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RUSSIA'S CENTRAL ASIA POLICY UNDER BORIS YELTSIN

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Abstract

This article seeks to analyze Russia's Central Asia policy under President Boris Yeltsin during the 1990s. It focuses on Russia's security and economic relations with Central Asian states. During the 1990s, along with various policies of the then ruling elite in Russia, Russia's security and economic relations with Central Asian states, therefore its influence on the region, deteriorated considerably in comparison with the Soviet times. Main factors behind this process were general characteristics of Russian foreign policy during the 1990s; namely, confusion, lack of coherence and ineffectiveness.

Keywords: Russian Foreign Policy, Central Asia, Boris Yeltsin, security relations, economic relations.

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Özet

Boris Yeltsin Döneminde Rusya'nın Orta Asya Politikası

Bu makale 1990'lı yıllarda, Başkan Boris Yeltsin dönemindeki Rusya'nın Orta Asya politikasını incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Makale Rusya'nın Orta Asya Devletleri ile olan güvenlik ve ekonomik ilişkilerine odaklanmaktadır. 1990'larda, o zamanın yönetici elitinin uyguladığı farklı politikalar eşliğinde, Rusya'nın Orta Asya Devletleri ile olan güvenlik ve ekonomik ilişkileri, dolayısıyla Rusya'nın Orta Asya üzerindeki etkisi, Sovyetler Birliği dönemine kıyasla önemli bir oranda gerilemiştir. 1990'lı yıllarda Rus dış politikasının genel özellikleri olan akıl karışıklığı, tutarsızlık ve etkisizlik bu sürecin arkasındaki ana etkenler olmuştur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Rus Dış Politikası, Orta Asya, Boris Yeltsin, güvenlik ilişkileri, ekonomik ilişkiler.

Introduction

Russian foreign policy in the first few years following the dissolution of the Soviet Union could be characterized, as Margot Light states, as 'incoherent'.¹ The ruling cadres in Russia were confused and also divided about Russia's new international status, identity and ideology following the fall of the Soviet Union.² As a result, Russia's external influence deteriorated significantly as compared to the Soviet period. The coherence of Russia's foreign policy was negatively affected by the ruling elite's confusion and their attempts to restore Russia's international identity and status. Various military, foreign and security concepts and doctrines were influential in the emergence of this incoherence.³ These general features of post-Soviet Russian foreign policy, namely confusion, lack of coherence and ineffectiveness, were also seen in Russia's Central Asia policy during the 1990s. This paper analyzes Russia's Central Asia policy under President Boris Yeltsin during the 1990s.

1 Margot Light, "Russian Foreign Policy," **Developments in Russian Politics 7**, (ed. Stephen White, Richard Sakwa, and Henry E. Hale), New York 2010, p. 225.

2 For a comprehensive examination of Russian domestic debate on Russia's post-Soviet identity, ideology and foreign policy, see Bobo Lo, **Russian Foreign Policy in the Post-Soviet Era: Reality, Illusion and Mythmaking**, Hampshire; New York 2002, pp. 12-62.

3 Light, 225.

This article, firstly, examines three periods in Russia's Central Asia policy during the 1990s. Later, the article discusses Russia's economic relations with Central Asian states under Yeltsin. Then, it focuses on Russia's security relations with the states of the region. The final part is the conclusion of the paper.

Russian foreign policy interests, therefore Russia's policies, towards Central Asia witnessed changes during the 1990s under President Yeltsin. The changes were due to above mentioned general characteristics of Russian foreign policy during the 1990s: confusion, lack of coherence and ineffectiveness made policy changes necessary. Russia's Central Asia policy during the 1990s can be divided into three periods: the first period of 1991-1992; the second period of 1993-1995; and the third period of 1996-1999.⁴ The common feature of these three periods was Russia's declining political and economic influence on Central Asian states. To put it shortly, during the 1990s Central Asia was lost for Russia.

First Period in Russia's Central Asia Policy: 1991-1992

Central Asian states, once a part of the Russian Empire and then the Soviet Union, became 'remote' for the Russian ruling elite following the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Russia did not have the necessary and sufficient means to deal with the states of Central Asia just after their independence.⁵ Accordingly, Russia could not formulate a new and effective policy towards the new independent states of Central Asia. Yegor Gaidar, as the head of the Russian government, and Andrei Kozyrev, as the foreign minister, did not have clear policy standings about Central Asia. There was no consensus among the Russian ruling elite about Russia's national interests, what role Central Asia plays for Russia's interests, and what kind of a policy Russia should pursue

4 Lena Jonson, **Russia and Central Asia: A New Web of Relations**, London 1998, pp. 17-19.

5 Lena Jonson, **Vladimir Putin and Central Asia: The Shaping of Russian Foreign Policy**, London; New York 2004, p. 43.

towards Central Asia. Reformers of the post-Soviet Russia initially supported the view that Central Asia was not a significant area for Russia's military and security interests. Indeed, since the time of Mikhail Gorbachev, then president of the Soviet Union, reformers had always claimed that Russia had to reduce, if possible terminate, its costly commitments outside Russia's main land. Lena Jonson, considering these tendencies of the ruling elite in Russia, characterized Russia's initial Central Asian foreign policy during 1991-1992 as "withdrawal and confusion."⁶

Russia's 'withdrawal and confusion' about Central Asia was a result of Russia's new policy orientation towards the West. Following the fall of the Soviet Union, most of post-Soviet Russia's new leaders changed their attitudes towards the West, in particular towards the US. The West was seen as a natural partner to complete Russia's transition from communism. Integration into the West became the main objective of Russian foreign policy. President Boris Yeltsin and his first foreign minister Kozyrev played significant roles in giving Russian foreign policy a pro-Western orientation.⁷ President Yeltsin criticized the communist past and declared Russia's goal as establishing democracy and being a part of the capitalist world.⁸ According to Yeltsin, Russia, for overcoming its weaknesses, had to liberalize its economy, come closer to Europe and the US, and change its previous geopolitical understanding that forced Russia to dominate its neighbors.⁹

Russia's this new policy orientation was based on Kozyrev's 'liberal internationalism'. Kozyrev focused his attention on improving Russia's

6 Jonson, **Russia and Central Asia: A New Web of Relations**, p. 17.

7 James M. Goldgeier and Michael McFaul, **Power and Purpose: U.S. Policy toward Russia after the Cold War**, Washington, D.C. 2003, p. 362.

