

“A Crucial Sphere for Our Security”

Russia in Central Asia after 9/11

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Abbreviations

ABM Treaty	Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty
AWACS	Airborne Warning and Control System
BTC	Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (pipeline)
CACO	Central Asian Cooperation Organisation
CENTCOM	US Central Command
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
CST/CSTO	Collective Security Treaty/ Collective Security Treaty Organisation
FSB	Federalnaia sluzhba bezopasnosti (Federal Security Service)
G-8	Group of eight
GUAM	Georgia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, Moldova
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MID	Ministerstvo inostrannykh del (Ministry of Foreign Affairs)
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NMD	National Missile Defense
RIIA	Royal Institute of International Affairs
SCO	Shanghai Cooperation Organisation
SVOP	Sovet po vneshnei i oboronnoi politike (Council on Foreign and Defence Policy)
TRACECA	Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Central-Asia
UES	Unified Energy System

Introduction

From 6 October 2001, the United States and its allies deployed military personnel and airplanes in former Soviet Central Asia in the campaign against global terrorism. The countries concerned were Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. The Western military activity and presence in these states was considerable in connection with Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan, especially in the most intensive military phase of the operation through March 2002.¹ On 24 September 2001 Russia's president, Vladimir Putin, stated that each of the post-Soviet countries had full freedom to decide whether to allow American bases on their territory. Putin's support for the operation in Afghanistan and in the war against international terrorism emphasised how relations between the United States and Russia had improved after 11 September 2001.

Operation Enduring Freedom underlined how Russia and the United States shared one important aim in Central Asia – reducing the threat from the Taliban in Afghanistan. This had at last become possible and in this respect, Operation

1 Operations in Afghanistan include Operation Enduring Freedom and the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). Operation Enduring Freedom was the military response to the attack of 9/11 and started on 6 October 2001. It was led by the United States with support from the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada and the Afghan Northern Alliance as well as other states allied with the United States in a coalition of the willing. Operation Enduring Freedom continues with military operations as of writing. However, the last large military offensive, Operation Anaconda, ended on 18 March 2002, and at that point Operation Enduring Freedom entered into a phase of consolidation and stabilisation of Afghanistan under its new leadership. In accordance with the Bonn conference, ISAF was established following the fall of the Taliban on 6 December 2001 with headquarters in Kabul. Its participants include several NATO member-states and cooperating states. NATO assumed command of ISAF on 1 August 2003.

Enduring Freedom enhanced stability in the region. Removing the Taliban from power in Afghanistan was just as important to Moscow as it had become to Washington after 9/11. The coalition's Central Asian bases considerably eased the logistics of achieving this aim. But Russian and American views diverged on the issue of Western military deployment in Central Asia in the longer term. To the United States, the coalition bases were instruments in the war on terrorism.² It was therefore difficult to discuss, even consider, a strict time frame for their existence. To a considerable section of the Russian political elite, on the other hand, a strict and short time frame for the Western military presence in Central Asia was a central prerequisite for supporting it.

Putin's support for the US-led coalition's use of Central Asian airbases and his encouragement to the Central Asian presidents to grant the coalition access to both bases and airspace remained divisive issues among Moscow elites. The bases were seen as vehicles for promoting American strategic interests in the region, not least access to the Caspian Basin's energy resources. One of Russia's goals in Central Asia was to prevent outside powers from gaining influence in the region, and American strategic interests were therefore perceived as a threat. Objections on these grounds were especially pronounced within the military and security branches and extended even to the top brass. Establishing a Russian airbase close to the Western base in Kyrgyzstan in October 2003 was

2 In this study, I will use the war on terrorism to denote this concept's place in American policy, as well as the international campaign against terrorism led by the United States. In a study where Russian-American relations play a role, it seems appropriate to apply the term in most frequent use in both Russia and the US. Russian policymakers accepted the term with ease, as it complemented well the term established in 1999 – international terrorism (*mezhdunarodnyi terrorizm*). The war on terrorism is translated as *voina protiv terrora/terrorizma* or *borba protiv terrora/terrorizma*. See for example Julie Wilhelmsen and Geir Flikke, "Copy That...": A Russian "Bush Doctrine" in the CIS? in the series *Nupi-rapport* (Oslo: Norwegian Institute for International Affairs, 2005), p. 17.

seen as a move to balance the Western presence. The Central Asian issue had apparently turned into one of several problematic issues on the Russian-American agenda.

