibility of political influence on the Belarusian president, whose regime it was supporting. Thus, Russia decided on new ways to pressure Belarus in order to accelerate the integration process (according to Moscow’s scenario) under the framework of the “globalization paradigm,” that is, the prioritization of

¹⁶⁷ Fortescue, *Russia’s Oil Barons*, 106.

¹⁶⁸ *Siloviki* are the representatives of the military and security services and Putin’s close friends.

¹⁶⁹ Lilia F. Shevtsova, *Russia – Lost in Transition: The Yeltsin and Putin Legacies* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2007), 107.

¹⁷⁰ See Table 1.

¹⁷¹ James M. Day, “Can U.S. Petroleum Companies Compete with National Oil Companies?” *Business Law Brief* (Fall 2005): 59, <http://www.wcl.american.edu/blb/01/3day.pdf?rd=1> (accessed September 12, 2010).

¹⁷² Robert W. Ortung, “The role of business in Russian foreign and security relations,” in *Russian Business Power: The Role of Russian Business in Foreign and Security Relations*, ed. Andreas Wenger, Jeronim Perovic and Robert W. Ortung (New York: Routledge, 2006), 38.

¹⁷³ Dmitri V. Trenin, *Getting Russia Right* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2007), 10.

¹⁷⁴ Leonid Zlotnikov, “V kil’vatore novoi imperii?” *Belorusskii Rynok* 22, no. 606/7 (14 June 2004), <http://www.br.minsk.by/print.php?article=22179> (accessed October 12, 2010).

economic over political interests.¹⁷⁵ Both the Kremlin and the Russian energy complex had compatible interests – “to safeguard transit and to maintain political influence in Belarus.”¹⁷⁶ To this must be added that if integration of Belarus into Russia could not be achieved, then at least the Kremlin had to keep its grip on the market share: Belarusian strategic assets such as the oil-refining industry, transport and pipeline infrastructure and the share from export customs duties on oil products using Russian oil.

Hence, integration with Belarus, whose president was distinguished by his sharp anti-Western rhetoric, his constant backpedaling on the privatization of key Belarusian energy assets and his counterbalancing by means of transit fees,¹⁷⁷ appeared as an obstacle to Russia’s interests. Putin, therefore, took a firm stance towards Belarus during energy conflicts starting from 2004. He demonstrated his will to back his loyal business corporations and their foreign policies. Russia paid the price of confrontation with its ally in order to deter Belarus from further “misbehavior,” thereby proving the credibility of the Kremlin’s threats and the politicization of Russia’s economic relations. Eventually, however, both energy companies and Belarus were compensated by Moscow,¹⁷⁸ whereas the latter sacrificed state profits, compromised Russia’s reputation as a reliable energy supplier and contributed to its imperial image among its CIS neighbors for the sake of some minor economic and political gains, incompatible with its losses.

Perception of the Past

Perception of the past was extremely influential during Yeltsin’s two tenures. The rapid and unanticipated disintegration of the Soviet Union brought serious consequences both for the RF and for its neighbors. Unlike other nations, which viewed the event as liberating, Russians and, to some degree, Belarusians grieved and felt humiliated by the sudden and traumatic loss of the empire.

Despite Russia’s initial attempt to disengage itself from the post-Soviet space, as part of the pro-Western policy, the Russian political elite and Yeltsin himself could not break the historically established ties with neighbors. This realization entailed a shift from the

¹⁷⁵ Salmin, “Black Side of Foreign Policy,” 413.

¹⁷⁶ Balmaceda, “Russian energy companies,” 78.

¹⁷⁷ Vadim Dovnar, “Prezidenti poprobuiut pomeniat’ neft’ na gaz,” *Kommersant* 235, no. 3566 (15 December 2006), <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc.aspx?fromsearch=b5f969d2-7031-4b81-b6b6-b087ec34a1c6&docid=730517> (accessed October 16, 2010); Denis Rebrov, “Interviu s Vagitom Alekperovim: “Ia blagodaren Igoriu Sechinu,” *Kommersant* 108, no. 3925 (26 June 2008), <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc.aspx?DocsID=906161> (accessed October 16, 2010).

¹⁷⁸ Balmaceda, “Russian energy companies,” 78-79; Bruce, *Fraternal Friction*, 17.

pro-Western to the CIS-oriented policy. Russia decided to restore its former greatness, to reorganize the post-Soviet space and to create a new framework for union.

During the 1990s, the idea of reunion with Belarus, therefore, was based on the concept of creating on the ruins of the post-Soviet space an active center of influence, which as Yeltsin defined it, “[would] become the flagship for the CIS and lead us forward to our common integration.”¹⁷⁹

Although President Yeltsin could not have prevented the eventual fall of the Soviet Union, as he himself indicated in his memoirs,¹⁸⁰ he felt an enormous responsibility and guilt for what had happened to that “great state” and to the Russian people.¹⁸¹ Hence he sincerely desired, as far as possible, to improve the situation by preserving traditional ties, thereby trying to rehabilitate his historical legacy. By creating Russo-Belorussian union, he hoped to enter history as “a gatherer of Russian lands,” rather than a demolisher of the empire. In the eyes of Russian elites, then, union with Belarus was an opportunity to finally make things right and bring to a halt disintegration processes which took place in the post-Soviet space.

Primakov contended that despite the president’s image as someone who was uninterested in union and “went with the stream,” the “‘Belavezha complex’ [guilt for the dissolution of the USSR] had an effect on Yeltsin, when overnight not thoroughly-thoughtful decisions were made, but either way, Yeltsin was – without any doubt – in favor of union with Belarus.”¹⁸² Yeltsin himself admitted,

It is not only the Communists who dream of restoring the Soviet Union at all costs. For Communist Party members, it was chiefly a political tool, an ideological postulate. But for other Russians the desire to revive the Soviet Union gave rise to a kind of personal *cri de coeur*, a reaction to the pain they felt for relatives, colleagues, friends, and others who were left behind in other countries. It was...the call of blood kinship. At times the subconscious can have a powerful influence on the conscious, even among government bureaucrats.”¹⁸³

¹⁷⁹ Boris Yeltsin, *Midnight Diaries*, trans. Catherine A. Fitzpatrick (New York: PublicAffairs, 2000), 242.

¹⁸⁰ Boris Yeltsin, *Prezidentskii marafon: razmyshleniia, vospominaniia, vpechatleniia* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo AST, 2000), 194-195.

¹⁸¹ Baturin, *Epokha Yeltsina*, 488.

¹⁸² (Translation mine) Primakov, *Godi v bol'shoi*, 388.

¹⁸³ Yeltsin, *Midnight Diaries*, 240.

Therefore, the signing of the Union State Treaty between Belarus and Russia on the symbolic date, December 8, 1999, exactly eight years after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, proved the existence of the abovementioned complex.

Russian-Belarusian union was viewed as an event that would also ease the syndrome of the “disintegrated nation” in Russia.¹⁸⁴ The identity crisis resulting from the USSR’s collapse, which beset Russia and Russians in the CIS states, was extremely profound. In one of his interviews, President Putin tried to convey this crisis: “People woke up and found out that from that day, it turns out, they do not live in a common state but are now outside the borders of the Russian Federation, although they have always identified themselves as part of the Russian people. Twenty-five million of them. This is truly an obvious tragedy.”¹⁸⁵ In line with this vision of the crisis, few Belarusians and Russians thought of themselves as two different nations. In his memoirs Yeltsin stresses, “Belarusians are not just our nearest western neighbors and not just Slavs. The history of Belarus is so interwoven with the history of Russia, and the relations between the two peoples are so close, that we have always felt ourselves historically to be blood kin.”¹⁸⁶ Lukashenko went even further, arguing that “Russians and Belarusians – the two closest nations, more than that – are a united nation. This unity is not only a historical reality but a great common value, created over the centuries.”¹⁸⁷ Hence, the Slavic-Orthodox origin and common language played their role in the integration process between the two nations. Integration was perceived as a natural process similar to that experienced by Germans in 1990.

Another past perception that has prevailed in Russo-Belarusian relations concerns Russia’s self-image. Following 1991, although Russia had not ceased to be a great power with nuclear capabilities, it definitely felt diminished and torn.¹⁸⁸ A desire to restore its status as a “great power” (*velikaia derzhava*) in the international arena dictated its foreign policy choices. Union with Belarus presented Russia with an opportunity not only to improve its regional position but to enhance its international status as well. In the eyes of

¹⁸⁴ Sergei V. Kortunov, *Sovremenniaia vneshniaia politika Rossii: strategii izberatel’noi vovlechenosti* (Moscow: Visshaia shkola ekonomiki, 2009), 215.