8 Peter Shearman, "The Sources of Russian Conduct: Understanding Russian Foreign Policy," **Review of International Studies**, 27 (2001), p. 255.

9 Celeste A. Wallander, "Russia: The Domestic Sources of a Less-than-Grand Strategy," **Strategic Asia 2007-08: Domestic Political Change and Grand Strategy**, (ed. Ashley J. Tellis and Michael Wills), Washington, D.C. 2007, p. 140.

relations with the West. As a result, relations with the former Soviet republics lost their importance for Russia. Kozyrev supported the idea that Russia could benefit significantly by integrating itself into the liberal world. For Kozyrev, Russia and the West (the democratic world) shared the same international interests and these interests were in line with Russia's objectives concerning democracy and transition. Kozyrev believed that Russia had to cooperate with the West in economic and political issues in order to avoid exclusion from the international democratic community.¹⁰ According to Kozyrev, post-Soviet international setting offered many advantages to Russia. He believed that there were no more potential enemies or military threats to Russia. He argued that a system of worldwide cooperation was replacing old global divisions and confrontations.¹¹

Kozyrev believed that a democratic Russia and the West were natural friends.¹² Kozyrev was following Gorbachev's 'New Thinking' as expressed in the concept of the 'Common European Home', which claimed that countries from Western Europe and the Soviet Union, although belonging to different political blocs, shared common problems and opportunities. Therefore, the European Community, Eastern Europe, and the Soviet Union could cooperate on the issues of security, economic and human rights.¹³ Like Gorbachev, Kozyrev believed that Russia had to give some sacrifices to improve its relations with the West.¹⁴ President Yeltsin, sharing these ideas, complained about the burden

10 Allen C. Lynch, "The Evolution of Russian Foreign Policy in the 1990's," **Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics**, 18/1 (March 2002), p. 164.

11 Christian Thorun, **Explaining Change in Russian Foreign Policy: The Role of Ideas in Post-Soviet Russia's Conduct towards the West**, New York 2009, p. 29.

12 Rick Fawn, "Realignments in Russian Foreign Policy: An Introduction," **Realignments in Russian Foreign Policy**, (ed. Rick Fawn), London; Portland, Or. 2003, p. 8.

13 Lionel Ponsard, **Russia, NATO and Cooperative Security: Bridging the Gap**, London; New York 2007, p. 140.

14 *Ibid.*, p. 62.

of the former Soviet republics and their conservative stance on economic and political issues. According to Yeltsin, former Soviet republics, particularly Central Asian states, were slowing down Russia's modernization efforts. These ideas of the ruling elite in Russia stood against Russia's any claim or wish to sustain its former control over Central Asia.¹⁵

Economic considerations of the Russian ruling elite also played an important role in Russia's 'withdrawal' from Central Asia during 1991-1992. During the problematic times of the Soviet Union, which finally led to the dissolution of the Union, Central Asia was seen as an economic burden for the already deteriorating Soviet economy. As Lena Jonson mentions, in 1990 Alexander Solzhenitsyn warned Soviet leaders about the necessity of developing the 'Slavic heartland' and ignoring Central Asia to a certain degree.¹⁶ For most of the new generation of Russian policy-makers, Central Asia was an economic burden. Central Asian states had received subsidies from the Soviet Union and were consequently potential applicants for subsidies from the Russian Federation.¹⁷ The first Russian Government, under Acting Prime Minister Gaidar, also regarded Central Asia as an economic burden to Russia. The ruling elite feared that Russia would be left out only with Central Asian states as other former Soviet republics in Europe searched for alternative relations.¹⁸ The attitude of seeing Central Asia as a burden (and a culturally, politically and religiously different region) was evident in Central Asian states' initial exclusion from the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), which was created by Russia,

15 Marlene Laruelle, "Russia and Central Asia," **The New Central Asia: The Regional Impact of International Actors**, (ed. Emilian Kavalski), Singapore 2010, p. 155.

16 Jonson, **Russia and Central Asia: A New Web of Relations**, p. 16.

17 Talgat Ismagambetov, "Some Geopolitical Peculiarities of Central Asia, Past and Present," **Oil, Transition and Security in Central Asia**, (ed. Sally N. Cummings), London; New York 2003, p. 246.

18 Jonson, **Vladimir Putin and Central Asia: The Shaping of Russian Foreign Policy**, p. 43.

Ukraine and Belarus in 1991.¹⁹ This exclusion led to protests by Central Asian republics. Especially Kazakhstan was critical of being abandoned. Taking into account the criticisms, finally Central Asian states, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Moldova were admitted to the CIS at a second meeting that took place three weeks after the first meeting.²⁰

Decision-makers in Russia expected a fast and unproblematic integration into the West and the establishment of democracy in Russia.²¹ However, the ruling elite in Russia soon recognized that Russia's attempts to integrate into the West was impossible on Russian terms and was unacceptable on Western terms. Therefore, it was decided that Russia had to promote its interests on its own.²² It became clear that Russia had other more urgent issues to deal with other than integrating into the West. Some of these issues included Russia's decreasing influence in CIS countries; deterioration of economic relations with the former Soviet republics; nuclear weapons left on the territories of Ukraine, Kazakhstan and Belarus; wars and ethnic tensions in the post-Soviet territory; and the situation of the Russians living in former Soviet republics.²³ With this recognition and 'wake up', the second period in Russian Central Asia policy began.