Research design

This study has two major analytical aims. The first is to answer the question of what influences Russian policy in Central Asia after 9/11. To answer the question, the study contains a thorough investigation of the Russian reactions to the establishment and presence of Western bases in Central Asia. The second analytical aim is to discuss an important set of implications of the findings from the investigation: how did the Russian response to the establishment of Western bases in Central Asia impact on the bilateral relationship between Russia and the United States?

The investigation of Russia's reactions to the establishment of the Western bases is carried out on three levels:

- Russian official statements aimed towards the United States, NATO and the West
- The domestic Russian political debate on the relationship to Central Asia and the Western bases there
- Russian policy in Central Asia. In this study, the core of this policy is understood to be Russian political signals towards Central Asian states with American bases and Western military activity during Operation Enduring Freedom, i.e. Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, as well as the way in which concrete steps, especially military steps, have followed political signals.

From the initial period commencing on 11 September 2001 to the Crawford summit between Putin and George W. Bush on 13–14 November 2001, Russia's reactions to the bases are followed at all three levels together. This period is studied in chapter 2. From November 2001, each level of the Russian reactions to the Western bases in Central Asia is examined on its own in chapters 3–5.

Choosing November 2001 as a benchmark is motivated by two factors. Firstly, in the domestic Russian debate it is difficult to distinguish between the debate on Putin's choice

after 9/11 of a strategic alignment with the West, and the debate on how Russia should respond to the establishment of the Western bases in Central Asia. Secondly, in international politics, the first two months after 9/11 were characterised by an emergency situation and increased uncertainty about the future. Even relatively insignificant and outlying statements in a domestic political debate such as the one which took place in Russia were afforded considerable attention on an international level. Therefore, the first few weeks after 9/11 were different from the period that followed.

The three levels of Russia's response are studied from 11 September 2001 to the end of 2003. By late 2003, the main tenets of Russia's reactions had already been well-established. At the same time, the issue of the Western bases in Central Asia was less prominent in Russia's domestic political debate as well as in Russian-American relations. A few issues are followed through 2004. These pertain mainly to Russian policy in Central Asia. The Western bases, as well as Russia's reactions to them, were central to this policy even in 2004.

The analytical implications of the investigation of the three elements of the Russian response to the US presence in the region are summed up in chapter 6. The chapter also prepares the ground for the next chapter's discussion of the question of what influences Russian policy in Central Asia. This is ensured particularly through a systematic comparison and discussion of the three levels of the Russian response, and the exploration of the relationship between them. Methodically, the three levels of the Russian response to the establishment of Western bases in Central Asia are approached as different sides of one case. This design stresses the correspondences and connections between the three aspects, instead of emphasising their differences. One question in the analysis will be whether Russian ambitions in Central Asia are presented differently towards the West than in the actual Russian policy towards the Central Asian states. Such an approach may shed light on how Russian foreign policy aims in the relationships with the West and with members of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) agree, or disagree.³

In chapter 7 I discuss three possible sources of influence on Russian policy in Central Asia after 9/11 based on the findings in the previous chapter. Domestic Russian politics, the bilateral relationship between Russia and the United States, and Russia's strategic interests in Central Asia are discussed as potential motivations.

Chapter 8 contains the discussion of the second analytical question. What were the implications of the Russian response to the Western bases in Central Asia for the bilateral relationship with the United States? How important was this response to the overall relationship, and how do Russian-American relations in Central Asia relate to Russian-American relations outside this region? What are the prospects for a strategic partnership between Russia and the United States? A strategic partnership is here understood as an enduring relationship based on shared strategic interests between two states. A strategic partnership is more durable and rooted in a wider range of strategic interests than an alignment on one issue. At the same time it has fewer notions of shared security and is less formal than an alliance. A strategic partnership is not necessarily based on shared values.