¹⁸⁵ (Translation mine) “Interviu germanskim telekanalam ARD i TsDF,” *Kremlin.ru* (May 5, 2005).

¹⁸⁶ Yeltsin, *Midnight Diaries*, 239.

¹⁸⁷ (Translation mine) “Obraz Rossii v viskazivaniakh Alexandra Lukashenko,” *Memoid*, [http://www.memoid.ru/node/Obraz_Rossii_v_vyskazyvaniiah_Aleksandra_Lukashenko?printable=1#cite_note-sb16-10-7-11](http://www.memoid.ru/node/Obraz_Rossii_v_vyskazyvaniakh_Aleksandra_Lukashenko?printable=1#cite_note-sb16-10-7-11) (accessed October 18, 2010).

¹⁸⁸ Yeltsin, *Prezidentskii marafon*, 68, 72, 13; Baturin, *Epokha Yeltsina*, 475.

the Kremlin, Belarus proved its loyalty to Russia when instead of integrating into European institutions it chose Russia.

Although, during Putin's presidential terms as in Yeltsin's period, integration with Belarus was a priority of Russian foreign policy, relations between the states dramatically changed. Understand why requires a concise analysis of the past perceptions of President Vladimir Putin.

In contrast to Yeltsin, Putin was free of the "Belavezha complex." Although Putin was shocked and upset as other Russians were in 1991, he never wanted to reverse history. As clearly stated in one of his interviews, "those who do not regret the collapse of the Soviet Union have no heart, but those who want it back – have no head. We are simply stating the fact and know that it is necessary to look not backward but forward. We shall not let the past catch us by the sleeves and deny us of an opportunity to go forward."¹⁸⁹

Unlike Yeltsin, who was overwhelmed by the Soviet past, Putin was profoundly imbued with European history and its historical figures.¹⁹⁰ For him, Europe was a source of historical inspiration in forming Russia's domestic and foreign policy. He wanted, similarly to Yeltsin, to create a European Russia, thereby developing a European vector in Russian foreign policy.¹⁹¹

Being a Germanophile,¹⁹² Putin adopted a postwar German model for post-Soviet Russia. At the forefront of his new ideology he placed economic pragmatism. President Putin realized, thanks to the German example, that there was no alternative to pragmatic cooperation with the West and, above all, with Europe. Putin saw the latter as the most important strategic partner which could contribute to Russia's economic recovery, and subsequently to its restoration of power. In addition to being the main client of Russian energy supplies, Europe was a key to global market integration and Western investments. Europe was perceived as a source of Russia's modernization and recovery. Russia sought to regain its international status by rebuilding a new empire which would meet the challenges of globalization – an energy empire¹⁹³ or, as Chubais termed it, "a liberal empire."

¹⁸⁹ (Translation mine) "Interviu germanskim..."

¹⁹⁰ To the question "Who are the political leaders that you are interested in?" Putin answered, "Napoleon Bonaparte...[Charles] De Gaulle, I guess. And I also like [Ludwig] Erhard. A very pragmatic person. It was he who built a new, postwar Germany." ((Translation mine) Natalia Gevorkian, Natalia Timakova i Anrei Kolesnikov, *Ot pervogo litsa. Razgovory s Vladimirom Putinyim* (Moscow: Vagrius, 2000), Ch. 9.)

¹⁹¹ Sakwa, *Putin*, 276.

¹⁹² Alexandr Rar, *Vladimir Putin. "Nemets" v Kremle* (Moscow: Olma-Press, 2001).

¹⁹³ Trenin called this strategy "the CIS Project," the goal of which was not to create a new state entity but a Russian "center of power," thereby expanding Russia's capital to the former Soviet republics and turning

Belarus with its fraternal rhetoric but with very hostile relations with the West became an obstacle. Lukashenko's populist, pro-integration dithyrambs had no effect on Russia's new leadership, which saw integration through an economic prism. Putin's pragmatism led to the deideologization of Russo-Belarusian relations, instead basing them purely on market-economy principles. Historical and linguistic commonalities of the two nations were used to the extent that they served Russian interests in either domestic or international contexts.

Although President Putin stressed the close relationship between the two states, he realized that there were advantages in Russo-Belarusian disunion. Putin viewed the Soviet past from a critical perspective, whereby Russia had carried the economic burden of the Soviet empire by subsidizing the numerous "parasites," which eventually brought about its fall. The Kremlin, therefore, was strongly determined to prevent a recurrence of this scenario. It did not want any territorial annexation but only economic integration, analogous to the EU model, as Putin asserted: "We do not want to include anyone else in Russia because for us it is merely an additional economic burden. However, we want our so-called natural competitive advantages in the global economy to be utilized. We can talk only about economic integration."¹⁹⁴ Minsk, however, has always insisted on the implementation of the "Soviet" model of integration, which in the eyes of the Kremlin meant that neither Ukraine nor any other CIS country would ever join. Putin, hence, explicitly warned Lukashenko about trying to revive the Soviet Union.¹⁹⁵ Lukashenko's opposition to Moscow's new course caused frictions in relations and "Belarus lost its status as the main foreign policy ally of Russia in the CIS and became merely one of Russia's partners in the post-Soviet space."¹⁹⁶

the RF into an economic magnet for them. (Dmitri Trenin, "New Priorities in Russian Foreign Policy: The CIS Project," in *Russia: The Next Ten Years*, ed. Andrew Kuchins and Dmitri Trenin (Moscow: Carnegie Moscow Center, 2004), 102)

¹⁹⁴ (Translation mine) "Interviu zhurnalu 'Taim'," *Kremlin.ru* (December 19, 2007).

¹⁹⁵ "Pod kolpakom u Putina," *Belorusskaia gazeta* (5 December 2002), <http://news.tut.by/society/33289.html> (accessed October 12, 2010).

¹⁹⁶ Oleg Aleksandrov, "The Crisis in Russian-Belarusian Relations," *Russian Analytical Digest* 15 (20 February 2007): 12, <http://www.res.ethz.ch/analysis/rad/details.cfm?lng=en&id=28611> (accessed October 19, 2010).

Russian-Ukrainian Relations 1991-2008¹⁹⁷

Geopolitical Considerations

Ukraine may rightly be called the most important country for the RF in the post-Soviet space; to quote Yeltsin, “Without Ukraine, it is impossible to imagine Russia.”¹⁹⁸ In contrast to the weak and isolated Belarus with its Soviet mentality, Ukraine is a powerful European state with a large and skilled population, the second largest territory in Europe, substantial economic weight and favorable geographical and agricultural conditions.

The Ukrainian declaration of independence on August 24, 1991, and the consequent referendum in December, historically sealed Russia’s geopolitical destiny, thereby resolving the centuries-old debate about Russia’s geographical belonging. Without Ukraine, Russia found itself outside Europe and ceased to be an empire.¹⁹⁹

Russian foreign policy towards Ukraine can be attributed to several geopolitical considerations. First, Ukraine has been strategically important to Russia, part of its geographical safety belt. Ukraine is a natural buffer between the West and the RF. Russia, therefore, was determined to ensure Ukraine’s loyalty, especially in light of NATO and EU enlargement plans. Moreover, the closest routes from Russia to the Balkans, the Mediterranean and Trans-Dniester regions, where Russia wanted to maintain its presence, pass through Ukraine. Ukraine is strategically important because of its hosting of the warm-deep-water Russian Black Sea Fleet (BSF), based in the city of Sevastopol on the Crimean Peninsula.

Second, the Ukrainian geopolitical position is important for Russia economically. Ukraine with its fifty million inhabitants has a large market potential. Nevertheless, the Russian economic interest in Ukraine has been linked to the fact that the lion’s share of the Russian energy supplies to Europe has been transferred through its territory. Moreover, a part of Russian oil has been transported via oil terminals at the Ukrainian seaports of Odessa, Yuzhnyi and Feodosiia. Thus, the establishment of Russian control over the Ukrainian transit infrastructure and transport routes became one of the main

¹⁹⁷ This chapter should be read together with the previous chapter on Russian-Belarusian relations, as topics are related.

¹⁹⁸ Yeltsin, *Midnight Diaries*, 243.

¹⁹⁹ As Brzezinski maintains, “without Ukraine, Russia ceases to be an empire, but with Ukraine suborned and then subordinated, Russia automatically becomes an empire.” (Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard* (New York: Basic Books, 1997), 46.)

goals of Russian foreign policy. Ukrainian agricultural, military and metal industries, along with the electricity sphere, were additional stimuli for Russia's economic interest.