19 Eugene B. Rumer, "Russia and Central Asia after the Soviet Collapse," **After Empire: The Emerging Geopolitics of Central Asia**, (ed. Jed C. Snyder), Washington, D.C. 1995, p. 49.

20 Martin A. Smith, **Russia and NATO since 1991: From Cold War through Cold Peace to Partnership?** London; New York 2006, p. 43.

21 Laruelle, p. 154.

22 Dmitri Trenin, "Russia and Central Asia," **Interests, Policies, and Prospects in Central Asia: Views from Washington, Moscow, and Beijing**, (Eugene Rumer, Dmitri Trenin, and Huasheng Zhao; with an Introduction by Rajan Menon), New York 2007, p. 81.

23 Goldgeier and McFaul, p. 362.

Second Period in Russia's Central Asia Policy: 1993-1995

General characteristic of Russian foreign policy towards Central Asia in the period 1993-1995, as Lena Jonson mentions, was 'great-power rhetoric'.²⁴ The opposition to President Yeltsin that emerged in 1992 accused the Russian government of ignoring Russian interests in the 'near abroad'-the independent republics which emerged after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. In Russia, in 1991-1993, the main domestic debate on Russian foreign policy orientation was between 'Atlanticists', who favored integration into the West, and 'Eurasianists', who claimed that Russia had to reestablish its former domination in the former Soviet space regardless of the interests and concerns of the West.²⁵

During 1993-1995, taking into account the critics, the ruling elite in Russia gave more emphasis to the issues of Russian national interests, Russia's great power aspirations, and Russia's leadership in the CIS.²⁶ In this period, policy statements of President Yeltsin and Foreign Minister Kozyrev showed a policy change concerning the 'near abroad'. The ruling elite in Russia became aware of the danger that Russia was losing its control and influence over Central Asia and external powers were taking Russia's previous place in the region. Accordingly, a new consensus on foreign policy among the Russian elite emerged.²⁷ The new policy aimed at regaining great power status for Russia; controlling the former Soviet territories; and preventing any other third state's involvement in the 'near abroad'.²⁸

24 Jonson, **Russia and Central Asia: A New Web of Relations**, p. 17.

25 F. Seth Singleton, "Russia and Asia: The Emergence of 'Normal Relations'?" **The Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation**, (ed. Roger E. Kanet and Alexander Kozhemiakin), New York 1997, p. 104.

26 Jonson, **Vladimir Putin and Central Asia: The Shaping of Russian Foreign Policy**, p. 44.

27 For a comprehensive examination of the evolution of debates and policies in Russia towards the CIS states in 1991-1996, see Nicole J. Jackson, **Russian Foreign Policy and the CIS: Theories, Debates and Actions**, London; New York 2003, pp. 51-80.

28 Jonson, **Russia and Central Asia: A New Web of Relations**, p. 18.

In 1995, Russia announced that the territory of the CIS was very important for its interests and Russia would try to continue its control on borders of the former Soviet Union.²⁹ However, there was no consensus among the Russian ruling elite on specific policies to be followed towards Central Asia. Although President Yeltsin issued a decree on Russian policy concerning CIS military and economic integration, Russian political elite both within and outside of the government could not agree on specific policies to promote Russia's interests.³⁰ In 1995 dated decree on Russia's relations with CIS states, President Yeltsin stated that Russia aimed to establish a collective security system based on the Collective Security Treaty and bilateral agreements between Russia and other CIS member states. President Yeltsin added that the Collective Security Treaty would become a defense union; Russian border troops in CIS member states would be maintained by mutual agreements; and joint peace keeping operations would be increased and enhanced. However, none of these ambitions of President Yeltsin materialized truly. Russia, therefore, focused on enhancing cooperation on the issues of joint border defense, joint air defense and joint peacekeeping operations.³¹

With the policy turn of 1993, Russia gave more emphasis to security threats caused by the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The Tajik civil war of 1992 was influential in this new understanding.³² With the Tajik civil war, Russian engagement in Central Asia became visible.³³ Russia became aware of the possible Islamic threat both for Central Asia and for its own territory. Russia, with its new borders, became more interested in the problems caused by smuggling, drug-trafficking, and illegal trespassing of borders. For the ruling elite, solutions to these problems could be found in geo-political strategy

29 Laruelle, p. 156.

30 Jonson, **Vladimir Putin and Central Asia: The Shaping of Russian Foreign Policy**, p. 44.

31 Jonson, **Russia and Central Asia: A New Web of Relations**, pp. 37-38.

32 Ibid., p. 18.

33 Maria Raquel Freire, "Russian Policy in Central Asia: Supporting, Balancing, Coercing, or Imposing?" **Asian Perspective**, 33/2 (2009), p. 131.

towards Central Asia. Therefore, Central Asia once again became important for Russia's security considerations.³⁴