Readers will note that some approaches from discourse analysis have aided me in the work on this study. This especially applies to the narrative on the internal Russian political debate in chapter 4. As in discourse analysis, chapter 4 is partly concerned with analysing language in a societal context. However, the chapter is not an analysis of discourse. Similar to discourse analysis, language and concepts are at the centre of the investigation. However, the study is not an analysis of a discourse aimed at discussing how the "ideas and concepts produced in this context interpret and shape societal reality".⁴ The ultimate task here is more traditional, i.e. to

3 The Commonwealth of Independent States includes the states of the former Soviet Union with the exception of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.

4 Werner Christie Mathisen, "Diskursanalyse for statsvitere: Hva, hvorfor og hvordan" [Discourse Analysis for Political Scientists: What, Why, and How], *Research paper no. 1/1997* (Oslo: Department of Political Science, University of Oslo, 1997).

analyse how concepts and language are shaped by reality. In effect, the causality is the opposite of what is aimed at in discourse analysis. Throughout the study, this will be evident from the discussion of how the domestic Russian debate connects to and compares with other aspects of a Russian response to the establishment of Western bases in Central Asia.

This introduction is followed by a chapter on the background and context of the study.

Recent research on Russia and Central Asia

In writing this study, I have drawn on the work of several other authors, as will be seen in the references. A few very recent works, all of which appeared during my work on this study, have been of particular interest. I might mention recent studies by Lena Jonson and Roy Allison, whose research in the field of Central Asia and Russian policy has long been an inspiration to others. I have borrowed the expression 'strategic reassertion' for the development of policy after 9/11 from Allison's article on Russian policy in Central Asia.⁵ Jonson's most recent book gave me considerable background knowledge and valuable insights, and her discussion of the shifts in Russian policy towards Central Asia in 1999 and 2001 is most illuminating.⁶ While writing up this study over the past few months I have also enjoyed reading the recent work of Julie Wilhelmsen and Geir Flikke, whose conclusions on Russian policy in Central Asia and the relationship to the United States are supported by the findings here.⁷ While all these works are relevant to the findings here, my approach is somewhat different. In the investigation, I focus not only on Russian political signals and concrete steps in Central Asia, but also on the domestic debate about this policy and how to react to the US military presence in Central Asia, and on the

5 Roy Allison, "Strategic reassertion in Russia's Central Asia policy", *International Affairs*, vol. 80, no. 2 (March 2004): 277-293.

6 Lena Jonson, *Vladimir Putin and Central Asia. The Shaping of Russian Foreign Policy* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004).

7 Wilhelmsen and Flikke, "Copy That..."

official policy towards the West. When making my conclusions, I discuss the motivations behind the Russian reassertion in Central Asia. Therefore, I hope that this work will also add to our knowledge about the motivations for Russian policy in Central Asia and this policy's relationship to the Russian political elite.

Sources

The sources used here are mainly Russian and Western. Sources from Central Asia are used to complement the primary selection of sources and to provide some insight into the receiving end of Russian policy in Central Asia. A methodological problem is the question of how to interpret sources relating to the different aspects of the Russian response to the Western bases in Central Asia. How can one relate a statement to a part of the domestic Russian debate, the official response to the West, or policy towards Central Asia? Is it the sender, the immediate receivers, the medium of the message, or is it time and place? For most sources, a combination of all these circumstances makes it relatively easy to determine where a statement belongs. However, the reader will notice that some statements are repeated and related to different contexts in different chapters.

One final problem is the risk of overstating the differences between the three aspects of the Russian response to the Western bases in Central Asia. Some topics are simply more relevant in some settings than in others. For example, while Putin may naturally have preferred emphasising Russia's strategic decisions in favour of the West when addressing Western leaders, the advantages of the strategic decision for Russia was a more relevant topic in Russia, and the shared responsibilities of fighting terrorism in Central Asia seemed a more logical choice when meeting Central Asian leaders. Being aware of risks such as this makes it possible to manage them. Readers, too, will profit from taking this into consideration.