Third, the large Russian and Russian-speaking population²⁰⁰ with strong pro-Russian sentiments in Ukraine was an additional source of the Kremlin's desire to reunite with Kiev and reestablish a Slavic union. In addition to upholding the fifteenth-century appellation of the "Gatherer of the Russian Lands," Moscow undertook yet another historical messianic role from the nineteenth century of "protector" of the Orthodox Slavs and Russians abroad. However, Russian foreign policy on the subject remained mostly demonstrative in nature. The ethnic-religious card was used mainly when it served Russian interests to pressure the Ukrainian government.

The abovementioned geopolitical considerations influenced Russian foreign policy during both Yeltsin's and Putin's tenures of presidency. However, their implications varied under the two administrations.

As well as in the Belarusian case, at the outset of Yeltsin's first presidency the pro-Western Russian policy dictated that Russia loosen the reins on the post-Soviet space. Russia was engaged in its own survival and was interested in the stabilization of Ukraine. The Kremlin perceived the Ukrainian striving for liberty and self-identification as a transient phenomenon. As Yeltsin put it, "Where would they [the Ukrainians] go? They will crawl back to us by themselves."²⁰¹ Consequently, Yeltsin's Russia from 1991 until late 1993 was supportive of Ukrainian policies, even though they contradicted the official agreements reached at Viskuli in 1991.

During Russia's period of disillusionment with the West, Russia reassessed its previous policies in the CIS and launched its "Monroe Doctrine," heading for the restoration of Russian influence on Eurasia. Consequently, Russia under President Yeltsin tried to bind Ukraine to its orbit of influence by integrationist policies, mainly under the CIS framework. However, all the attempts failed since Ukraine, as opposed to Russia, saw the CIS framework as a form of "institutional divorce."²⁰² For Ukraine, its independence meant above all independence from Russia. In contrast to Belarus, Ukraine

²⁰⁰ In 1996, 11.20 million out of 51.07 million Ukrainians considered Russian to be their native language. (Yana Streltsova, "Problemy russkogo iazyka i obrazovaniia v rossiiskikh diasporakh v novom zarubezh'e," in *Iazik i etnicheskii konflikt*, ed. Martha B. Olcott and Ilia Semenov (Moscow: Carnegie Center, 2001), 89.)

²⁰¹ Author's interview with a Russian politician in July 2010, who worked closely with Yeltsin and preferred to stay unidentified.

²⁰² Leonid Kravchuk, "Pokhoroni imperii," *Zerkalo nedeli*, 32, no. 356 (23 August-1 September 2001), <http://www.zerkalo-nedeli.com/1000/1030/32025> (accessed June 12, 2009).

had sought to exit the Soviet Union as a means of getting closer to Europe and moving away from Russia.²⁰³

The Kremlin acted to appease Ukraine, trying to convince it of Russia's good intentions. Yeltsin believed that resolving the issues concerning the BSF and recognizing Ukrainian territorial integrity would facilitate integration with both Ukraine and other CIS states.²⁰⁴ Therefore, despite strong domestic criticism, Yeltsin agreed in May 1997 on the division of the BSF and then signed the "Big Treaty" on Friendship, Cooperation and Partnership, thereby resolving the issue of Russia's de jure recognition of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. Yeltsin, however, had succeeded in achieving a major geopolitical advantage for Russia – Ukrainian neutrality. In line with Article Six of the treaty, each side pledged not to do anything that would undermine the other side's security interests.²⁰⁵ Accordingly, Ukraine could not sign agreements directed against Russia or allow the deployment of foreign troops and nuclear weapons on its territory. That meant Ukraine's participation in a foreign military bloc would be considered a breach of the treaty, and therefore nullify Russia's commitments.

Although the ambition of integration with Ukraine did not change during Putin's first tenure of presidency, Putin's approach to its realization differed from that of his predecessor. For President Putin it was easier to admit that the CIS organization had exhausted its integrative potential, and hence the creation of new regional structures was needed to activate the wheels of integration. Putin's strategy revealed that Russia had decided to focus not on collective forms of integration but on the development of bilateral relations through Russian-led organizations. Although Putin's strategy partially succeeded with Ukrainian President Leonid Kuchma,²⁰⁶ Ukraine's Orange Revolution brought Russo-Ukrainian integration to a halt. It became a watershed, marking a new stage in Russian foreign policy. Moscow's policy following 2004 indicated a Russian fatigue with the integration process in the "near abroad." The Kremlin renounced the idea of Ukrainian participation in collective projects and took the course of building purely

²⁰³ The hallmark of Ukraine's disengagement was its refusal to ratify the Charter of the CIS. Although de facto Ukraine was a founding member of the CIS, it has never been a full member de jure.

²⁰⁴ Yeltsin, *Prezidentskii marafon*, 187-188.

²⁰⁵ "Dogovor o druzhbe, sotrudnichestve i partnerstve mezhdru Rossiiskoi Federatsiei i Ukrainoi," in *Rossiiia-Ukraina, 1990-2000: Documenti i materialy 2* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnie otnosheniia, 2001), 147.

²⁰⁶ In September 2003, Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Ukraine signed the treaty on the SES. This structure was especially created for Ukraine, since other members had already been incorporated in other Russian-led regional organizations.

bilateral market-oriented relations. Russia, therefore, gradually decreased the costs of potential Ukrainian “disengagement” and temporarily suspended all integration plans.

Threat Perception

As discussed in the chapter on Russian-Belarusian relations, the main threats Russia perceived at the outset of the 1990s originated from the CIS states. Russia’s 1993 Military Doctrine defined the threats as “existing and potential areas of local wars and armed conflicts, above all those in direct proximity to Russia’s borders; ...attacks on military installations of the Russian Federation Armed Forces located on the territory of foreign states; the expansion of military blocs and alliances to the detriment of the interests of the Russian Federation’s military security.”²⁰⁷

Therefore, Russia was supportive of the official Ukrainian authorities in the case of the Crimean irredentism in the first half of the 1990s. Despite several attempts by political forces in Crimea to proclaim independence from Ukraine and to seek Moscow’s protection, Yeltsin’s administration refused to support separatists and sustained the Russian nationalists’ pressure, thereby supporting Ukraine’s sovereignty over Crimea. The rationale for this policy stemmed from Russia’s dealing with a separatist threat of its own in Chechnya. Russia’s political elite recognized that if internal CIS borders were to be changed, the delicate balance between the republics within Russia might be destabilized, similarly to the Chechen scenario, and could trigger the RF’s disintegration.

The Soviet nuclear and conventional weapons in Ukraine were another issue in Russia’s threat perception. From the outset of its independence, Ukraine was committed to the denuclearization of its territory.²⁰⁸ However, as opposed to Belarus, Ukraine linked this issue to security and sovereignty assurances, which it expected to obtain from the West and Russia. This linkage paved the path to what Deyermond called “a negative interdependency – [when] stronger Ukrainian assertions of sovereignty over the nuclear weapons issue were perceived as a threat to Russian security, while Russian attempts to increase its security (through control of the post-Soviet nuclear arsenal) were viewed as a challenge to Ukrainian sovereignty.”²⁰⁹ Yeltsin’s announcement in 1993 that Russia

²⁰⁷ Deyermond, *Security*, 53.

²⁰⁸ The Chernobyl catastrophe has influenced the Ukrainian attitude towards the nuclear weapons. The Declaration of the State Sovereignty of Ukraine from July 16, 1990, proclaimed Ukraine’s neutrality and nuclear-free status. In October 1991, the Ukrainian parliament reaffirmed this pledge.

²⁰⁹ Deyermond, *Security*, 69.

“cannot allow Ukraine to be a nuclear power”²¹⁰ underscored one of the main goals of Russian foreign policy. Yeltsin’s attempts to reassure Ukraine failed to allay the security suspicions of the latter.²¹¹ Only strong international and Russian pressure led to the signing in January 1994 of the Trilateral Statement, according to which the United States and Russia provided guarantees of Ukraine’s territorial integrity. These guarantees were reiterated by the RF in the Budapest Declaration of December 1994. Although the nuclear dispute eventually ended, this saga has cast a dark shadow over bilateral relations ever since.

