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# Russia and its Borderlands: A Geography of Violence

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"The internal and economic transformation of Russia has reached a stage where every external disruption could lead to long-lasting disorder in the organism of the state." -- D. Miliutin

"There is something erotic in everything that happens on the distant frontiers of the Empire." -- P. Valuev[1]

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This essay focuses on the Russian military's encounter with the new borderlands. Such an encounter is by no means unique in Russian history. Since the earliest days, Russia's borderlands have been a source of danger, of conquest, of military innovation and disaster. These lands have played an enormous role in shaping the Russian state itself, looming in the earliest days as a threat demanding the full mobilization of Russian society by the state and later as a source of imperial temptation at the expense of internal development. The Russian military's latest encounter with the borderlands is likely to be every bit as decisive as past encounters, for Russian forces are already engaged there and are likely to remain so for some time to come. The borderlands are likely to influence the structure and mission of the Russian armed forces, as well as basic security perceptions, not only of the military, but of the Russian leadership as well.

The new borderlands have arisen on the fragments of the old Soviet Union. This fragmentation has created new military and security challenges to which the Russian military must respond. These challenges include the rise of new nations and new national military forces, the spread of instability and armed conflicts, and the potential interests and ambitions of outside powers in these borderlands. But it is not just threat or necessity that propels the Russian military into the borderlands. The Russian military is there for a number of reasons--the sense of mission, the hope of profit or glory, and the search for power. It is there because of political decisions which, much more than the wishes of the military, shape Russian strategic policy. This essay is about how the Russian military is responding to both the pressures of the new borderlands and the decisions and interests of the Russian political leadership.

## **The Emerging Eurasian Military Environments**

The Eurasian security environment, like Eurasia itself, is fragmenting in the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union.[2] The rise of the new borderlands is in fact the rise of multiple military and security environments, not the single or unified region implied in the Russian term, "Near Abroad." Though Russian military weakness has magnified this diversity, its real source lies in the diversity of the new states themselves, their proximity to vastly different regions of Europe or Asia, and their success or failure in state-building, economic reform, and the creation of their own militaries. As the Russian military approaches these diverse borderlands, it must also recognize that their ultimate configuration is unlikely to be something uniform or shaped solely by Moscow.

This state of affairs demands a more exact mapping of the new military environments. As a contribution to this effort, what follows is a consideration of five key aspects of the new Eurasian security geography and Russia's military response to it, namely a consideration of zones of conflict; the hodgepodge of Russian security commitments in Central Asia; Russian force pockets in the western regions of the former USSR; the rise of a Ukrainian Armed Forces; and the future of Russian military forces in Belarus.

*Zones of Conflict*

This section will consider the interaction between the Russian military and the zones of conflict, particularly in the Caucasus. There is a geography of violence in the former USSR. Its epicenter is the Caucasus, though the conflicts in Tajikistan and Moldova suggest that violence is by no means confined to a single region. The preconditions for violence exist elsewhere in the former Soviet Union. One can blame ethnic tensions or outside pressures--and both factors play a role--but the root cause of violence in the zones of conflict is an indigenous political failure, a failure to consolidate a regime that has enough legitimacy and capabilities to defend itself and to hold at bay the forces that seek to destroy it. Of course, the Russian military is not simply a silent spectator to this failure. At times, it has contributed to it. At other times, it has exploited it. The Russian invasion of Chechnya brought new instability to the region. But the vulnerability and perhaps the small size of the states and state structures remain a root cause of violence in the zones of conflict.

Violence assumes a central role in the politics of failing regimes and becomes an accepted means of resolving disputes. Private factions and parties tend to have their own soldiers, as their Western counterparts have their own lawyers and accountants. These non-state military forces include a wide variety of militia, paramilitary structures, and private armies loyal to a political leader, clan, region, or cause. The national army is made up of various combinations of these groups, making them an unstable political coalition rather than a stabilizing factor in the regime. In this atmosphere, a small amount of force can go a long way. In Azerbaijan, the current Prime Minister gained his office by overthrowing the elected President. He accomplished this feat by threatening Baku with a few thousand soldiers. The indigenous units sustaining conflicts in Abkhazia, Nagorno-Karabakh, and Tajikistan are small and lightly armed by the standards of forces once arrayed along the Fulda Gap, yet there is little prospect that the tyranny of violence can be overcome by the rise of a military and state power that would overawe the various factions.

This array of irregular forces produces a violence that is persistent, fast-moving, and fast-disappearing. The military units that dominate the scene are well-formed one day, yet melt back into the civilian population the next. To distinguish them from their historical counterparts in the novels of Lermontov or Tolstoy, they possess at least small amounts of relatively modern conventional armaments, "privatized" from Soviet units that were disbanded or withdrawn.[3] Their possession of these weapons guarantees that the present conflicts will be bloodier than those in the past. These weapons--along with the traditional advantages enjoyed by guerrilla forces--increase the staying power of these forces vis-à-vis traditional armies, particularly demoralized ones like the Russian army. Though these small units may appear amateurish, ill-equipped, or ill-trained in the use of modern equipment, they are perfectly suited to the emerging military environment in which they act.