The foreign policy consensus of 1993 changed not only Russia's foreign policy towards Central Asia but also its stance to the West.³⁵ The new foreign policy understanding followed that Russia's foreign policy interests could coincide with the West's interests but were never identical to them. Accordingly, Yevgeny Primakov, as then head of the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service, highlighted the threat arising from Western and Muslim governments that were aiming to increase their influence on the former Soviet territories. The threat to Central Asia, mainly to Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, caused by the situation in Afghanistan was attributed to states out of the region, which utilized the instability of the former Soviet Union space for their interests.³⁶

Although Russia wanted to be more active in Central Asia during its second period of Central Asia policy (1993-1995), the gap between its capability and goals and between its rhetoric and actual actions continued to grow. Russian attitude towards the war in Tajikistan was a result of the realization of this gap by the ruling elite. The ruling elite realized that Russia lacked the resources and the capability to have a military solution in the Tajik war, and a Russian failure would significantly harm Russia's prestige in Central Asia. Therefore, Russia pushed for a political compromise between the Tajik parties and the signing of a political agreement.³⁷ With the recognition of the limits of Russia's capabilities and the gap between its rhetoric and actual actions, the third period in Russian Central Asia policy began.

34 Jonson, **Russia and Central Asia: A New Web of Relations**, p. 18.

35 For details of the foreign policy consensus of 1993, see Jackson, pp. 63-65.

36 Jonson, **Russia and Central Asia: A New Web of Relations**, p. 18.

37 *Ibid.*, pp. 18-19.

Third Period in Russia's Central Asia policy: 1996-1999

The third period in Russia's foreign policy towards Central Asia under President Yeltsin began in 1996 when Yevgeny Primakov replaced Kozyrev as foreign minister and lasted until the appointment of Vladimir Putin as prime minister in 1999. Kozyrev was removed from office as for President Yeltsin, Kozyrev, who had conducted an apparent pro-American foreign policy, was incapable of raising Russia's status in the international arena and his policies had humiliated Russia as a great power.³⁸ Indeed, Kozyrev had long been criticized for his idealism and uncritical stance towards the West.³⁹ According to critics, during 1991-1993 Russia could not deal with its former Soviet republics in a consistent manner and had easily made unilateral concessions to the West on important issues. Accordingly, Kozyrev's pro-Western policy was perceived as humiliating Russia's prestige and harmful to its economic, political, and security interests.⁴⁰

Lena Jonson characterized Russia's Central Asia policy in the period 1996-1999 as a policy of 'pragmatic search' for solutions to the problems on the 'near abroad'. This policy understanding called for political compromise between conflicting parties and followed a 'wait and see' policy to integrate former Soviet space. Primakov, then foreign minister, was the leading figure in this pragmatic understanding to foreign policy. He was devoted to defending and advancing Russia's interests.⁴¹ Primakov, in comparison to Kozyrev, had a more realistic stance in foreign policy. He was aware of the limits of Russia's capabilities. He favored multilateralism in foreign policy. According to Primakov, Russia had to follow a balanced policy in relations with the West and at the same time develop relations with other countries, especially China

38 Roy Medvedev, **Post-Soviet Russia A Journey through the Yeltsin Era**, (trans. and ed. George Shriver), New York 2000, p. 332.

39 Richard Sakwa, **Putin: Russia's Choice**, 2nd ed., London; New York 2008, p. 275.

40 Alexei G. Arbatov, "Russia's Foreign Policy Alternatives," **International Security**, 18/2 (Autumn, 1993), pp. 5-23.

41 Jonson, **Russia and Central Asia: A New Web of Relations**, p. 19.

and India. For Primakov, this was the only way of challenging the unipolar world system that stood against Russia's great power aspiration.⁴² In 1996, Primakov argued that Russia would always be a great power. According to Primakov, Russia's greatness was based on its strategic, scientific, educational, and cultural potential, and also on its territory. Primakov believed that Russia had to develop its relations with non-Western countries with a much more committed manner in order to preserve its international status as an important actor.⁴³

According to Primakov, Russia also had to reestablish its influence over the post-Soviet space for its great power ambitions. Russia's conditions at the time, however, were not very promising for this end: Russia was having serious economic problems; it had important problems concerning Chechnya; Russia witnessed a series of change of prime ministers as a result of President Yeltsin's concerns for his own career; and the elites in Russia, although accepting the necessity for regaining great power status, were divided whether to reinvest in Central Asia for this goal.⁴⁴

Accordingly, despite ambitions of the 'Primakov Doctrine', the situation in Central Asia during 1996-1999 was not really promising for Russia. By 1999, among Central Asian states only Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan remained in the Collective Security Treaty. Russian troops left all Central Asian states except Tajikistan. Russia's role and influence in Central Asia reduced and Central Asian states were reorienting their foreign policy policies away from Russia.⁴⁵ Central Asian states had been cooperating with Western states on security and military issues. All Central Asian States, except Tajikistan, joined North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO) Partnership for Peace (PfP) programme - the programme of bilateral cooperation between

42 Laruelle, p. 157.

43 Thorun, pp. 34-35.

44 Laruelle, pp. 157-158.

45 Jonson, **Vladimir Putin and Central Asia: The Shaping of Russian Foreign Policy**, p. 48.

individual Partner countries and NATO. These states showed further interest in developing cooperation. Central Asian peacekeeping battalion carried out joint military maneuvers on Central Asian territory within the framework of the PfP with NATO soldiers. In the economic sphere, Central Asian states consulted with the West for oil and gas pipeline projects that would bypass Russian territory.⁴⁶ Economic relations between Russia and Central Asian states fell to very low levels. New foreign economic actors, particularly from the US, China, Turkey, Iran, and Japan managed to enter Central Asian markets and jeopardized Russian firms' former position.⁴⁷