An additional problem which arose following Ukraine’s independence was the division of the BSF. Ukraine’s demands to control the BSF were perceived by Russia as a challenge to its dominant role in both the Black Sea region and the whole CIS area. Although, from the Kremlin’s perspective, the fleet had minor military value,²¹² it had major symbolic and strategic significance for Russia’s regional position. If Ukraine had gained control over the entire fleet, based in Sevastopol – “the city of Russian glory”²¹³ – it would have meant Ukraine had become an alternative center for the CIS states. In contrast to Belarus, Ukraine made an effort to establish equitable relations²¹⁴ with Russia and to preserve a regional balance by preventing the latter’s dominance. Russia viewed this competition as a threat, especially in light of Ukraine’s balancing tactics which involved pro-Western declarations and the institutionalization of relations with NATO and the EU.²¹⁵ Although the dispute over the BSF division was resolved in 1997, it has not been exhausted. Nor have Russia’s concerns about Ukraine’s regional ambitions been allayed, as Ukraine has not ceased to counterbalance Russia. Moreover, in September

²¹⁰ Mark D. Skootsky, “An Annotated Chronology of Post-Soviet Nuclear Disarmament 1991-1994,” *Nonproliferation Review* (Spring-Summer 1995): 77, <http://cns.miis.edu/npr/pdfs/skoots23.pdf> (accessed October 28, 2010).

²¹¹ “Although [Ukrainian] President Leonid Kravchuk signed the Lisbon Protocol on May 23, 1992, Ukraine’s process of disarmament was filled with political obstacles. Many Ukrainian officials viewed Russia as a threat and argued that they should keep nuclear weapons in order to deter any possible encroachment from their eastern neighbor.” (“The Lisbon Protocol at a Glance,” *Arms Control Association* (n.d.), <http://www.armscontrol.org/node/3289> (accessed October 31, 2010)).

²¹² Since the Black Sea gates – the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles – were controlled by Turkey.

²¹³ Serhii Plokhyy, “The City of Glory: Sevastopol in Russian Historical Mythology,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 35 (July 2000): 369-383.

²¹⁴ Hrihoriy Perepilitsa, “Osnovnye voennye tendentsii v Chernomorskom regione: Ukrainskaia perspektiva,” in *Nauchnyi doklad. Ukraina: problemy bezopasnosti 12*, ed. Irina Kobrinskaia i Sherman Garnett (Moscow: Carnegie Center, 1996), 42-46.

²¹⁵ Ukraine was the first CIS state to initiate cooperation agreements with the West. It signed “Partnership for Peace” with NATO on February 8, 1994, and “Partnership and Cooperation” with the EU on March 23, 1994.

1997, Ukraine was one of the initiators of the GUAM organization,²¹⁶ a group of Western-oriented CIS states. Through GUAM, Ukraine was attempting to portray itself as a viable alternative to Russia's regional leadership.

Nevertheless, Yeltsin's administration had major security accomplishments in relations with Ukraine. It prevented a territorial conflict between Ukraine and Russia, and it succeeded, thanks to the U.S. assistance, to neutralize Ukrainian nuclear ambitions while nonetheless preserving Russia's regional influence.

Russia, therefore, at the beginning of President Putin's tenure was relatively unthreatened by Ukraine. However, the Ukrainian Orange Revolution in November 2004 dramatically changed Russia's previous perceptions of threat towards Ukraine, as well as towards other states in the region. Russia identified offensive intentions in Ukrainian upheavals, which Moscow interpreted as an anti-Russian demarche. The Kremlin perceived "the process of replacement of power elites in ex-Soviet republics"²¹⁷ along with the change in these states' strategic and geopolitical orientations as "a well-organized plot of the West aimed to weaken Moscow's positions in the CIS."²¹⁸ Moreover, Ukrainian events were "interpreted not only as the U.S. special operation for separating Ukraine from Russia, but also as the creation of a foothold for implementing the 'orange scenario' in Moscow."²¹⁹ The Kremlin's response, then, was immediate: it undertook suppressive legislative measures to prevent the "orange contagion" within Russia.

Since 1994, Ukraine has openly stated its desire to join the EU and then NATO. Although Russia had some reservations about the issue, it did not perceive it as a threat. This was because Kiev had not filed a formal and legal application for membership and because Russia had similar aspirations to join the EU in the future.²²⁰ The change came in 2005, when an intensified dialogue on Ukraine's NATO membership was launched. The Kremlin perceived Ukraine's possible participation in NATO as a serious threat. This

²¹⁶ Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova. Uzbekistan joined in 1999, making it GUUAM, and withdrew its membership in 2005.

²¹⁷ Stanislav Secieru, "Russia's foreign policy under Putin: 'CIS Project' renewed," *UNISCI Discussion Papers* 10 (January 2006): 305, <http://revistas.ucm.es/cps/16962206/articulos/UNIS0606130289A.pdf> (accessed October 15, 2010).

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ Dmitri Trenin, "Foreign Policy: Russia is back," *Kommersant* (29 January 2008), http://www.kommersant.com/p845861/Putin_brings_Russia_back_to_the_international_arena (accessed November 11, 2010).

²²⁰ Moscow – semiofficially and through its partners in Ukraine – championed the concept of joint and synchronized movement into Europe. In his 2003 address to the Federal Assembly of the RF, Putin stated: "Our foreign policy's important element is a wide rapprochement and a real integration into Europe. Certainly, it is a complicated and long-term process. Yet, it is our historic choice."

along with the geographical proximity triggered Russia's balancing against Ukraine and the West,²²¹ throughout Putin's second tenure. As Putin threatened at the Bucharest NATO summit in 2008, "If Ukraine were to be admitted to NATO, this country would simply cease to exist."²²²

Power

Like any other country in the world, Russia tried to translate its power into an effective foreign policy tool. However, on the Ukrainian vector, Russia's power, similarly to the Belarusian case, had some limits. Common ethnic roots and ties, the Ukrainian military and nuclear might and Russia's deep economic and political crises at the beginning of the 1990s caused Moscow to eliminate the military option with regard to Kiev. Ukraine, however, at the outset of its independence, was extremely suspicious of Russia and saw it as a potential challenger to its territorial integrity.

Therefore, when Ukraine proclaimed the BSF as a part of the Ukrainian army, put forward its claims on the Soviet properties abroad and attempted to nationalize nuclear weapons, Russia considered a "tough approach"²²³ towards Kiev. The Kremlin adopted several techniques to pressure Ukraine; it used economic and political levers, exploiting Kiev's heavy reliance on Russia's energy supplies, as well as the Russian ethnic communities in Ukraine.

The first instance of economic pressure occurred in 1993 when, a week before the September Massandra summit between the two presidents, Russia cut off 25 percent of Ukraine's gas supplies, officially due to gas debts.²²⁴ At the summit, however, Russia demanded that Ukraine sell its share of the BSF, lease Sevastopol and hand over all its nuclear weapons in exchange for a reduction of Ukraine's energy debt to Russia.²²⁵ On another occasion, "Russia raised its export price on gas for Ukraine above the world market price at the same time as it proposed that Ukraine would join the CIS Custom

²²¹ Russia's balancing towards Ukraine was explicitly expressed by milk and energy wars. Tension between Russia and the West reached its peak with Putin's speech in Munich on March 10, 2007.

²²² (Translation mine) Olga Allenova, Elena Geda i Vladimir Novikov, "Blok NATO razoshelsia na blokpaketi," *Kommersant* 57, no. 3874 (7 April 2008), <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc.aspx?DocsID=877224&NodesID=5> (accessed October 20, 2010).

²²³ Mikhail Berger i Yanin Sokolovskaya, "Yeltsin considers 'tough approach' toward Ukraine," *Izvestiya* (21 April 1995), in *Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States: Documents, Data, and Analysis*, ed. Zbigniew Brzezinski and Paige Sullivan (New York: Armonk, 1997), 280-281.

²²⁴ Robert L. Larsson, *Russia's Energy Policy: Security Dimensions and Russia's Reliability as an Energy Supplier* (Stockholm: Swedish Defence Research Agency, March 2006), 202.

²²⁵ The Ukrainian president first agreed but then, under domestic pressure, withdrew from the initial agreements.

Union in 1995.”²²⁶ Finally, in May 1997, Russia agreed to write off a Ukrainian debt, which stood at \$1 billion, in exchange for Ukraine’s agreement to lease Sevastopol for twenty years as a part of bilateral agreements on the BSF.