The effect of these conflicts on the surrounding security environment is quite clear. Regional conflicts are the enemy of political and economic stability. States in the midst of disintegration, civil strife, ethnic conflict, or small wars with their neighbors are unlikely to be vibrant democracies or economic success stories. Moreover, these conflicts impose military burdens even on disinterested neighbors, drawing scarce resources away from political and economic reforms to the military and security spheres. To an interested neighbor with forces deployed on their territory, these states inevitably exert special pressures.[4]



**Figure 1. Russia's New Borderlands.**  
(Commonwealth of Independent States shown in white in original.)

In a political environment in which force is all too common, Russian forces are a potentially critical factor in the success or failure of local factions. Russian soldiers possess the power to stabilize or destabilize regimes. It is difficult for such units to avoid being drawn into a conflict, whether by material inducements, honors, or even the impossibility of staying out of the line of fire. This gravitational pull on stationed Russian forces applies whether or not there are additional pressures from Moscow to shape, or at least take advantage of, a conflict. All too often, these pressures arise, perhaps not with the first shots, but later when Moscow can seek to exploit the fighting. In Georgia, for example, Russian military pressure led to a number of concessions on long-term basing rights for Russian forces and the return of Georgia's entitlement under the Treaty on Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) to Russia.

The Russian military has a long tradition of involvement in little wars on the edge of the empire. This tradition has at times had a positive effect on military innovation and reform. The military reforms of the 1860s-70s originated at least partly in the theater-reforms carried out in the Caucasus by Dmitri Miliutin and his commanding general. Yet, more often, this military involvement engendered an independent and imperially minded set of officers, like Cherniaev, who tried to carry out their own foreign policies in Central Asia (and, in the case of Cherniaev, in Serbia as well). In a more recent period, the rise of the so-called *Afghantsy* in the Soviet (and later the Russian) military reflects the influence of the frontier conflict in Afghanistan. The influence of this peculiar mixing of the military and a violent frontier has undeniably been a key ingredient in shaping the Russian military past.[5] It is also likely to play a considerable and contradictory role in the Russian military future.

For the military and state budgets, these conflicts are a long-term resource drain. The most likely scenarios, particularly given the current state of the Russian army, are those of stalemate and guerrilla war. In the Caucasus and Central Asia, no real rival army appears capable of arising from the states themselves, nor is one likely, in the near term, to intrude from the outside. Yet, even in an environment of "low-intensity conflict," Russian forces are likely to be engaged for years. Financing the war in Chechnya proved more manageable than many first feared, but financing two, three, or four little wars over a decade is a real financial burden directly affecting not only the allocation of scarce defense resources but the larger state budget as well. Furthermore, even if the budget burdens are manageable, the current Russian army has only so much equipment and personnel. The conflict in Chechnya, for example, used up surplus equipment, fuel, and supplies faster than they could be replaced. It also stretched existing personnel resources to the limit, bringing reinforcements from as far away as Vladivostok on the coast of the Sea of Japan.

At the unit level, these conflicts pose a real danger to military morale and cohesion. They are dirty little wars; few line officers or enlisted men are likely to receive glory or profit from their service in them. Press reports from Chechnya documented the low spirits, drug use, and atrocities that follow demoralized units like Banquo's ghost.

However, long-term military intervention creates a different momentum among senior military and political leaders toward imperial and quasi-imperial forms of control. The local commander's interference in local politics creates an opportunity for out-and-out control. In the past, the military's control of a region has led to *de facto* or *de jure* loss of independence. The Russian military's intervention in Abkhazia created opportunities for Moscow to win concessions on military bases, Georgia's share of conventional weapons entitlement under the CFE Treaty, and other "integrationist" steps. Though some argue that Moscow intended such a policy from the very beginning, Moscow would not have been able to press its agenda without local Russian military involvement in the Abkhaz conflict.[6] Ultimately, whether intended from the outset or not, involvement in one conflict clearly produces tendencies to exploit the fruits of that involvement. And, at least in the Caucasus, the geographic and political links between conflicts lead the senior military and political leadership to see the strategic need for a regional strategy, rather than selective intervention in one or another of the conflicts.[7]

Finally, there is also a danger that, in an army under stress, officers schooled in the rough-and-tumble of the borderlands will carry acquired habits of political interference home to Moscow. The figure of General Lebed is already a canonical example, but a greater danger probably arises from conspiracies of individuals and groups still unknown that will take advantage of the military's weakness as an institution to pursue their own agendas. The fragmentation of the military removes important restraints throughout the system, not only on the frontier. A broken army is more likely to breed Decembrists or provincial warlords, not dominate leadership decisions.

### *The Central Asian Hodgepodge*

Russian military involvement in Central Asia is a hodgepodge of deployments and security commitments with important long-term consequences for the Russian military. The hodgepodge is the result of the accident of existing deployments, improvised responses to the fall of the USSR and the outbreak of conflict in Tajikistan, and political decisions by the Russian leadership. It reflects the military side of the increasing Russian political commitment to deeper integration on the part of the new states of the former USSR. Yet, though in theory integration seeks to bind all states in the region, in practice Russian engagement--security and military--is likely to have unequal effects.

The hodgepodge of commitments begins with the conflict in Tajikistan. This conflict not only threatens the internal stability of the country, but has a regional dimension with its spill-over into Afghanistan. The support of one or another warring parties in the conflict by various Afghan factions, Iran, Uzbekistan, and Russia recalls old-fashioned geopolitical frictions in the region, but by no means yet on a scale of the "Great Game." The Russian leadership has made a series of commitments to defend Tajikistan's borders.[8] Russia reinforced the 201st Motorized Rifle Division as fighting in the Tajik conflict worsened and the division became more involved. It continues to man former Soviet border posts with Russian border troops, who are regularly fired upon and have suffered casualties.