Chapter 1

Background and context

This chapter considers the background for the investigation and analysis. The topics considered are:

- Russian policy in Central Asia before 9/11;
- the strategic and domestic contexts of Putin's decision to align with the West in the war on terrorism;
- the development of the United States' strategic aims in Central Asia and Central Asia in a strategic context.

The chapter has no conclusion as such. Instead, this is an overall sketch of the situation surrounding Russia, Central Asia and the US before 11 September 2001 and functions as a brief introduction to Central Asia's wider strategic environment.

Russian policy in Central Asia before 9/11

During the break-up of the Soviet Union, there was a conspicuous lack of Russian interest in the former Central Asian union republics. Other issues were more urgent. There was considerable confusion over what constituted Russian interests in Central Asia and how they should be implemented. When translating priorities into action, Russia could offer the Central Asian states relatively little compared with other possible actors because of Russia's limited economic and military resources. This tendency was exacerbated by a "powerful reluctance in Moscow to make material sacrifices for the sake of its CIS partners".⁸ During the last years of the

Soviet Union, Moscow viewed Central Asia with its corrupt leaders as a burden. The Russian political elite was happier concentrating on Russia's own economy. An expectation that it would be easy to maintain Russia's influence in the region added to the general ambivalence. Nevertheless, Moscow viewed Central Asia as a region where Russia still had "special rights and obligations".⁹ As the ambivalence of the early 1990s gave way to increasing interest in Moscow for Central Asia and its strategic position, there were persistent efforts leading to a Russian reengagement in the region. Initially, these efforts appeared a success, but faced with the growing competition for influence from other powers such as the United States and China, the foundations of Russia's position as a security guarantor were eroded. At the end of the 1990s, Russia's policy in Central Asia was characterised as one of involuntary disengagement.¹⁰ Russia's influence in Central Asia was waning relative to that of other powers, although it remained the strongest external power. Circumstances beyond Russian control, like other powers' engagement, were compounded by a Russian inability to formulate a policy attractive to the Central Asian states.

The Central Asian governments, on their side, balanced Russia's influence with that of other powers. Their possibilities for doing so increased greatly as plans for exploiting the oil and gas deposits in the Caspian Basin attracted Western and Asian governments and companies, especially from the United States and China, to Central Asia. No longer dependent solely on Russia for their security and economic development, Central Asia's leaders looked to other powers to diffuse Russian influence. The lack of Russian interest only served to create disillusionment with Moscow in the Central Asian capitals.

8 Neil Malcolm and Alex Pravda, "Introduction," in *Internal Factors in Russian Foreign Policy*, Neil Malcolm et al (Oxford: Oxford University Press/RIIA, 1996), pp. 1-32, 8.

9 Jonson, *Vladimir Putin and Central Asia*, p. 44.

10 Lena Jonson, *Russia and Central Asia. A New Web of Relations* (London: RIIA, 1998).

At the end of the 1990s, Russia's military engagement in Central Asia was concentrated in Tajikistan. There was a joint Russian-Tajik border guard service on the non-CIS borders of Tajikistan.¹¹ Also, the Russian 201st Motorised Rifle Division had its headquarters in Dushanbe, with detachments in Kuliab and Kurgan-Tiube. The Russian military engagement preserved political stability in Tajikistan, and was therefore important to the regime of President Imomali Rakhmonov. Tajikistan, the weakest of the Central Asian states, was in effect Russia's closest ally in the region. This was in itself an indication of Russia's weakness.¹²