During the 1990s, Russia also used political levers to pressure Ukraine. Although President Yeltsin strongly condemned the Russian parliament’s resolutions,²²⁷ he used them to demonstrate to Ukraine the possible consequences of its misbehavior. However, pressure was also exerted by the Kremlin. First, the 1993 Russian Military Doctrine proclaimed that Russian citizens abroad would be protected by the RF, and then, the 1994 presidential decree on compatriots living abroad was adopted. Moscow’s strategy was to introduce dual citizenship for ethnic Russians or Russian-speaking compatriots in the CIS. As Zevelev points out, “by considering the Russians living in the ‘near abroad’ not only as members of ethnic minorities residing in other countries, but also as compatriots, Moscow secured the grounds for raising the problem in relation to its neighbors at its own discretion. [This] has allowed the Kremlin to address the problems of Russian diasporas in post-Soviet countries as Russia’s internal matter.”²²⁸ Russia, therefore, gained a serious political leverage on Ukraine, which has been the home of eleven million ethnic Russians. It is no wonder, then, that Ukraine was under pressure when its President Kravchuk stated that “There has never been a precedent set in the world whereby a state would defend people of any nationality if they are citizens of another state.”²²⁹

During Putin’s presidencies, similar techniques were used; however, Putin refused to play the ethnic card and concentrated mainly on economic levers, using them more effectively than his predecessor. The steep increase in energy prices and the turnabout of Russian economic conditions at the outset of the millennium enabled Putin to act in this manner. In his dissertation abstract, Putin asserted that “Russia’s natural resource base will not only secure the country’s economic development but will also serve as the

²²⁶ Larsson, *Russia’s Energy Policy*, 202.

²²⁷ The Supreme Soviet of Russia decided to reconsider the 1954 transfer of Crimea to Ukraine and in May 1992 declared that the transfer had been illegal. In July 1993, the Russian State Duma granted a federal status to the city of Sevastopol.

²²⁸ Igor Zevelev, “Russia’s Policy toward Compatriots in the Former Soviet Union,” *Russia in Global Affairs* 1 (January-March 2008): 52, <http://www.units.muohio.edu/havighurstcenter/russianstudies/documents/compatriots.pdf> (accessed December 12, 2010).

²²⁹ “Further Kravchuk, Plyushch comments [on Russian Military Doctrine],” *Intefax* (5 November 1993), in *Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States: Documents, Data, and Analysis*, ed. Zbigniew Brzezinski and Paige Sullivan (New York: Armonk, 1997), 270-271.

guarantor of the country's international position.”²³⁰ In conformity with this vision, the 2000 Russian Foreign Policy Concept urged Russia “to utilize all its available economic levers and resources for upholding its national interests.”²³¹

Therefore, from the beginning of his first tenure, Putin made it clear to Ukraine that although the latter had developed transit and refining infrastructure, it was getting old and without Russia's investments and natural resources, Ukraine could hardly preserve its industrial assets.²³² Thus, in October 2000, at a meeting with President Putin in Sochi, President Kuchma “offered Gazprom a stake in Ukraine's gas pipeline system *in lieu* of Ukraine's gas debt to Russia.”²³³ The proposal was naturally accepted by Russia, which desired to control Ukraine's transit infrastructure. External factors, such as a domestic political scandal in Ukraine with Kuchma's involvement and Western criticism of Kuchma's government, pushed the Ukrainian president further into Russia's arms, making him extremely receptive to Russia's initiatives.²³⁴

Russia openly declared its intent to use its energy levers in its foreign policy in May 2004. Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov affirmed that “only ‘friends of Russia’ could count on economic and political benefits such as low prices on oil, gas, and energy, while the rest had to be prepared for relations based on market principles both in trade and in policy.”²³⁵ Following the Orange Revolution, Ukraine experienced firsthand the pressure of these levers. In May 2005, Russia suspended oil deliveries to Ukraine, despite Ukraine having “signed all the necessary agreements.”²³⁶ In December, the Russian Atomic Agency demanded that “prices for uranium bought in Ukraine and of nuke [nuclear] fuel supplied by the Russian state-owned company be leveled.”²³⁷ The Ukrainian side claimed that the demands were unfounded, since all the prices were fixed until 2010 in the

²³⁰ Martha B. Olcott, *The Energy Dimension in Russian Global Strategy: Vladimir Putin and the Geopolitics of Oil* 17 (Houston: James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy of Rice University, 2004), http://www.rice.edu/energy/publications/docs/PEC_Olcott_10_2004.pdf (accessed November 12, 2010).

²³¹ <http://www.fas.org/nuke/guide/russia/doctrine/econcept.html> (accessed November 15, 2010).

²³² Russia announced its intention to build a new pipeline, with the cooperation of the EU partners, which would bypass Ukraine.

²³³ Roman Wolczuk, *Ukraine's Foreign and Security Policy 1991-2000* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2002), 42.

²³⁴ The trilateral memorandum on the creation of a Russian-Ukrainian-German gas consortium was signed in June 2002, according to which Gazprom would gain control over Ukraine's gas transit system. In September 2003, the SES with Ukraine was formed.

²³⁵ Nikolai Sokov, “The Withdrawal of Russian Military Bases from Georgia: Not Solving Anything,” *PONARS Policy Memo* 363, no. 7 (June 2005), http://www.gwu.edu/~ieresgwu/assets/docs/ponars/pm_0363.pdf (accessed November 15, 2010).

²³⁶ Larsson, *Russia's Energy Policy*, 203.

²³⁷ “No more reduced nuke fuel prices for Ukraine,” *Kommersant* (5 December 2005), http://www.kommersant.com/p632407/r_500/No_More_Reduced_Nuke_Fuel_Prices_for_Ukraine/ (accessed November 12, 2010).

contract from 1996 and later set by a bilateral intergovernmental agreement in 2003.²³⁸ However, the Russian pressure reached its peak in winter 2006, when, on January 1, Russia cut off gas supplies to Ukraine.

The trigger of this gas war was the suggestion of Ukrainian President Victor Yushchenko to President Putin, on an official visit of the latter to Kiev in April 2005, to move from barter to market relations. Putin, therefore, encouraged Gazprom to renegotiate “outdated” contracts. The conflict began when Russia decided to raise energy prices dramatically to the so-called “market” level.²³⁹ For Ukraine, this meant a change from \$50 to \$160-\$230 per 1000 cubic meters, despite the viable gas agreement between the two states. As Andrei Illarionov, the state economic adviser to Putin, confirmed, “the price of \$50 per 1000 cubic meters was installed in the Supplementary Agreement to the contract between Gazprom and Naftogaz [the Ukrainian gas and oil company], which was signed on August 8, 2004. This contract, according to the text of the Supplementary Agreement, had to remain in force for five years [the expected presidency of Russia’s favorite, Victor Yanukovich] until 2009...with a fixed price.”²⁴⁰ He then argued that the conflict had nothing to do with liberal economic policy; it was about a price discrimination policy, “an energy weapon,” which indicated the presence of non-economic and political goals.²⁴¹ The aims of the conflict, according to Illarionov, were purely political: to foster internal turmoil in Ukraine and to get control over its gas transportation system. As he recalled: “the representatives of Gazprom stated repeatedly that a compromise on gas prices was possible and that the price of \$230 or even \$160 could be changed if the ownership of Ukraine’s gas transportation system would pass to Gazprom.”²⁴² Russia, thus, used its energy levers to promote its foreign policy and economic interests, along with its desire to make Ukraine suffer for its disloyal, Western-oriented political course.

Interest Groups

As in the case of Belarus, the main interest groups influencing Russian foreign policy during the first tenure of President Yeltsin were the MFA and the Defense Ministry. The

²³⁸ Ibid.

²³⁹ Alena Kovalenko, “Ukraina upustila deshevyi gaz,” *Utro* (14 December 2005), <http://www.utro.ru/articles/2005/12/14/504473.shtml> (accessed November 12, 2010).

²⁴⁰ (Translation mine) Andrei Illarionov, “Interviu on ‘Echo Moskvi,’” (31 December 2005), <http://www.echo.msk.ru/programs/beseda/40891.phtml> (accessed November 12, 2010).

²⁴¹ Ibid.

²⁴² (Translation mine) Illarionov, “Interviu on ‘Echo.’”

former was interested in distancing Russia from Ukraine as a part of its pro-Western foreign policy vector, while the latter was interested in tightening relations with Russia's western neighbor, since it had strong interests in Ukraine's military industry²⁴³ and strategic facilities, specifically the BSF.

By 1994, however, both groups had reached a consensus that Ukraine was a kind of regional implacable opponent. However, each of them had its own outlook on how to deal with the situation. As Primakov noted,

The MFA firmly opposed any territorial claims to Ukraine [the Defense Ministry's line] believing that this would lead to extremely negative consequences and would create, perhaps, an insurmountable obstacle to the development of our relations. However, we could not ignore so strongly manifested sentiments in Russian society. In such circumstances, the only right decision was a long-term lease of Sevastopol as the main base of Russia's Black Sea Fleet.²⁴⁴

The Defense Ministry and the nationalist-Communist-led Duma were extreme-minded, declaring that all of the Crimean peninsula should be attached to the RF, including Sevastopol and the BSF. Thus, Russia's stance on the BSF became Russia's leadership test, analyzed by other CIS observers. As Deyermond observed, "key security assets had a symbolic value in relations between Russia and other successor states that far exceeded their material value, at least as security instruments."²⁴⁵ Therefore, in relations with Ukraine, as in the case of Belarus, President Yeltsin played a mediating role.