But Russian involvement also includes strong political and security ties with Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, as well as a proposed "military union" with Kazakhstan. No effort is being made to create a real military border between Russia and Kazakhstan, given the high costs associated with the installation of barriers and border posts, as well as the deployment of border guards and other military assets.[9] This pattern of engagement--including the participation by four of the five Central Asian states in the Tashkent Agreement on Collective Security--means that Russia has decided to deal with potential problems of instability in the region by forward-deploying its scarce military assets there.[10]

It might well be argued that this approach in Central Asia is cost-effective for Russia, particularly if this small-scale engagement deters a serious outside competitor like China. The emergence of China as a great power is occurring simultaneously with Russian military and political weakness. This weakness in turn deprives Russia of levers for managing the growth of Chinese power, already manifested as economic and demographic pressures on the resource-rich, underpopulated Russian Far East.[11] Some Russian military analysts are concerned that Russia is in no position to manage the frictions to come.[12]

Russia's small-scale military engagement in Central Asia is also cheaper in the near term than massive outlays to erect

a real border and other military structures on the Russian-Kazakh line (or any other line between Russia and the old Soviet border in Tajikistan) and withdrawing from what is outside this new line. Finally, these Russian deployments-- thin as they are-- are enough to dominate indigenous national armies. Even where these armies seem to be relatively large on paper, such as Uzbekistan, Russian influence remains strong through the overwhelming presence of ethnic Russian officers.[13]

However, the management of this hodgepodge in Central Asia presents real problems, the most serious of which is the military's overcommitment. The Russian leadership has not provided material resources commensurate with its strategic commitments under any but the most favorable circumstances. Over time, the Russian forces-in-being are unlikely to be able to respond to expected challenges to Russian interests, even without the emergence of a true geopolitical competitor. At times, the elements of a real debate have emerged over Russia's role in the region or in conflicts like that in Tajikistan. This debate views military involvement in the borderlands as a great distraction from Russia's more serious security problems and challenges. Though this school of thought is unlikely to counsel withdrawal, it is likely to exert influence to prevent Central Asian commitments from becoming an abiding or expensive military preoccupation. The hodgepodge of commitments must be maintained on the cheap.

But local pressures for more resources will continue. The most obvious pressure on existing resources is the conflict in Tajikistan, where Russian commitments are only likely to increase. The Russian military is now the power supporting the current Tajik government, but these forces are not strong enough to put a halt to the civil war nor to seal off the border with Afghanistan. Russian military and border troops in Tajikistan are thus in for a long period of "frontier warfare," reminiscent of the difficult conditions faced by the Russian army of the past century but unlikely to end anytime soon with the same assertion of Russian control.

Russia must also be concerned about future conflicts of this type. These conflicts could arise from border disputes, or the breakdown of order in existing regimes, or simply as spill-over from the escalation and fragmentation of Tajikistan itself. The commitment already made in Tajikistan and clear security commitments to the other Central Asian states, both bilateral and through the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), make it unlikely that the Russian army would remain aloof from these conflicts. Thus, the extent of Russian involvement in Central Asia could very well grow out of a slow-but-steady "mission creep," a continuous response to one emergency after another, without time for a more dispassionate review of Russian interests, capabilities, and options in the region.

To add to Russia's problem, not one of the states of the region is capable of sharing any of the fiscal or military burdens with Russia. The most obvious example is CIS peacekeeping forces in Tajikistan, where other CIS leaders have offered only token forces of dubious quality to an ostensibly multilateral effort. While Uzbekistan has tried to play a central political role in management of the Tajik conflict, it has done so with little effect on the costs Russia must bear. In this and other cases, Russia must inevitably foot the lion's share of the bill, provide the bulk of the military equipment and forces, and suffer most of the casualties. Costs incurred here inevitably take resources away from force modernization and other programs designed to meet challenges already visible beyond the new borderlands. In the near term, these conflicts demand manpower and working equipment already in short supply, making involvement in the first conflict the enemy of success in the second or third.

If, for the foreseeable future, Russia's military commitments to the region are likely to exceed its material and military resources there, a second set of problems arises: Russia is forced to make choices over first- and second-order interests and allies. Even though it has exerted the greatest effort in Tajikistan, Russia's long-term preoccupation must be with the fate of Kazakhstan, its closest neighbor, for reasons of geography, resources, and the long and still indefensible border between the two states. The recent agreement-in-principle on a military union between Russia and Kazakhstan is one way of redressing this balance, but in Central Asia, urgent requirements may sometimes be obstacles to addressing the most important goals.[14]

Uzbekistan also figures prominently in Russia's first-order interests, but perhaps best illustrates the problems of managing limited Russian military and security assets in the region. Though in the past willing to serve as a surrogate for Russian interests in the region, Uzbekistan also has ambitions of its own. In Tajikistan, though joining with Russia to support the ruling coalition, Uzbekistan supports a different faction from Russia. Because of its size, geography, and resources, Uzbekistan may possess the greatest long-term potential to exert influence of its own over its Central Asian

neighbors, taking advantage of future Russian overextension or hesitation to fill the void or at least elevate its status from client state to junior partner.

Russia's long-term management of its military and security relationship in Central Asia will also include relations with Turkmenistan and Kyrgyzstan, though both are likely to be second-tier countries in Russian thinking. The Russian military is likely to find itself in the middle of a number of intrastate and interstate frictions. Between the states of the region, there remain tensions over borders, water, and other resources. Within these states, succession crises and internal challenges to existing regimes could very well sweep away political and security ties with Russia that have been fashioned over months or years. Russian military presence might dampen some conflicts but certainly not fully control or extinguish them. As in the past, Russia will likely have to use these conflicts and contradictions as a means of control, because it will not have the means to overawe the local competitors. Inevitably, this hodgepodge of commitments will give way to a more differentiated pattern of engagement and control. The competition for resources at home and the problems to be managed within the region compel the military to find a strategy that focuses on core national interests and the best way of using relatively limited military resources to greatest advantage. Even with the evolution of such a strategy, Russia is likely to face a number of setbacks and surprises in the region.