Strategic and economic objectives of Russia's main competitors in the region, namely the US and China, have been very influential in the policy choices of Central Asian states. In the early 1990s, Central Asia was not taken as a priority issue by the US foreign policy makers. The US initially focused on the presence of nuclear weapons and nuclear infrastructure in Kazakhstan. Other aspects of security in the region were largely ignored.⁴⁸ Since mid-1990s, however, Central Asia has been considered to have significant strategic importance for the US, mainly due to its geographical location and rich natural resources. In the second half of the 1990s, the US policy in Central Asia focused on weakening the dependency of Central Asian states on Russia, limiting China's expansion into the region, preventing Iran from establishing contacts with the region and reducing transnational threats.⁴⁹ The US prioritized the establishment of democratic political institutions; development of market economy; fostering cooperation and integration of these countries with the Euro-Atlantic community; improvement of these countries' security policies

46 Lena Jonson, "The Security Dimension of Russia's Policy in South Central Asia," **Russia between East and West: Russian Foreign Policy on the Threshold of the Twenty-First Century**, (ed. Gabriel Gorodetsky), London; Portland, Or. 2003, p. 131.

47 Laruelle, pp. 158-159.

48 Evgeny F. Troitskiy, "US Policy in Central Asia and Regional Security," **Global Society**, 21/3 (2007), p. 415.

49 *Ibid.*, p. 417.

on antiterrorism, nonproliferation and drug trafficking.⁵⁰ These strategic objectives were based on US global security concerns and economic interests. Accordingly, the US tried to reorient regional elites to Washington from Russia and minimize Chinese influence.⁵¹ In the second half of the 1990s, the US managed to develop its cooperation with the Central Asian states on military, political and economic issues.

China, on the other hand, quickly established relations with the newly independent Central Asian states following the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The war in Afghanistan, rise of political Islam, the civil war in Tajikistan in 1992, and unrest in Xinjiang have been the main policy issues for Chinese policy makers. Initially, China's main concerns in the region focused on getting support for its policies in Xinjiang and border demarcation. Since the mid-1990s, China began to concentrate on economic opportunities in the region. For China, strong economic ties between Central Asia and Xinjiang became very important not only for ensuring stability in these areas and protecting its economic interests, but also for China's great power aspirations. Central Asia has become vital for China's investments and oil and gas demands for its rapidly developing domestic economy. Accordingly, Chinese trade, loans and investments in the region have grown significantly since the 1990s.⁵²

Russia's Economic Relations with Central Asian States under Yeltsin

Following the fall of the Soviet Union, Russia tried to control the disintegration process of the former Soviet space by offering CIS integration initiatives. Indeed, both Russia and the Central Asian states had interest in preserving and enhancing economic relations with each other. However,

50 Nozar Alaolmolki, **Life After the Soviet Union: The Newly Independent Republics of the Transcaucasus and Central Asia**, New York 2001, pp. 10-11.

51 Troitskiy, p. 417.

52 International Crisis Group, "China's Central Asia Problem," **Asia Report**, 244 (27 February 2013), pp. 3-12. Available at <http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/asia/north-east-asia/244-chinas-central-asia-problem.pdf> (accessed 01 March, 2013)

Russian economic relations with Central Asian states deteriorated: the volume of trade reduced significantly and cross-border investment fell dramatically.⁵³

Dissolution of the Soviet Union and the subsequent break down of the Soviet trade patterns prevented intra-CIS trade from developing. Although Russia was the main trading partner of Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan, the level of trade remained lower than the Soviet period.⁵⁴ Russia's bilateral trade with Central Asian states fell significantly. The level of bilateral trade in 1993 was just a tenth of the 1991 levels, and this situation continued until 1995.⁵⁵ In 1995, Kazakhstan; in 1996, Kyrgyzstan; and in 1998, Tajikistan joined Russia in CIS Customs Union. However, the volume of intra-CIS trade still remained at lower levels in comparison to former Soviet trade figures.⁵⁶

1995 was a turning point in Central Asian states' economic relations with the outside world. Central Asian states followed a more obvious 'diversification' policy in 1996 and 1997. This policy was based on Central Asian states' perception that Russia's economic assistance for the region would not be sufficient and these states had to look for alternative sources of assistance.⁵⁷ All CIS states had important economic problems. Both Russia and CIS member states repeated at different meetings the need for improving economic cooperation. Yeltsin's election as president for a second term in 1996 and the appointment of Anatoly Chubais and Boris Nemtsov (the young reformers) in 1997 brought a more economic-oriented policy stance towards the CIS. The new government gave importance to Russia's business interests

53 Jonson, **Vladimir Putin and Central Asia: The Shaping of Russian Foreign Policy**, p. 46.

54 Lena Jonson, "Russia and Central Asia," **Central Asian Security: The New International Context**, (ed. Roy Allison and Lena Jonson), Washington, D.C. 2001, pp. 101-102.