The first two years of Putin's presidency saw considerable changes in Russia's policy towards the Central Asian states. His first visit to a Central Asian country after his election as president was to Uzbekistan's president, Islam Karimov, in May 2000, which was in fact a follow-up to a highly profiled visit by then Prime Minister Putin to Tashkent in December 1999. In the 1990s, Uzbekistan had pursued a foreign policy that was rather independent of Moscow. It was perceived as a relatively strong counterbalance to Russia within the CIS, especially where Central Asian affairs were concerned. Putin's visit to Tashkent was indicative of three elements in the new approach to Central Asia. Firstly, it no longer sufficed to have just Tajikistan as a close ally and Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan as more ambivalent partners. To develop closer and more advantageous relations with Central Asia, it was necessary to pursue closer bilateral ties with all of the Central Asian states. Secondly, as a consequence of this, it was no longer a question of pursuing a blanket Central Asian policy through the framework of the CIS, as had been the case in the Yeltsin period. Putin preferred a combination of bilateral contacts and multilateral approaches specific to Central Asia. On the multilateral side, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and the Collective Security Treaty (CST) are

11 I.e., on the borders with Afghanistan and China.

12 Lena Jonson, "Russia and Central Asia" in *Central Asian Security: The New International Context*, edited by Roy Allison and Lena Jonson (London: RIIA, 2001), pp. 95-126, 109.

particularly applicable.¹³ On the bilateral side, close relationships and frequent meetings between the heads of state became a staple feature of Russian-Central Asian bilateral relationships. In addition, Putin used multilateral summits to discuss bilateral relations, and made a point of meeting the Central Asian leaders separately on the sidelines of these summits. Thirdly, Putin used the terrorist threat as a rationale for security integration within the CIS, particularly so in Central Asia, and thus 'securitised' relations with the Central Asian states.¹⁴

Putin's strategic decision

By 2001, it was clear that on the strategic scene, Russia had two main goals in Central Asia: "to maintain regional stability, and to prevent 'outsiders' from gaining influence in the Central Asian states."¹⁵ The decision to welcome US-initiated bases in Central Asia represented a considerable step aside from this goal. However, one should not overestimate the degree to which Russia was in a position to prevent the Americans from deploying in Central Asia. As Bobo Lo points out, "Russian influence on the Central Asian states, though considerable, was not so great as to forestall an action that was manifestly in their best security interests."¹⁶ In supporting the establishment of Western bases in Central Asia, Putin made a virtue of necessity.

In the context of a closer strategic relationship between Russia and the United States, Putin's decision served Russian interests rather well. It brought substance to the still new alignment with the US in the war on international terrorism. The relationship with the US remains the most important

13 Armenia, Belarus, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are the CST signatories. The treaty is also referred to as the Tashkent Treaty, as it was signed in Tashkent in 1992. Uzbekistan was one of the original signatories but withdrew from the Treaty in 1999.

14 Jonson, *Vladimir Putin and Central Asia*, pp. 63–70; Wilhelmsen and Flikke, "Copy That...", p. 25.

15 Jonson, "Russia and Central Asia", p. 114.

16 Lo, *Vladimir Putin and the Evolution of Russian Foreign Policy*, p. 82.

bilateral relationship of Russian foreign policy, and the decision thus made good sense. This applied even if the decision entailed downplaying Russian ambitions in Central Asia for the time being. I agree with Bobo Lo that Putin "did not so much make a 'strategic choice' in favour of the West, but took advantage of an extraordinary set of circumstances to pursue objectives that were already in place." One could even argue that from Putin's point of view, it was "America that was joining him in the fight against international terrorism."¹⁷ However, the Russian political elite viewed this strategic decision as a shift in emphasis, where priorities in Central Asia were explicitly being subordinated to the objective of developing a closer relationship with the United States. This is the background for using 'strategic decision' here to refer to Putin's ability to take advantage of the circumstances.