### *Force Pockets in the Western Regions*

In the western regions of the former USSR, the pattern of Russian military engagement apparent in the Caucasus and Central Asia is replaced by different challenges. With the exception of the conflict in Moldova, the west has been a region of military policy, not military interventions. The Russian military has had to complete its withdrawals from the Baltic States and adjust to the rise of indigenous militaries in Ukraine and Belarus, though only the former appears to Russian military analysts as a potential source of friction.

One of the consequences of this pattern of military engagement in the west is the existence of various "force pockets," areas of large Russian force concentrations in Moldova and Crimea. These pockets represent a challenge to stability because of their military power and their potential to alter peacefully or violently the politics of the region in which they are deployed, with or without the approval of Moscow. In Sevastopol, these forces are also an important element of the local economy. In all three cases, there is a strong connection between active personnel, retirees living in the area, and the local community. Thus, these forces remain an integral part of local life that will not be quickly or painlessly removed.

The security complications posed by these "force pockets" are best illustrated by the case of the 14th Army. In the Soviet Union, the 14th Army was a low-readiness, reserve structure, barely the size of a full-strength division.[15] The separatist forces in the Transdnister region of Moldova have strong ties to the 14th Army. During a period of active fighting in 1992, elements of the army took an active role in support of the separatists, leading the commander to state openly that he had lost control of his forces. While General Lebed was commander of the 14th Army he restored order to the force, but routinely took a public position of sympathy for the separatist regime in the region.

In the long run, the Moldovan government--even the new President Lucinschi, who ran on a more pro-Russian platform than his opponent, the incumbent President Snegur--would like to see the 14th Army withdrawn. Its removal would deprive the separatist Transdnistrians of an important pillar of political and military support. There exists a Russian-Moldovan agreement on the eventual withdrawal of the force, though the two sides differ about the timing for beginning such a withdrawal. But the real rub is that it is difficult to imagine a withdrawal scenario in which the entire army and its equipment leave the region. The headquarters, commanding officers, and active personnel might leave, but there would be intense local pressure and the active collusion of some in the army itself to leave the equipment behind. Certainly, large amounts of equipment would be "diverted" to the Transdnistrians before the withdrawal. This kind of withdrawal would only reignite bloodshed in the region, with the Moldovan army hopelessly outgunned by the separatists. The current command-and-control relationship between Moscow and its stationed forces in general, and that between Defense Minister Rodionov and the 14th Army command in particular, make hopes for any other kind of withdrawal unlikely. The center simply cannot order and supervise a complete withdrawal.

The force pocket with the greatest potential for creating a serious international problem is the Black Sea Fleet. To date, the tensions within the fleet and between the fleet and Ukraine have been largely dealt with through negotiation or

symbolic acts of defiance. But the strong linkage between the fleet and Crimea's economy, as well as the ideological ties between the fleet and disaffected groups within Crimea's rather disorderly political process, could well be a harbinger of future problems. What is most dangerous about the Black Sea Fleet in the short run is that, in the absence of a settlement between the Russian and Ukrainian governments over the future of the fleet, the uncertain atmosphere and dissatisfaction among the Russian parties and elements of the population on the peninsula could draw elements of the fleet into local politics. The creation of another "14th Army" in Crimea would have repercussions for the key security building blocks of the region, namely Ukraine's internal stability and Ukrainian-Russian relations. Given the existing tensions within the fleet, the potential for serious incidents and even violence is quite real. In the spring of 1994, the two navies exchanged warning shots over possession of a research vessel and its equipment. Though this incident has not spawned others, the fleet's poor material condition and the presence of ethnically and politically hostile factions on the peninsula create the preconditions for future conflict. The inability of Kiev and Moscow to come to agreement on the division and basing of the Black Sea Fleet, most recently in October 1996, prolongs the uncertainty surrounding the fleet and the Crimean Peninsula as a whole. Incidents of this type could become more frequent, with destabilizing consequences for the fleet and Crimea itself, if no solution is found for the medium- and long-term stationing of the fleet.

There are long-term trends that point toward the gradual reduction of the naval force in Sevastopol. These are the intense pressures on the Russian military budget which have already greatly reduced naval resources and which are likely to decrease further or eliminate altogether the Baltic and Black Sea Fleets over time.[16] Minister Rodionov's struggle throughout the autumn of 1996 to win increased funding for the military, including unpaid wages for the late spring and summer, has revealed a military that, in Rodionov's words, has "reached the limit beyond which extremely undesirable and even uncontrollable processes may arise." [17] Despite President Yeltsin's election promises to increase support to the Baltic Fleet and other naval forces, there are few signs that new funds for the navy are forthcoming. The priorities of sustaining nuclear forces, fighting in various regional conflicts, and taking care of the needs of ground and air forces leave little for the navy as a whole, let alone for the Black Sea Fleet. In the long run, the problem becomes less a security issue than one of economic adjustment for the local population. What is needed is a set of agreements and economic investment, at least in the case of the Black Sea Fleet, that lets this process run its course. Great restraint is required on both the Ukrainian and Russian sides, a restraint that could be easily undermined by current political and military pressures.[18]

What is common to both cases is the uncertain control of the central military authorities in Moscow of key force pockets in the west, shifting to local commanders tremendous authority--and tremendous temptations--to act on their own. At present, there appears no easy way to reverse this trend, but these force pockets continue to represent the basic transmission belts for the violence and instability already present in other parts of the former USSR.