Along with these groups, Russia's large corporations – Gazprom and LUKoil – have been greatly involved in Russian foreign policy since 1996. As Kobrinskaia concluded, it is impossible not to notice an explicit and broad coincidence of interests between the aforementioned companies and the MFA's foreign policy under Yevgenii Primakov.²⁴⁶ Gazprom's interest included the stabilization of relations with Ukraine in order to secure

²⁴³ L. Kobilianskaia, "Ekonomicheskie otnosheniia Rossii i Ukrainy," *Ekonomist* 11 (2008): 60-68, <http://www.finanal.ru/011/ekonomicheskie-otnosheniya-rossii-i-ukrainy> (accessed November 02, 2010).

²⁴⁴ (Translation mine) Primakov, *Godi v bol'shoi*, 393.

²⁴⁵ Deyermond, *Security*, 65.

²⁴⁶ Kobrinskaia, "Vnutrennie faktori," 284, 285.

the transit of Russian energy supplies to Europe. LUKoil was also interested in improving relations with Ukraine, where tenders for privatization of oil refineries were planned.²⁴⁷

At the beginning of Putin's first tenure, similarly to Yeltsin, the president was preoccupied with domestic issues and with the establishment of a state order. The *securitisation* and *economisation*²⁴⁸ of Russian foreign policy became apparent. Putin reconstructed the Russian state system in line with his economic-security vision. His views of state control over the economy triggered the appointments of *siloviki* to key positions in the corporate sector and within state structures that began to implement the president's credo. Therefore, by the end of Putin's first tenure, the president surrounded himself with a likeminded²⁴⁹ coalition of people with a similar background.

As a predominant leader, Putin, in line with the Russian constitution, undertook the authority to determine and govern the state's foreign policy. However, Putin's preoccupation with economics and his strong reliance on his appointees forced him to pay attention to Russian corporations' interests in forming state policies. This, in turn, led to a *corporationism* of Russian foreign policy. As in 2006, the MFA officials acknowledged that "now Gazprom is instead of the MFA; all key areas of foreign policy are conducted through it: in Europe, in Ukraine, in Belarus and in Central Asia."²⁵⁰

The influence of interest groups gradually increased as Putin and his trustees became symbiotic. In the abstract of his dissertation, Putin stressed that "the main source to turn Russia into a leading economic power [was] the creation...of large financial-industrial corporations of intersectoral profile."²⁵¹ Therefore, Russian large corporations, managed mainly by him and his *siloviki*, were both the instigators and executors of Russian foreign policy.

Ukraine, as opposed to any other CIS country, became President Putin's prerogative, as he himself stressed: "For us, all the relations in the post-Soviet space are a priority but

²⁴⁷ Already in 1999, LUKoil succeeded, with the Kremlin's blessing, to take over the Odessa oil refinery, purchasing more than half of its shares, and subsequently took control of 90 percent of them. (<http://www.lenta.ru/articles/2009/10/15/tatneft/> (accessed October 20, 2010))

²⁴⁸ Sakwa, *Putin*, 275-276.

²⁴⁹ As Putin admitted, "for a [political] team to work properly and efficiently, it must work together. People need to get used to each other conceptually, to understand what they are guided by when making decisions [and] to adjust psychologically to each other." ((Translation mine) "Interviu telekanalam ORT, RTR i 'Nezavisimoi gazete'," *Kremlin.ru* (December 25, 2000))

²⁵⁰ (Translation mine) Zygarev, *Gazprom*, 162.

²⁵¹ (Translation mine) Vladimir Putin, "Mineral'no-sirevie resursi v strategii razvitiia Rossiiskoi ekonomiki," *Zapiski Gornogo instituta* 144, no. 1 (January 1999), <http://uralgold.ru/expert/28.html> (accessed October 12, 2010).

ties with Ukraine are even more so.”²⁵² This was demonstrated by his first trip abroad as an elected president to Kiev. Another step, which signified Ukraine’s importance in the eyes of the Kremlin, was taken in May 2001 when ex-Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin, the founder of Gazprom, became Russia’s ambassador to Ukraine.²⁵³ Putin’s choice demonstrated the linkage between the interests of Russian businesses and the state’s foreign policy.

The corporations and the Kremlin acted in harmony in Ukraine through Putin’s entire period of presidency. The state-owned Gazprom,²⁵⁴ “independent”²⁵⁵ LUKoil and other large oil companies were instruments willing²⁵⁶ to serve Moscow’s foreign policy agenda, while enjoying full support from the Kremlin.

The Orange Revolution further enhanced the influence of Russian corporations on Russian foreign policy. The 2004 events seriously discredited the Kremlin’s image of omnipotence, as well as Putin’s reputation and prestige. Due to Putin’s personal involvement in the 2004 Ukrainian presidential elections and Gazprom’s sponsorship of Victor Yanukovich’s presidential campaign, Moscow’s reaction to the upheavals was more emotional than rational. The Kremlin felt that the “orange” leaders made a mockery of it and that the West had intervened in its “backyard.” Thus, Putin’s strategy was aimed at expanding Russian business interests in Ukraine. Moreover, the Russian foreign policy following 2005 exposed the Kremlin and Gazprom’s desire to take revenge on the dissident leaders of Ukraine.²⁵⁷

Perception of the Past

As Markedonov observed, “The post-Soviet Russian elites (under Yeltsin and under Putin) perceived the collapse of the USSR not as a fact of a formation of a new Russian state but as a historical tragedy.”²⁵⁸ Part of this tragedy was losing Ukraine, without which Russia, in the eyes of the Russian political elites, could not exist as a full-fledged

²⁵² (Translation mine) “Interviu ukrainskim sredstvami massovoi informatsii,” *Kremlin.ru* (February 7, 2001).

²⁵³ The Kremlin expected him to promote Gazprom’s interests on the personal level, using his friendly relations with President Kuchma.

²⁵⁴ From 1993 to 2003, the state owned 38.7 percent of the company; however, as part of Putin’s reconstruction of the energy sector, the state increased its share to 51 percent in 2005.

²⁵⁵ LUKoil was 14 percent state-owned during most of the post-Soviet period. However, in 2000 the state began selling its shares. The last 7.59 percent of state shares were finally sold in 2004. (<http://www.itogi.ntv.ru/news/52459/> (accessed November 16, 2010))

²⁵⁶ Their willingness was, in part, the result of the Yukos affair.

²⁵⁷ Secieru, “Russia’s foreign policy,” 306.

²⁵⁸ (Translation mine) Sergei Markedonov, “Rossiia Vladimira Putina i SNG: missiia bez tseli,” *Neprikosnovennii zapas* 6, no. 50 (2006).

Russian state. Russia's political leadership tried to reconstruct its views of the past according to existing sociopolitical reality and interests, and then to propose projects for the future, based on its interpretation of the past. Past perceptions, therefore, were instruments serving concrete political goals, such as the legitimization of Russia's territorial and geopolitical ambitions, the preservation of its regional and international status and mobilization of the public against a potential enemy.

During Yeltsin's period, reintegration with Ukraine was a priority; therefore, all political circles highlighted ancient history, Slavic roots and a common language with regard to Ukraine. Yeltsin himself elaborated on Russia's perception of the past concerning Ukraine: "To Russians, Ukrainians are the same kind of kin as Belarusians. We have an enormous affinity in everything – language, customs, and lifestyle. Most important, Kiev in Ukraine was the capital of ancient Rus, and Ukraine is the cradle of our national identity, our national history."²⁵⁹ Thus, Ukraine's independence became a national disaster for Russians; it led, as in the case of Belarus, to the syndrome of the "disintegrated nation." However, in contrast to Belarus, Ukraine did not provide Russia with an opportunity to heal its wounds; instead Kiev reopened them. Moreover, Ukraine challenged the legitimacy of the syndrome. In deciding to eliminate the Russian language, making Ukrainian the only state language, it asserted its independence and national identity, thereby officially distancing itself from the common Slavic ethos. Russia's perception that Ukraine would eventually join a Russo-Belarusian union was fundamentally erroneous. Ukraine's desire to counteract Russia's cultural leveling impeded Yeltsin's attempts during the 1990s to negotiate bilateral, sensitive humanitarian issues.