55 Laruelle, p. 155.

56 Jonson, "Russia and Central Asia," p. 101.

57 Jonson, **Russia and Central Asia: A New Web of Relations**, p. 7.

in Central Asia.⁵⁸ Primakov, then foreign minister of Russia, stated that issues concerning economic integration and establishment of a united economic space were of great importance and solutions to these problems were the one of the main priorities of Russian foreign policy. In this regard, Boris Berezovsky, a Russian oligarch, was appointed as secretary of the CIS. Berezovsky's appointment showed the importance given to economic issues and economic cooperation. However, Berezovsky's suggestion of centralizing the CIS and giving more authority to organization's executive bodies was not accepted. Most of the CIS leaders were against the idea of centralization. Finally, Berezovsky could not reform the CIS and was removed from office. His removal proved how difficult it was to establish cooperation among the member states of the CIS. Therefore, despite the goals and wishes of Russia, economic cooperation among CIS member states did not develop as planned.⁵⁹

Russia's Bilateral Economic Relations with Central Asian States

During the 1990s, Kazakhstan remained Russia's biggest trading partner among other Central Asian states. However, Russia's share of Kazakhstan's trade had ups and downs in the 1990s. Since 1995, there had been a constant decline in exports and imports. Russia and Kazakhstan criticized each other's national tariffs for the declining trade. In 1997, Russian minister for cooperation, for example, blamed Kazakhstan of putting import duties on Russian goods 150 times higher than the agreed rates. Concerning investments in Kazakhstan, Russia was just one of the many other investors, though not among the largest ones. By mid-1997, Kazakhstan had the fifth largest foreign direct investment among all post-communist countries. Around 80 percent of Kazakhstan's major companies were directed from abroad. In 1996, only 95 of 883 joint ventures in Kazakhstan were Russian. Russian minister for cooperation, once again, criticized Kazakhstan of intentionally harming Russian economic interests by

58 Ibid., p. 19.

59 Jonson, **Vladimir Putin and Central Asia: The Shaping of Russian Foreign Policy**, p. 46.

escaping joint ventures with Russia and selling its natural resources to third countries.⁶⁰

Uzbekistan's trade with Russia had declined significantly during the 1990s. Although Russia was Uzbekistan's largest trading partner, its share of Uzbekistan's trade had fallen considerably: from 53.9 percent in 1990 to 14.4 percent in 1996. The decline in trade between Russia and Uzbekistan was evident in the decreased level of cotton exports to Russia. In 1996, Uzbekistan lost its VAT-free privilege on cotton in Russia. Exports to Russia were cut as Russia did not pay in hard currency. In 1997, a bilateral agreement was signed to solve these problems and increase trade. However, it did not help as Uzbekistan decided to preserve export tariffs on important goods such as gold, oil, gas and cotton. Concerning investments in Uzbekistan, Russia could not play a significant role. Despite Russia's absence, annual foreign investment in Uzbekistan grew from 85 million dollars in 1994 to 150 million dollars in 1996. Turkey, the US, the UK, Germany, Japan, Indonesia and South Korea were the main players in investment.⁶¹

Turkmenistan's trade with Russia declined significantly following the fall of the Soviet Union. Ukraine, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan were the main exports markets for Turkmenistan. Gas (55.4 percent of total exports in 1995) and cotton (23 percent) constituted the largest share of Turkmenistan's exports. In 1995, only 6 percent of Turkmenistan's exports went to Russia, whereas 67 percent went to CIS member states.⁶²

Although Tajikistan and Russia had close military relations during the 1990s, Russia's economic relations with Tajikistan had declined and became very limited. Russia's share of Tajikistan's total trade decreased from 50.9 percent in 1990 to 10.3 percent in 1996. In 1995, Tajikistan's imports from Russia were only 6.7 percent of its total imports and exports to Russia were

60 Jonson, **Russia and Central Asia: A New Web of Relations**, pp. 52-53.

61 *Ibid.*, pp. 53-54.

62 *Ibid.*, p. 55.

only 8 percent of its total exports. Uzbekistan and Ukraine were Tajikistan's main trading partners. Russia was not among the main foreign investors in Tajikistan, whereas British mining companies managed to establish the two biggest joint ventures in the natural resources sector.⁶³

In 1990, 43.1 percent of Kyrgyzstan's total trade had been with Russia, whereas 50 percent with other Soviet republics. However, in 1995 Russia's share of Kyrgyzstan's total exports was around 25.6 percent and its share of Kyrgyzstan's imports was 21.9 percent. Russia's economic influence in Kyrgyzstan was further declined when China became Kyrgyzstan's largest trading partner in 1997.⁶⁴

In short, during the 1990s economic relations between Russia and Central Asian states deteriorated considerably in comparison to the Soviet times. New foreign economic actors managed to enter Central Asian markets and threatened Russia's former position in the region.

Russia's Security Relations with Central Asian States under Yeltsin

Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Russia initially managed to offer security guarantees, both domestic and external, to the Central Asian states, which lacked the necessary military experience, personnel and infrastructure for setting up national armies.⁶⁵ Accordingly, Russia signed bilateral agreements with Central Asian states concerning military and defense issues. In 1992, Collective Security Treaty was signed. The treaty focused mainly on external threats, but it also aimed to restrict the use of force between the signatories. All Central Asian states, except Turkmenistan, signed the treaty. However, the proposed goals of military integration and effectiveness by the Treaty did not realize. Participants failed to create a joint CIS force and reach common military policies. Turkmenistan, for example, did not participate in

63 Ibid., pp. 55-56.

64 Ibid.

65 Ibid., p. 29.

CIS military discussions and stopped attending experts meetings on military issues.⁶⁶ Uzbekistan, on the other hand, withdrew from the Treaty in 1999. The main reason behind Uzbekistan's withdrawal was its willingness to escape tensions between Russia and NATO.⁶⁷

Peacekeeping became one of the main issues in relations between Russia and Central Asian states following the Tajik civil war in 1992. Central Asian states were reluctant in establishing military cooperation with Russia. During the Tajik civil war, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan provided only a small number of military troops and Russia had to do the main job in the crisis. Russia's further calls for creating stable mechanisms and standing armies for peacekeeping operations were ignored by the CIS members. Instead, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan established their own national peacekeeping forces and increased their cooperation both between themselves and with the NATO's PfP programme.⁶⁸