### *The Ukrainian Armed Forces*

Ukraine is the only new state of the former Soviet Union with the potential to create an indigenous military of concern to Russia. Ukraine is not in a position to create an army that poses an offensive threat to Russia, but over time Ukraine can build up a force of real destructive power that could alter Russian calculations about the balance of forces and its options in the western regions. However, the Ukrainian military, like other basic political institutions within Ukraine, is still in the formative stage. As with other institutions, it is evolving on the basis of a political and territorial notion of citizenship, not ethnic identity. The Ukrainian military is also under an overwhelming resource constraint limiting basic activities like training, maintenance of existing equipment, and even the ability to reduce existing force structure to sustainable levels. Thus, for some time to come, the Ukrainian military will be in the process of establishing its identity, mission, and capabilities. A breathing space exists in which the Russian-Ukrainian military relationship, like the Russian-Ukrainian relationship as a whole, can be put on stable footing.[19]

The Russian military leadership, to date, has poorly used this breathing space. It has largely viewed the rise of the Ukrainian military with a mixture of fear and condescension, making it difficult to resolve outstanding issues, like the future of the Black Sea Fleet, or to forge a more broad-based relationship.[20] Russia's military leadership, like its political leadership, has regularly exaggerated the extent to which nationalist anti-Russian sentiments shape Ukrainian political and military policies. Former Ukrainian Minister of Defense Morozov's early dismissal of political officers and others who would not take the oath of loyalty to Ukraine yielded less than 20,000 officers who resigned or were



not assigned to new positions in an army of, at that time, over 750,000.[21] Senior Russian military officials regularly complain of widespread *Ukrainization* to the detriment of ethnic Russian officers. Though Morozov flirted with the nationalist Union of Ukrainian Officers, this organization criticized him for the small size of the dismissal and for his reluctance to shift the military to a more nationalistic and ethnic basis. No matter what Morozov's intentions--and he has become a more outspoken proponent of national democratic views since his resignation from the Defense Ministry--he could not have maintained peace in his already beleaguered institution had he conducted a serious effort at *Ukrainization*.

Russian military policy statements have focused on schemes for bilateral and multilateral military structures that would leave little room for an independent Ukrainian armed forces. The clearest statement of Russian rhetorical ambitions in this regard was made by former Defense Minister Pavel Grachev, after the September 1993 Massandra meeting of Presidents Kravchuk and Yeltsin. Grachev stated that "after the Black Sea Fleet becomes Russian, it would be desirable that Ukraine comes up with an initiative to establish a military union with Russia, at least on the Black Sea." [22] Grachev's replacement, General Rodionov, has made no such rash statements, but many Russian military and political figures still hold out the hope that some version of Grachev's union will develop. These Russians nourish the view that the long-term subordination of the Ukrainian armed forces to Russia is in Russia's and Ukraine's long-term security interest. In particular, many see deeper ties with Ukraine as part of a Russian response to NATO expansion.

The problem with such an approach is twofold: it overstates what Russia itself is capable of doing to effect a "military union" on any terms but Ukraine's voluntary surrender to the concept; and it impedes the work of moderating influences within Ukraine itself and within the Ukrainian armed forces.

First, Russia's practical military policies toward Ukraine reflect Russia's own military crisis and resource constraints, not a package of enticements toward a closer military relationship. Grachev strictly enforced his regulation, preventing officers serving in the Ukrainian armed forces above the rank of captain from serving in the Russian armed forces. While forming more flexible policies in practice for ethnic Russians in Central Asian armies, the Russian military slammed the door on anyone who decided to stay after the administration of the Ukrainian oath of loyalty in 1992-1993.

In the military-industrial sector, despite attempts to refoster linkages, the Russian defense crisis has basically forced firms within Russia to compete for scarce resources, leaving little for the Ukrainian defense sector. On the long-term basing of the Black Sea Fleet, Russia has regularly sought a duration and terms for basing the Russian element of the fleet in Sevastopol that are insensitive to Ukrainian sovereignty, even though Russian analysts must understand that the actual demands made on Sevastopol port facilities by a modest Ukrainian navy will hardly be noticed. The Russian calculation may be that long-term pressures--such as Ukraine's military equipment dependency on Russia--will force Ukraine back in the fold no matter what policies Russia pursues, but the near- to mid-range effect of Russia's actual policies is to give a boost to the independence and resolve of Ukraine's own forces.

Second, these Russian military and security policies give little support to moderating tendencies within the Ukrainian society at large. The policies rely on a caricature of Ukrainian politics that alternatively curses the domination of anti-Russian nationalists or belittles Ukraine's abilities to build a state without Russia. Yet, such an approach overlooks the fact that Ukraine is still in the process of building a stable state and associated military on the basis of ethnic and regional diversity. This diversity works against extremist security policies, whether of the anti-Russian or anti-independence variety. An attempt by the Ukrainian leadership to give Ukrainian foreign and security policy an anti-Russian focus, absent provocation from Russia itself, would cause major internal splits within Ukraine, splits that would undermine the stability and viability of the Ukrainian state.

Russia needs to understand that this Ukraine is the best Ukraine (and Ukrainian military) Russia could hope for, because it is internally self-regulating. The regional and ethnic diversity of Ukrainian political and military institutions frustrates the emergence of an extremist security agenda. The failure of this state is unlikely to lead to Ukraine's disappearance altogether but rather to other configurations that are far more threatening to Russian security. Moreover, as this article has argued, should this challenge arise, the Russian military and economy are simply not in a position to respond effectively.

Though the apparent inclination of the Russian military is to search for more and better levers for integration with the Ukrainian military, a more realistic option in the near term involves the recognition that a small but independent Ukrainian military probably best serves Russia's national interest. It should continue to seek cooperation on projects of real mutual benefit, such as maintaining the strategic air defense network. But, above all, the Russian military should exercise restraint in its long-term plans for deployments and exercises on the Ukrainian border. The last thing the Russian military should seek is to recreate a militarily significant border with Ukraine, even temporarily, and even if it is sure that it will continue to hold decisive advantages in manpower and equipment. Russian military and security policy should not squander the advantages it now enjoys of a demilitarized western theater, particularly if the new borderlands--as well as the rising uncertainties in the Far East--come to command the bulk of Russia's defense resources. In such circumstances, an untroubled security environment in the West would appear to meet fundamental Russian security interests.