President Putin did not differ from his predecessor in his view of Ukraine. In 2001, he summarized ten years of Ukraine's independence as "not easy for Russia and for Ukraine."²⁶⁰ He clarified that Ukraine and Russia would eventually be together: "Our roots are in Kievan Rus. Our brotherhood is not a legend but a historical fact. Therefore, the common future of Russia and Ukraine is the future of the two European states, which are very close and connected to each other."²⁶¹ In 2003, in Kiev, Putin declared:

²⁵⁹ Yeltsin, *Midnight Diaries*, 243.

²⁶⁰ (Translation mine) Vladimir Putin, "Vistuplenie na prieme po sluchau 10-letia nezavisimosti Ukrainy," *Kremlin.ru* (August 23, 2001).

²⁶¹ (Translation mine) *Ibid.*

we are building Russian-Ukrainian relations based on historical experience and contemporary realities.... our peoples have thousands of years of common traditions, we have a unique and firm basis for their continuation and development: we have friendship and spiritual kinship, shared successes and shared historical memory. We know about the tragedies of the past, about the repressions and about the terrible famine in the early 1930s, when those who lived in Ukraine and in our Volga region suffered. These are all common tragedies; however, we also had common successes.²⁶²

During his first tenure, the Russian president constantly underscored shared historical ties and accomplishments. Although he was ready to admit past misdeeds (concerning only the Soviet period), he emphasized collective responsibility for them and completely ignored the Ukrainian view of history.²⁶³ His statement that “Our special feelings and attitudes are not only for years; they are for centuries,”²⁶⁴ expressed Russia’s commitment to preserve historical ties with Ukraine in the future.

However, the Orange Revolution and Ukrainian President Yushchenko’s quest for the rewriting of history²⁶⁵ silenced the Kremlin’s brotherhood declarations completely, heating up yet other historical debates which led, among other confrontations, to “memory wars” between the two states. Russia’s refusal to reexamine past horrors, committed by the Soviet state, has prevented it from acknowledging that Ukraine was trying to construct its own national identity through a newly interpreted historical narrative. Instead the Kremlin perceived the Ukrainian reading of the past as an anti-Russian act and attempted to maintain the Russian state as the single legitimate source of

²⁶² (Translation mine) Vladimir Putin, “Vstupitel’noe slovo i otvety na voprosy na vstreche s prepodavateliami i studentami Kievskogo natsional’nogo universiteta imeni Tarasa Shevchenko,” *Kremlin.ru* (January 28, 2003).

²⁶³ The historical narrative of modern Ukraine was formed around the issue of the continuous struggle of the Ukrainian nation against Russia to establish the independent (*nezalezhnaia*) Ukrainian state. Although Russian-Ukrainian relations were friendly under President Kuchma’s government, the book by the latter, titled *Ukraine Is Not Russia*, revealed differences in the two states’ views of the past. Kuchma argued that Ukraine and Russia “are two different countries, with different historical fates, different national experiences, different self-awareness, disparate cultural and linguistic situations, [and] fundamentally different relation to the geographic and geopolitical space.” ((Translation mine) Leonid D. Kuchma, *Ukraina – ne Rossiia* (Moscow: Vremia, 2003), 489.)

²⁶⁴ (Translation mine) Putin, “Vstuplenie na prieme.”

²⁶⁵ The *Holodomor* is a debatable concept, which was raised for discussion by President Kuchma (<http://www.echo.msk.ru/programs/beseda/654407-echo/> (accessed November 11, 2010). Russia perceived it as the famine that swept through Kazakhstan, Russia and Ukraine in 1932-1933 under Stalin’s rule, while Ukraine, under President Yushchenko, viewed it as a genocide against the Ukrainian nation conducted by the Soviets.

history. For Russia's political elite, Ukraine has remained a breakaway piece of Russia, as President Putin clarified in a statement in 2008: "...Ukraine is not even a state! What is Ukraine? Part of its territory is Eastern Europe, but the significant part is a gift from us."²⁶⁶

Past perceptions, thus, played an important role in the formation of Russia's foreign policy, since they influenced Russian political elites through both Yeltsin's and Putin's presidencies. In 2007, Putin argued that "addressing challenges we face and using modernity...we, however, must and shall rely on fundamental moral-ethical values, which have been developed by the people of Russia for more than a thousand years of their history. Only then will we be able to identify correctly the development orientations of the country."²⁶⁷ The president's policies, however, conveyed an ambiguous message. They legitimized the officially accepted historical legacy, completely ignoring the right of other nations to reexamine it. This generated mistrust among Russia's neighbors, who remained suspicious of the RF's historic mission in the new millennium.

²⁶⁶ (Translation mine) Allenova, Geda and Novikov, "Blok NATO."

²⁶⁷ (Translation mine) Vladimir Putin, "Poslanie Federal'nomu Sobraniyu Rossiiskoi Federatsii," *Kremlin.ru* (April 26, 2007).

Russia's Foreign Policy after May 2008

From the beginning of his presidency, Dmitri Medvedev has been under the shadow of the powerful Prime Minister Vladimir Putin. Medvedev has struggled to perform as an independent state leader who governs Russia's foreign policy.²⁶⁸ Although constitutionally the president directs the foreign policy of the state, the joint ruling tandem of Medvedev and Putin has reduced the president's authority. Despite the formal division of state powers between Putin and Medvedev, whereupon the prime minister deals with domestic policy and the president with foreign policy, Putin's role in foreign policy, at least in the post-Soviet space, remains predominant.²⁶⁹ One reason is that as prime minister he supervises Russia's interstate economic ties, foreign loans and other economic resources. This allows him to play a substantial role in Russia's foreign relations.

Under Medvedev, Russia's geopolitical considerations towards both Belarus and Ukraine remained unchanged. Interest groups – *siloviki* and Russian corporations from Putin's era – retained their influence under the new president. Russia's energy resources and political levers, despite the 2008 international economic crisis, continued to be recruited to promote Russian foreign policy objectives in line with the Kremlin's previous foreign policy traditions. Past perceptions of Russia's political elite remained mostly unaltered too since the decision-makers' group, headed by Medvedev and Putin, was not changed. As Medvedev admitted, "[Myself] together with Prime Minister Putin, obviously, represent one political force."²⁷⁰

On the other hand, the Russian threat perception underwent serious changes. Although the 2008 Foreign Policy Concept underscored that "Russia maintains its negative attitude towards the expansion of NATO, notably to the plans of admitting Ukraine and Georgia to the membership in the alliance, as well as to bringing the NATO military infrastructure closer to the Russian borders,"²⁷¹ it still called "to ensure progressive development of interaction within the format of the Russia-NATO Council."²⁷² Moreover, the Concept

²⁶⁸ "Interviu telekompanii CNN," *Kremlin.ru* (September 20, 2009), <http://news.kremlin.ru/news/5516> (accessed October 13, 2010); "Interview with Dmitry Medvedev," *CNN*, <http://archives.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/0912/27/fzgps.01.html> (accessed October 13, 2010).

²⁶⁹ Alexander Osipovich, "Putin, not Medvedev, Remains Master of Russian Foreign Policy," *Eurasianet* (7 May 2010), <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/61010> (accessed November 22, 2010).

²⁷⁰ (Translation mine) "Interviu telekompanii CNN."

²⁷¹ "The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation," *Kremlin.ru* (July 12, 2008), <http://archive.kremlin.ru/eng/text/docs/2008/07/204750.shtml> (accessed November 10, 2010).

²⁷² *Ibid.*

proposed “to create a truly open, democratic system of regional collective security and cooperation ensuring the unity of the Euro-Atlantic region, from Vancouver to Vladivostok.”²⁷³ Russia’s foreign policy approach maintained that eventually Russia and Western democratic countries were bound to be partners.

Russia’s attitude towards Belarus has changed dramatically, especially following the Russian-Georgian war in August 2008. Although President Lukashenko publicly supported Russia’s policies towards Georgia and promised to recognize the independence of the breakaway Georgian republics of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, he later conditioned this recognition on Russia’s economic assistance to Belarus and when Medvedev refused to turn the matter into “an object of political bargaining,”²⁷⁴ the Belarusian president blocked the entire process.²⁷⁵ Additionally, Belarus, to Russia’s dismay, started flirting with the West and joined the EU’s Eastern Partnership initiative. Moreover, Belarus challenged Russia when it ignored its demands to extradite Kyrgyzstan’s ousted President Kurmanbek Bakiyev.²⁷⁶ As a result, Belarus was included in Russia’s “foes list.” Medvedev called his Belarusian counterpart “not a real partner” and forewarned him that he “may not secure bonuses while he harbors Moscow’s enemy.”²⁷⁷

Belarus’ attempts to challenge the regional status quo by attracting foreign actors – the EU, China, Turkey, Venezuela and Azerbaijan – triggered strong Russian balancing towards it. This was translated into milk,²⁷⁸ oil,²⁷⁹ gas²⁸⁰ and information wars,²⁸¹ the

²⁷³ Ibid.