Russia's 'withdrawal' from Central Asia in security issues was evident. Russia could not effectively respond to NATO's PfP programme, which aimed at integrating former Soviet Republics. Russia was satisfied with its observer status in the Central Asian Union,⁶⁹ which consisted of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan.⁷⁰ Russia only managed to establish close cooperation with Tajikistan. Russia's close cooperation with Tajikistan, the weakest state in Central Asia, showed its weakness in Central Asia during the 1990s.⁷¹

66 Jonson, "Russia and Central Asia," p. 104.

67 Pavel H. Baev, **Russian Energy Policy and Military Power: Putin's Quest for Greatness**, New York 2008, p. 71.

68 Jonson, "Russia and Central Asia," p. 105.

69 Central Asian Union (CAU) was created by Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan in 1994. Tajikistan joined the Union in 1998. Russia became an observer in 1996. The objective of the CAU was creating a common political, economic and cultural space by regional integration.

70 Laruelle, p. 155.

71 Jonson, "Russia and Central Asia," p. 109.

Russia's Bilateral Security Relations with Central Asian States

Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Russia helped Turkmenistan to establish its national army. With the 1992 dated treaty Turkmenistan agreed with Russia to establish a national army under joint command. Russia had the total control over the air force and air defense systems. Russia became responsible for training, exercise and logistics. However, Turkmenistan reduced its cooperation with Russia as a result of its foreign policy based on 'neutrality'. Turkmenistan's foreign policy doctrine of 'permanent neutrality' was approved by the UN General Assembly in 1995. 'Neutrality' doctrine aimed to enhance Turkmenistan's independence by establishing diplomatic and trade relations with a variety of states while escaping conflicts of its neighbors. 'Neutrality' called for non-interference and opposed membership in tightly bound international organizations or military alliances, including the CIS.⁷² In 1995, Turkmenistan decided to end the 1992 military cooperation agreement, which enabled Russia to have military bases in Turkmenistan.⁷³ In addition, Turkmenistan did escape CIS military cooperation, did not join the Collective Security Treaty, and reduced its military cooperation with Russia since the mid-1990s. Until the end of the 1999, Russia continued to control the border between Turkmenistan and Afghanistan. In 1999, Turkmenistan decided to annul the Russian-Turkmen treaty of 1993 on border cooperation and Russian border troops left Turkmenistan. Besides, Turkmenistan joined NATO's PfP programme and in 1999 signed another programme on increased cooperation with the PfP.⁷⁴

Uzbekistan, during the first half of the 1990s, built close military relations with Russia.⁷⁵ In 1992, for example, Uzbekistan worked with Russia to bring

72 Annette Bohr, "Independent Turkmenistan: from Post-Communism to Sultanism," **Oil, Transition and Security in Central Asia**, (ed. Sally N. Cummings), London; New York 2003, p. 16.

73 Jonson, **Russia and Central Asia: A New Web of Relations**, p. 35.

74 Jonson, "Russia and Central Asia," p. 106.

75 Roy Allison, "Russia and the New States of Eurasia," **Contemporary Russian Politics: A Reader**, (ed. Archie Brown), New York 2001, p. 448.

President Emomali Rakhmonov to power in Tajikistan. However, after 1995 Uzbekistan's attitude towards cooperation with Russia began to change. Uzbekistan established the most powerful military among Central Asian states and was determined to set up a national defense force independent of Russia.⁷⁶ Uzbekistan stopped taking part in multilateral CIS structures on military and economic matters. Uzbek President Islam Karimov openly questioned military and economic efforts of the CIS. Uzbekistan started to look for assistance and investment from the West, mainly the US. It opposed Russian military presence in Tajikistan and the 1999 dated Russian-Tajik agreement. Coming to the end of the 1990s, Uzbekistan withdrew from CIS military cooperation and finally in 1999 it left the Collective Security Treaty. Instead, Uzbekistan increased its cooperation with NATO's PfP programme.⁷⁷ President Karimov stated that he was not against the expansion of NATO.⁷⁸ In a similar stance, Uzbekistan joined GUAM in 1999.⁷⁹ In addition, in 1998 President Karimov openly criticized Russian security services and accused them of interfering in Uzbekistan's internal affairs. The issue of Russian military presence in Uzbekistan was not discussed even after the 1999 terrorist attacks in Tashkent.⁸⁰

During the 1990s, Kazakhstan had close military cooperation with Russia. Kazakhstan was the first Central Asian state to sign bilateral treaties with Russia on cooperation and mutual assistance. Both sides agreed to give military assistance in case of aggression against either party. They decided to establish a military and strategic zone and use military bases, infrastructures, and test sites jointly. President Yeltsin and Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev considered the treaty to be a model for other Central Asian states. However, the common military and strategic zone did not materialize and

76 Jonson, **Russia and Central Asia: A New Web of Relations**, p. 34.

77 Jonson, **Vladimir Putin and Central Asia: The Shaping of Russian Foreign Policy**, pp. 45-46.

78 Jonson, **Russia and Central Asia: A New Web of Relations**, p. 31.

79 GUUAM was a sub-regional association of Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova. After Uzbekistan's participation GUUAM was renamed as GUUAM.