### *The Remilitarization of Belarus*

But such an environment may indeed be slipping away on Russia's western borders. Since the fall of the Soviet Union, Belarus has experienced a steady and rapid demilitarization, both with regard to nuclear weapons and the dismantling of the conventional forces of the old Soviet Belorussian Military District. The final nuclear withdrawals took place in November 1996, while the large Soviet ground presence has been whittled back to Russian air defense units. This rapid demilitarization is not unique to Belarus, but is part of a larger trend taking place on both sides of the old line of contact between NATO and the former Warsaw Pact. Some analysts regard this broad separation of forces as the key strategic accomplishment of the past half decade: "The maintenance and legal consolidation of this separation is one of the main objectives of the Russian national strategy." [23] Belarusian plans for an army of less than 100,000 represent a continuation of this trend.

This would be the end of the story of--and of Western interest in--military developments in Belarus were it not for a clear political trend toward deep security ties with Russia and the potential that those ties could be the basis of a Russian military response to the expansion of NATO. The political aspects of NATO's expansion have been debated endlessly in the West and Moscow. The security environment on "the day after NATO expansion" has received less attention but goes to the heart of the military future of Belarus. Many in Moscow believe that NATO expansion will require specific Russian military measures in response. Senior Russian defense and national security officials have regularly stated that Russia will have to take specific political and military measures in response to NATO's expansion. General Rodionov has stated explicitly that Russia would have to revise its military doctrine, form a "counter-alliance," strengthen its "southern, western, and northwestern groups of forces," and possibly redeploy tactical nuclear weapons on Russia's western borders. [24]

Military sources and other observers of the Russian military believe the most likely field on which to take these "other measures" is Belarus. The political momentum toward integration has picked up speed, winning praise from military observers. [25] The military infrastructure of the old Belarusian Military District remains largely intact. No strong indigenous political movement would oppose the move. Indeed, some observers believe a significant element of the current Russian officer corps needs to rekindle the old Western threat to regain resources and influence lost in the past four years.

However, it should be kept in mind that the current crisis within the Russian military and the resource demands made upon it by involvement in ongoing conflicts place real limits on the near-term actions that can be taken. The most likely response would be an ambitious declaration of military intentions, ranging from the creation of joint Belarusian-Russian forces to plans to reintroduce Russian ground and air units, perhaps even nuclear-capable systems. What would actually take place on the ground would be only symbolic at first--perhaps a few companies or the shifting of divisional headquarters--but in the current atmosphere that emphasizes statements of intention over actual capabilities, there is little doubt that even these steps would cause a serious chill in East-West relations.

The preceding paragraphs say nothing about either the inevitability or the wisdom of this response to NATO expansion. In particular, a response of this kind, though widely bandied about by the military and discussed by outside observers in Moscow, requires a strategic decision of some consequence. It would significantly raise the ante for the West on NATO expansion, but it would also reverse a military course in Europe favorable to Russia and the West. It

would be widely seen on both sides as a return of a Cold War military dimension to the relationship, however remote serious deployments were from taking place on either side. The current drift in the overall relationship between Russia and the West, as well as the political atmosphere in Moscow and Washington, give little hope that the focus of either side will be on preserving the security gains of the past several years.

## Conclusions

This rough sketch of the Russian military and the borderlands suggests several conclusions. Whatever the results of Russian military reform, the armed forces that eventually emerge will in no way resemble their Soviet predecessor in global reach or power. The military will be more inward-looking, with significant sacrifices of naval and long-range force projection capability. It will deepen its embrace of nuclear weapons as a hedge against developments beyond these new borderlands, but its equipment and doctrine will be shaped significantly by operations on the borderlands. In the near term at least, it will become much more of a frontier army.

These encounters with the borderlands have a momentum of their own. Particularly in the zones of conflict, this military momentum leads to increased military involvement in regions where political stability is already weak. The result could very well be a catalyst for expansionist and imperialist tendencies, not too far from the surface of the new Russian rhetoric about national interests and goals. In such a scenario, the borderlands play an important counterweight to internal efforts at political and economic reform.

The military momentum in the borderlands could seriously distort Russia's coming strategic choices. Russia cannot be uniformly strong along its entire border, yet, judging from the statements and writings of the Russians themselves, security challenges of one kind or another are emerging along the perimeter of Russia. In the south, there are instability and local conflicts. In the east, Chinese economic, demographic, and military power is on the rise in a region already rapidly changing as a result of the collapse of the USSR. And, in the West, the potential expansion of the NATO Alliance and its long-term influence over Ukraine and other western borderlands appears as a military challenge to Russia's traditional "spheres of influence." Russia and its military must decide where the real challenges lie, where it must be strong and where it must seek settlement. Above all, Russia cannot afford a return to strategic autarchy in which its attempts at military self-sufficiency distort reforms at home and deepen Russia's isolation from the world-at-large.

Though military weakness would seem to compel a judicious political and military strategy, it also appears to call forth various compensatory strategies that look to the borderlands to supply the military glory or sense of political primacy absent in Russia's encounters outside the borderlands. In addition, these lands seem to beckon the military, or at least parts of the military, to old-fashioned glory and national purpose or to newfound wealth--the very eros of the frontier which Valuev described. Yet, this eros is as false a guide to policy as any other steppe or desert apparition. And, like the apparition of an oasis so common in the desert, it fixes the mind on pursuit of what is not real, robbing it of its reason and of its last reserves of strength. If the Russian military follows this apparition, it could very well be the last chapter in the history of its encounter with the borderlands.