²⁷⁴ Dmitri Medvedev, “Bessmyslennaiia polosa napriazheniia v otnosheniiax s Belorussiei obiazatel’no zakonchitsia,” *Kremlin.ru* (October 3, 2010), <http://blog.kremlin.ru/post/111/transcript> (accessed November 26, 2010).

²⁷⁵ “Lukashenko on Reasons Why Minsk Refused to Recognize Abkhazia, S. Ossetia,” *Civil Georgia* (2 October 2010), <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=22721> (accessed November 17, 2010).

²⁷⁶ Steve Gutterman and Andrei Makhovsky, “Belarus leader says will not extradite Bakiyev,” *Reuters* (4 May 2010), <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE64359220100504> (accessed November 19, 2010).

²⁷⁷ Pavel Felgenhauer, “Russia triumphs in dispute over Sevastopol, but the price is high,” *Jamestown Foundation* (22 April 2010); “Sovmestnaia press-konferentsiia s Prezidentom Ukraini Viktorom Yanukovychem,” *Kremlin.ru* (April 21, 2010), <http://news.kremlin.ru/transcripts/7518> (accessed November 2010).

²⁷⁸ Marina Kamenev, “Russia-Belarus Relations Sour over Milk Ban,” *Time* (16 June 2009), <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1904749,00.html> (accessed November 12, 2010).

²⁷⁹ <http://www.rosbalt.ru/2010/01/19/705191.html> (accessed November 18, 2010).

<http://www.rosbalt.ru/2010/01/11/702929.html> (accessed November 18, 2010).

²⁸⁰ <http://www.rosbalt.ru/2010/06/21/746842.html> (accessed November 12, 2010).

<http://www.inosmi.ru/belorussia/20100622/160763237.html> (accessed November 12, 2010).

²⁸¹ Maria Efimova, “Kreml’ razvenchivaet mif o nerushimom bratstve Rossii i Belorussii,” *Gzt.ru* (5 July 2010), <http://www.gzt.ru/topnews/politics/-kremlj-razvenchivaet-mif-o-nerushimom-bratstve-/313457.html> (accessed November 12, 2010); Mikhail Smilian, “V ‘Krestnom bat’ke-2’ Alexandru Lukashenko pripomnili ‘druzei’ Mikhaila i Kurmanbeka,” *Gzt.ru* (16 July 2010), <http://www.gzt.ru/topnews/politics/-v-preddverii-krestnogo-batjki-2-lukashenko-prosit-/315385.html?from=rotationbigfromindex> (accessed November 12, 2010).

cancellation of Russian loans to Belarus²⁸² and political pressure such as threats not to recognize the results of the Belarusian elections in December 2010.²⁸³

A similar deterioration occurred in Russo-Ukrainian relations until the end of Yushchenko's presidency in February 2010.²⁸⁴ However, the result of the 2010 Ukrainian elections changed Russia's threat perception, and influenced its foreign policy, towards Ukraine. President Yanukovich's pro-Russian attitude led to the signing of the Kharkov Agreements in April 2010, in accordance with which Russia's lease on Sevastopol's naval facilities was extended for a further twenty-five years in exchange for a reduction in Russian gas prices for Ukraine. Another significant confidence-building step was Yanukovich's declaration, approved by the Ukrainian parliament, that Ukraine would not participate in any military bloc. These developments led Medvedev to assert that "The years lost are the years of wasted opportunities and mutual claims. Therefore, we need to do everything to ensure that we do not find ourselves in that situation again. We need to clear the logjams of the past.... we are truly partners and we currently have friendly relations...we have demonstrated that we are together once again and that we are ready to do real business instead of producing empty talk."²⁸⁵

²⁸² Kamenev, "Russia-Belarus Relations."

²⁸³ Pavel Sheremet, "Souz bez doveriia," *Kommersant*, "Ogonyok" 40, no. 5149 (11 October 2010), <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc.aspx?DocsID=1516155> (accessed November 25, 2010).

²⁸⁴ Dmitri Medvedev, "V otnosheniakh Rossii i Ukrainy dolzhny nastupit' novye vremena," *Kremlin.ru* (August 11, 2009), <http://blog.kremlin.ru/post/30/transcript> (accessed November 12, 2010); also available in English at <http://en.for-ua.com/analytics/2009/08/12/115623.html> (accessed November 26, 2010).

²⁸⁵ Dmitri Medvedev, "Speech at Russian-Ukrainian Economic Forum," *Kremlin.ru* (May 18, 2010): http://archive.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2010/05/18/1900_type82914type84779_226137.shtml (accessed November 27, 2010).

Conclusion

The paper analyzed the evolution of Russia's foreign policy towards Ukraine and Belarus and underscored the factors that influenced the formation of this policy, pointing to specific foreign policy patterns during the presidencies of Boris Yeltsin and Vladimir Putin. In addition, Russia's current foreign policy towards the two states under President Dmitri Medvedev was briefly evaluated.

The research has yielded several conclusions. First, geopolitical considerations led Russia to pursue a foreign policy which was directed at strengthening its influence in bordering states, so that the policies of these states would correspond to Russia's interests. To this end, and in order to create buffer states, Russia promoted integrationist policies in the CIS. However, when the RF realized that such integration could not be achieved, it acted to increase its western neighbors' dependency on itself so that they would not slip far beyond its grip. Second, Russia's threat perception caused it to act to reobtain the USSR's nuclear weapons. Russia, then, strived to preserve the regional status quo, which dictated that the neighboring states' position towards it would be at the very least neutral. Any worsening of that status quo was regarded as changing Russia's threat perception. Either a tightening of relations between one of the CIS states and a foreign power, or a state's action that might have jeopardized Russia's interests was interpreted by it as a threat. This perception triggered Russia's balancing against the challenger by political and economic levers.

Third, the intensity of the balancing was dependent on Russia's level of power. When Russian power was soaring under President Putin and then President Medvedev, it conducted an increasingly assertive balancing, whereas when its power was at a low point during Yeltsin's era, it chose to use appeasing balancing tactics and compromise. Russia's power also played a role in allowing it to gain the other side's cooperation in the sphere of foreign relations. Fourth, interest groups also had an effect on Russia's foreign policy. When the predominant leader was unable to act alone or chose to be detached from the decision-making process, interest groups influenced Russia's foreign policy. In this case, the decision-makers implemented policies that improved the position of those groups. Finally, the Russian decision-makers' perception of the past guided them in formulating Russia's foreign policy. These policies tended to integrate elements of the historical succession, based on the decision-makers reinterpretation of the past.

Table 1*Siloviki* in Russian Business

Name	Title	Business	Concentration	Day job
Sergei Chemezov*	Chairman / CEO	Rosoboron-export	Arms exports	
Sergei Ivanov**^	Chairman	United Aviation	Airplane manufacture	First Deputy Prime Minister
Viktor Ivanov**^	Chairman of Board	Aeroflot; Almaz-Antey	Airline; Air defense systems	Deputy head Kremlin administration
Igor Levitin	Chairman	Sheremetyevo Airport	Airport	Minister of Transportation
Dmitry Medvedev^	Chairman	Gazprom	Natural gas	Former Putin Chief of Staff; First Deputy Prime Minister
Sergei Naryshkin**^	Vice chairman	Rosneft	Oil	Deputy Prime Minister
Sergei Prikhodko	Chairman	Tvel	Nuclear fuel trading	Foreign affairs adviser to Putin
Igor Sechin**^	Chairman	Rosneft	Oil	Kremlin staff
Anatoly Serdyukov	Chairman	Khimprom	Chemicals	Minister of Defense
Yevgeny Shkolov	Board of Directors	Transneft	Oil pipeline	Presidential aide
Igor Shuvalov	Board of Directors Chairman	Russia Railways; Sovcomflot	Railway; Shipping Company	Presidential economic adviser
Sergei Sobyanin	Chairman	Tvel	Producer of nuclear fuel	Putin Chief of Staff
Vladislav Surkov	Chairman	Transnefteprodukt	Pipeline hardware	Kremlin staff
Vladimir Yakunin*	President	Russia Railways		
Vladislav Surkov	Chairman	Transnefteprodukt	Pipeline hardware	Kremlin staff
Vladimir Yakunin*	President	Russia Railways Co.		

* former member of KGB

^ from St. Petersburg

Source: Marshall I. Goldman, "Russia: A Petrostate in a Time of Worldwide Economic Recession and Political Turmoil," *Social Research* 76, no. 1 (Spring 2009): 66.

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