80 Trenin, "Russia and Central Asia," p. 87.

military cooperation deteriorated.⁸¹ Indeed, Kazakhstan also gave importance to cooperation with the PfP programme.⁸² Kazakhstan, in its military doctrine called for close cooperation with NATO for assuring its security. In this regard, Kazakhstan became the first Central Asian state to open a permanent mission at NATO's headquarters in 1998.⁸³

Kyrgyzstan, just like Kazakhstan, continued its military cooperation with Russia and the CIS states during the 1990s. Kyrgyzstan, surrounded by Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, China and an unstable Tajikistan, was in need of Russia's security assistance. Nevertheless, Kyrgyzstan also paid great attention to cooperation with the PfP programme. Kyrgyzstan established its national border units in 1999 and Russian border units were replaced gradually until the end of 1999.⁸⁴

Tajikistan was significantly dependent on Russia for its security. Tajik civil war that lasted from 1992 to 1997 played an important role in this dependence. Russia took part in the war with its 201st Motorized Rifle Division and border troops.⁸⁵ Russian military assumed the role of CIS peacekeeping troops and the conflict in Tajikistan was solved and ended with a peace agreement. Tajikistan, accordingly, became the most loyal Central Asian state to Russia. Russian ruling elite always wished to maintain a large military force in Tajikistan as this presence was seen necessary to protect southern Russian borders from Islamic fundamentalism and also drug-trafficking.⁸⁶ In this regard, Russian military intervention in Tajikistan was the most successful case among Russia's attempts of direct use of force in the former Soviet space in the 1990s.

81 Jonson, **Russia and Central Asia: A New Web of Relations**, pp. 32-33.

82 Jonson, "Russia and Central Asia," p. 107.

83 Jonson, **Russia and Central Asia: A New Web of Relations**, p. 31.

84 Jonson, "Russia and Central Asia," p. 107.

85 Jonson, **Russia and Central Asia: A New Web of Relations**, p. 36.

86 Allison, "Russia and the New States of Eurasia," p. 449.

Despite these early achievements, coming to the end of 1990s Russian military presence in Tajikistan had lessened considerably.⁸⁷

In short, during the 1990s Russia's role and influence in security matters in Central Asia reduced. Central Asian states looked for ways for reorienting their foreign policy policies away from Russia. NATO's PfP programme was a good option for this end.

Conclusions

Russia's Central Asia policy during the 1990s can be divided into three periods: the first period of 1991-1992; the second period of 1993-1995; and the third period of 1996-1999. The common feature of these three periods was Russia's declining political and economic influence in Central Asian states.

In the first period of Russia's Central Asia policy (1991-1992), Russia could not formulate a new and effective policy towards Central Asia. This was the case as; firstly, Russia did not have the necessary and sufficient means to deal with the states of Central Asia; secondly, the ruling elite of the time remained passive and lacked serious political will and consensus about Central Asia. The political elite could not reach a consensus on what Russia would do in Central Asia, what Russia's goals and interest towards Central Asia were, and what specific policies were to be followed. Russia's new policy orientation towards the West was also very influential in Russia's loss of influence and interest in Central Asia. Russia, under the influence of President Yeltsin and Foreign Minister Kozyrev, tried to come closer to the West. Within this approach, Central Asian states were seen as both political and economic obstacles to Russia's integration into the West. Accordingly relations with the states of the region lost their importance for Russia and priorities of Russian foreign policy shifted to the issues related with the West. However, the ruling elite in Russia soon recognized that Russia's integration into the West was not an easy task and meanwhile Russia was losing Central Asia. In this respect, the opposition

87 Baev, pp. 96-97.

in Russia accused the government of ignoring Russian interests in the 'near abroad'. With these developments the second period in Russian Central Asia policy began.

During the second period of Russia's Central Asia policy (1993-1995), taking into account the critics, President Yeltsin and Foreign Minister Kozyrev followed a policy change concerning the 'near abroad'. The ruling elite in Russia became aware of the danger that Russia was losing its control and influence over Central Asia and external powers were taking Russia's previous place in the region. Accordingly, the new policy aimed at regaining great power status for Russia; assuming leadership in an integrated CIS, particularly over Central Asian states; and preventing any other third state's involvement in the 'near abroad'. With the policy turn of 1993, Russia gave more emphasis to security threats caused by the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The Tajik civil war of 1992 was influential in this new understanding. Central Asia once again became important for Russia for security considerations. However, there was no consensus among the Russian ruling elite on specific policies to be followed towards Central Asia. The Russian political elite both within and outside of the government could not agree on specific policies to promote Russia's interests. Therefore, although Russia wanted to be more active in Central Asia during its second period of Central Asia policy (1993-1995), the gap between its capability and goals continued to grow. Optimist declarations on economic and military integration in the CIS, particularly in Central Asia, did not materialize. With the recognition of the limits of Russia's capabilities and the growing gap between its rhetoric and actual actions, the third period in Russia's Central Asia policy began.

The third period in Russia's foreign policy towards Central Asia (1996-1999) began when Yevgeny Primakov replaced Kozyrev as foreign minister. Kozyrev was removed from office as for President Yeltsin, Kozyrev was incapable of raising Russia's status in the international arena and his policies had humiliated Russia as a great power. Appointment of Primakov in 1996 led to important changes to Russian Central Asia policy. Central Asia gained

importance in Russian foreign policy considerations. Primakov followed a more realistic and pragmatic policy towards the CIS, in particular towards Central Asia. Primakov supported the view that Russia had to return to the international arena as a great power. For this end, Russia had to follow a balanced policy in relations with the West and at the same time develop relations with other countries. For Primakov, this was the only way of challenging the unipolar world system that stood against Russia's great power aspiration. Primakov believed that Russia had to develop its relations with non-Western countries with a much more committed manner in order to preserve its international status as an important actor. According to Primakov, Russia also had to reestablish its influence over the post-Soviet space for its great power ambitions. Primakov was aware of the limits of Russia's capabilities. He aimed to reduce the gap between Russia's declarations and its capabilities. However, the premises of 'Primakov Doctrine' could not materialize efficiently as a result of Russia's limited resources and internal problems.

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