Arguably, the decision to support Western bases in Central Asia could also be explained by Russia's goal of maintaining regional stability. Stability was constantly under threat by developments in Afghanistan, especially by the advance of the Taliban. Russia's repeated efforts, the last in May 2000, to attract support from the Central Asian states for air raids on Afghanistan, had failed.¹⁸ If the US-led coalition could oust the Taliban, nothing could serve Russian interests in Central Asia better. Indeed, if this meant that Russia in the future could spend its limited resources on its allies instead of its enemies, Russia's presence in the region could be boosted. However, Russia's other goal in Central Asia – excluding – was also to a certain extent preserved in the new circumstances. Putin realised that the Americans would be coming to Central Asia no matter what he said. Islam Karimov's repeated offers of assistance to the Americans in the weeks before Operation Enduring Freedom could not be misread. With his explicit support for Western bases in

17 Dmitri Trenin, "Russia and anti-terrorism", in *What Russia sees*, ed. Dov Lynch (Paris: Institute for Security Studies, Chaillot Paper no. 74, 2005), pp. 99–114, 104.

18 See Jonson, "Russia and Central Asia", p. 113.

Central Asia Putin was making it clear that Russia was claiming a leading role in Central Asia. This meant that Russia would have to be consulted on security issues in the future as well. Instead of letting Russia be overrun by the developments, Putin's decision brought Russia closer to being recognised in the future as a key power in Central Asia.

Putin's decision in the Russian context

Central Asia had not been a very prominent topic in discussions about Russian foreign policy before 2001. Policy toward the region was largely the preserve of military and security officials. Correspondingly, public interest rested mainly with what I shall refer to as a "military-security constituency". This military-security constituency consists of several groups, the most obvious group being the members and veterans of the armed services. Those affiliated with the defence-industrial complex also have a considerable interest in foreign policy. The term 'security' has also been included because under Putin members of the security services have become increasingly included in the political elite and as policymakers, with interests in foreign policy close to those of the military elites.¹⁹ To the extent that there was any discussion about Central Asia, it was largely framed within a geopolitical worldview, in which the former Soviet Union, for most of the 1990s the "near abroad", was seen as a Russian sphere of influence. This was consistent with the emphasis placed on the former Soviet Union within the worldview of pragmatists and conservatives in Russia, and consistent with the emphasis placed on geopolitics in the worldview of the military-security constituency. Conservatives are here seen as being favourably disposed towards a strong Russian influence in the CIS, while pragmatists are in favour of developing Russia's ties with its neighbours if this has a positive influence on Russia itself. This distinguished their view on foreign policy from that of liberal westernisers, who focused on

19 Olga Kryshstanovskaia, *Anatomiia rossiiskoi elity* [Anatomy of the Russian Elite] (Moscow: Zakharov, 2005 (2004)), pp. 264–279.

integration with the West. Westernisers were not interested in the former Soviet Union as a special case in Russian foreign policy, and advocated that the CIS states should occupy rather little space in overall Russian foreign policy.²⁰ In this way, Russia's relations with the former Soviet Union were a topic that divided the political elite from the outset.

Increasingly throughout the 1990s, policymaking in the CIS was left to those who supported the idea of a Russian sphere of interests in the CIS. Under Putin, disagreements on foreign policy, similar to other disagreements, were not as vocal or politicised as had been the case under Boris Yeltsin. In Putin's first period as president, a pragmatic foreign policy line meant that one could speak of a consensus around the need for better relations with the West and a more active policy in the CIS. Nevertheless, the basic disagreements between those who favoured closer relations with the West and those who prioritised relations with the CIS remained unresolved. It remained one of the basic, latent, foreign policy disagreements within the Russian political elite.²¹ Accordingly, when Putin chose a strategic alignment with the West in the campaign against terror, this was a potentially controversial decision to the Russian political elite.

US strategic goals in Central Asia

American policy in Central Asia from the mid-1990s developed out of a set of ambitious goals that were all connected to the promotion of the independence of the Central Asian states as well as their integration into the international political community and the world economy.²² However, considerations connected to the important energy

20 Adapted from Margot Light, "Foreign Policy Thinking" in *Internal Factors in Russian Foreign Policy*, Neil Malcolm et al, pp. 33–100. These concepts are still useful. Although conservatism, pragmatism and the liberal westernisers in foreign policy in Russia have developed since the 1990s, the heritage of this period is clearly discernible in the debate even today.