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## NOTES

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1. D. A. Miliutin, *Dnevnik D. A. Milyutina*, 4 vols., ed. P. A. Zayonchkovskiy (Moscow: 1947-1950), I, 47; P. Valuev, *Dnevnik P. A. Valueva: Ministra vnutrennikh del*, 2 vols. (Moscow: 1961), II, 60 ff.

2. On geopolitical trends in the former USSR, see my "The Integrationist Temptation," *The Washington Quarterly*, 18 (Spring 1995), 35-44. For excellent overviews of the Russian military in Eurasia, see John W. R. Lepingwell, "The Russian Military and Security Policy in the 'Near Abroad,'" *Survival*, 36 (Autumn 1994), 70-92; and Susan Clark, "The Russian Military in the Former Soviet Union--Actions and Motivations," *Jane's Intelligence Review*, 6 (December 1994), 538-43.

3. See, for example, a Russian report that Chechen fighters had modest amounts of T-62 and T-72 tanks, armored combat vehicles, and multiple rocket launchers at the beginning of the conflict (*Novoe vremya*, 27 January 1995, pp. 14-15). In general, however, the units of the Transcaucasian Military District, the 14th Army, and the Central Asian Military District were low-readiness units, equipped with older equipment.
4. According to one estimate in 1994, 40,000 Russian troops were stationed in Central Asia and 22,000 in the Caucasus (Jed C. Snyder, "Russian Security Interests on the Southern Periphery," *Jane's Intelligence Review*, 6 (December 1994), 548). This figure did not include the approximately 40,000 or more troops sent to Chechnya in December 1994, the last of which were scheduled to be withdrawn in January 1997 (Michael R. Gordon, "Yeltsin Orders Withdrawal of Troops in Chechnya," *The New York Times*, 24 November 1996, sec. 1, p. 4).
5. On the political and military implications of the frontier, see Bruce W. Menning, *Bayonets Before Bullets: The Imperial Russian Army 1861-1914* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1992), esp. pp. 11-12; and "The Army and Frontier in Russia," *Transformation in Russian and Soviet Military History*, ed. Carl W. Reddel (Washington: US Air Force Academy, 1990), pp. 25-38. On the influence of the Caucasian wars on Miliutin's reforms, see Forrest A. Miller, *Dmitri Miliutin and the Reform Era in Russia* (Vanderbilt, Tenn.: Vanderbilt Univ. Press, 1968), p. 12; and P. A. Zaionchkovskii, *Voennye reformy 1860-1870 godov v Rossii* (Moscow: Izdatel' stvo moskovskogo universiteta, 1952), pp. 83-84. On Cherniaev, see David Mackenzie, *The Lion of Tashkent: The Career of General M. G. Cherniaev* (Athens: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1974).
6. For the argument that Russia is pursuing a coherent, center-driven strategic plan in the Caucasus and Central Asia, see William E. Odom and Robert Dujarric, *Commonwealth or Empire? Russia, Central Asia and the Transcaucasus* (Indianapolis: Hudson Institute, 1995).
7. General Yermolov, Russian Commander in the Caucasus from 1816-1827, stated that "the Caucasus are a large fortress, defended by a garrison half a million strong. One must either storm [this garrison] or take it by trenches. A storming would be too costly. Therefore we will carry out a siege" (quoted in A. A. Kersnovskiy, *Istoriya russkoy armii v chetyrekh tomakh* [Moscow: Golos, 1994], II, 95).
8. For a list of formal Russian commitments to the Tajik border, as well as a spirited defense of Russian involvement there, see the press briefing by Andrey Nikolayev, Director of the Federal Frontier Service (Bol' shaya Lubyanka), *Federal News Service Transcripts*, 12 April 1995.
9. On the question of border construction, as well as the use of peacekeeping forces throughout the former USSR, see Aleksandr Golts, "Mirotvorcheskii operatsii kak sredstvo realizatsii natsional'nykh interesov Rossii," in the monograph *Rossiya: Novyye Parametry Bezopasnosti (Russia: New Security Parameters)*, ed. Sherman Garnett and Irina Kobrinskaya (Moscow: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1995).
10. Twelve thousand for the 201st and 28,000 for Russian-Turkmen forces, according to IISS's *The Military Balance 1994-1995*, p. 118. Russian border guard forces add an additional several thousand at most.
11. For an overview of the emerging strategic environment in the Far East and the policies and perspective of the key powers, see *The Strategic Quadrangle: Russia, China, Japan and the United States in East Asia*, ed. Michael Mandelbaum (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1995). In his essay in this volume, Robert Legvold argues that the key factor shaping the Far East is not Russia's power but rather the "trouble into which [it] can slide" (p. 19). This trouble can spill over into neighboring states of East Asia. "The essence of the Russian challenge is not Russia as a player. . . but Russia as a problem" (p. 20). This Russia as a problem is also less able to weather pressures and frictions as confidently as it might otherwise.
12. There are a number of areas where Chinese economic and demographic pressures create friction with Russian fears and capabilities to manage these pressures. Russian regional leaders in Primorskiy Kray and Khabarovsk have attempted to alter state-to-state negotiations on border demarcations. Any number of Russian areas adjacent to the border are magnets for Chinese immigration. In addition, large-scale economic projects, such as the plan to create a direct outlet for Chinese products to the Sea of Japan in the so-called Tumenjiang triangle, if completed, will attract outside investment and laborers in unprecedented numbers. For the Tumenjiang project, for example, Russian analysts

estimate a new port could attract up to ten million new residents, the bulk likely to be Chinese and other Asians. Few in Moscow expect large numbers of Russians to move to the Far East. On the Tumenjiang project, see Igor Korkunov, "On the Project of the Tumenjiang Free Economic Zone in the Territory of Russia, China and North Korea," *Far Eastern Affairs*, 2 (No. 3, 1994), 38-43. Additional details on the project, including estimates of migration into the region, were supplied to me during interviews in Moscow in February 1995.

13. Ethnic Central Asians never made up a very large percentage of the officer corps of the old Soviet Army and were especially under-represented in field commands and other senior leadership positions. The most important incentive for ethnic Russian officers to stay put has been simply the absence of opportunity in the Russian army itself. In Turkmenistan, a formal Russian-Turkmen arrangement exists that counts service in Turkmenistan as service in the Russian army proper. In Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, many ethnic Russian officers remain in service but without explicit benefits or future options from the Russian authorities. Susan Clark provides a list of incentives Russia offers to keep ethnic Russian officers serving in foreign armies ("The Russian Military in the Former Soviet Union--Actions and Motivations," p. 542). Her list suggests a more uniform policy in this regard than apparently exists in practice, at least as I have learned from various military and journalistic sources in Moscow. These sources paint a portrait of a more chaotic set of policies, with priority given, in the absence of a bilateral agreement, to decrees that close the door on a return to the Russian army of ethnic Russian officers serving in the armies of the new states. For example, a decree by Grachev forbids the return of officers serving in a foreign army above the rank of captain. This decree has not stopped many graduates of Ukrainian military academies from serving in the Russian army. There are several thousand Ukrainian cadets serving in the North Caucasus, where combat pay in relatively stronger rubles makes service in the Russian army attractive. In the North Caucasus, local commanders welcome the Ukrainians as a solution to the growing shortage of line officers (See note 6). However, for more senior officers, service in the Ukrainian army shuts the door on any return to Russia. In Uzbekistan, both sides appear to tolerate a less rigid situation. Many Russian officers remain in Uzbek service, but they have refused to sign contracts, a step that would make them ineligible for future service in or benefits from the Russian army. The growing military relationship between Russian and Kazakhstan may yet create an additional category of service closer to that of Russians in Turkmenistan.

14. On military issues in Kazakhstan, see Steve Liesman, "Kazakhstan Agrees to Combine Its Army in Part With Russia's," *The Wall Street Journal*, 25 January 1995; Shirin Akiner, "Soviet Military Legacy in Kazakhstan," *Jane's Intelligence Review*, 6 (December 1994), 552-55; and Richard Woff, "Kazakhstan--National Defense and Security Forces," *Jane's Intelligence Review*, 5 (April 1993), 178-80.

15. *Military Balance 1995-1996* estimates the troop strength of the unit at 6400, with 120 main battle tanks.

16. See the account of a document on defense reform attributed to a Russian National Security Council source in *Komsomol' skaya pravda*, 11 April 1995, p. 12. The report recommends the consolidation of the Russian navy move toward two fleets--Northern and Pacific, with the long-term phase-out of the Black Sea and Baltic fleets.

17. *ITAR-TASS*, 25 October 1996.

18. For an overview of trends within the Black Sea Fleet and policy recommendations for US and Western actions that might aid in bringing about a stable solution to the dispute, see my "U.S. National Interests in Crimea," in *Crimea: Dynamics, Challenges and Prospects*, ed. Maria Drohobycky (Lanham, Md.: Rowan and Littlefield, 1995).

19. On the broader questions of the Ukrainian-Russian relationship, including nuclear policy, see Sherman Garnett, "The Ukrainian Question and the Future of Russia," *Politichna Dumka*, 4 (1994), 169-77; "The Sources and Conduct of Ukrainian Nuclear Policy: November 1992 to January 1994," *Nuclear Challenges for Russia and the New States of Eurasia*, ed. George Quester (New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1995); and "Ukraine and the NPT," *Arms Control Today* (January-February 1995), 7-12.

20. Morozov records the condescending treatment he received at Massandra, with Grachev stating that Ukraine could not handle its own fleet. Morozov, of course, is the Russian military's bête noire, but relations did not substantially improve with the appointment of Radetsky. As with Kuchma's election, Russian observers overestimated how far new Ukrainian officials would go to accommodate Russia. Inevitably, they are disappointed when these officials, whether civilian or military, respond to internal political pressures, their own convictions and the rather pronounced impact of

the new responsibilities they hold to conduct a more independent-minded policy than expected. Morozov's memoirs were circulated as a campaign pamphlet *Shchil' ni Shary Nezalezhnosti* (Kiev, n.d.) and published in *Ukrainska hazeta*, 1 (No. 4, 1994).

21. Morozov stated that 10,000 officers refused to take the oath of loyalty to Ukraine and were permitted to leave Ukrainian service. Draftees from outside Ukraine were also permitted to leave. Six thousand political officers and party secretaries "were not assigned to posts in the Ukrainian armed forces" (Konstantin Morozov, "Theses Presented to the Conference `The Military Tradition in Ukrainian History: its Role in the Construction of Ukraine's Armed Forces,'" text distributed at the conference, Cambridge, Mass., 12-13 May 1994).

22. *ITAR-TASS*, 4 September 1993.

23. Aleksey Arbatov, "Rossiya: natsional'naya bezopasnost' v 1990 godov," *Mirovaya ekonomika i mezhdunarodniye otnosheniya*, 7 (July 1994), 5-15; and 8-9 (August-September 1994), 5-18.

24. *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 28 November 1996.

25. The material in this section is based mainly on interviews in Moscow and Kiev conducted in February and April 1995.

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