21 Cf. Bobo Lo, *Russian Foreign Policy in the Post-Soviet Era. Reality, Illusion and Mythmaking* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), pp. 21–23.

resources of the Caspian Basin shaped how policy was conducted. Towards the end of the 1990s, involvement in the exploitation and transport of these resources in itself became an US policy objective. The American energy engagement in practise received a higher priority than the other US goals in the region. By the end of the century, the US had a substantial engagement in Central Asia, with a clearly strategic profile. However, it was not clear how this engagement would develop in the future. For one thing, in spite of the substantial engagement, there was also a pronounced gap between objectives and rhetoric on the one side, and a lack of focus and commitment towards the region on the other. A decrease in US engagement seemed just as likely a development as a strengthening of the American presence in the region.

The events of 11 September 2001 radically changed the American approach to Central Asia. The significant increase in the US engagement even extended to underwriting regional security structures. The emphasis on Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan as the primary axes for conducting American policy in the region was on the one hand broadened through a more active relationship with Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, while the focus in the war on terrorism now concentrated on Uzbekistan, which was already a main US collaborator on terrorism from 1998 onwards. The tendency towards a strategic view of the region had in fact been pronounced in American policymaking before 2001, but from 2001 onwards,

22 See Robert Legvold, "U.S. Policy Toward Kazakhstan" in *Thinking Strategically. The Major Powers, Kazakhstan, and the Central Asian Nexus*, ed. Robert Legvold (Cambridge, MA: American Academy of Arts and Sciences/MIT Press, 2003), pp. 67–106, 83. Legvold quotes the following sources of US policy in Central Asia (in fn. 21): James Collins, "The United States and the Caucasus States: Working Together Toward Constructive Cooperative Development", *Dispatch*, vol. 7, no. 45 (4 November 1996); Strobe Talbott, "A Farewell to Flashman: American Policy in the Caucasus and Central Asia", *Dispatch*, vol. 8, no. 6 (21 July 1997); Stephen Sestanovich, "Testimony Before the International Relations Committee of the U.S. Congress", and Donald Pressley, "Testimony Before the International Relations Committee of the U.S. Congress", both 30 April 1998; Stephen Sestanovich, "Testimony Before the Asia-Pacific Subcommittee of the International Relations Committee of the U.S. Congress", 17 March 1999.

there was even more emphasis on the military and security sides of US policy.²³ Arguably, the American focus on Central Asia also narrowed. While the primary objectives of American policy in the region by 2001 had been increasingly shaped, and partially overshadowed, by the energy considerations in the Caspian Basin, the war on terrorism once again changed the weighting of US priorities. This could be seen in the particular emphasis given to energy *security* from 2001 onwards. While this concept had been central to US policy in Central Asia before, after 9/11 it was seen as a part of the war on terrorism.²⁴

The basis of the American engagement in Central Asia from September 2001 was a comprehensive military presence. The most visible aspect of this presence was the two bases, one American in Uzbekistan, and one coalition base in Kyrgyzstan. In addition, airstrips in Tajikistan were used for refuelling aircraft, and airspace in all countries except Turkmenistan was used in the humanitarian side of the operation. This came in addition to the military cooperation with the West prior to 9/11, e.g. the Central Asian Battalion's (Centrasbat) exercises under NATO's auspices, and American military assistance to the Central Asian countries. In addition, US aid to all the Central Asian states and to regional programmes increased substantially in 2001 and 2002.²⁵ Via the increase in military presence, the US presence, policy and plans in Central Asia had acquired a thoroughly strategic character.

23 On the period up to 2001 see also Stephen Blank, "The United States and Central Asia" in *Central Asian Security*, eds. Allison and Jonson, pp. 127-151.

24 On the use of 'energy security' in connection with American policies in the region before 9/11, see Legvold, "U.S. Policy Toward Kazakhstan", p. 86. For the place of energy security within the US National Security Strategy, see "The National Security Strategy of the United States of America", September 2002, pp. 19-20.

25 Total US assistance to all the Central Asian countries was in the fiscal year of 2002 408 million US dollars, while in the fiscal year of 2001 it was 244.2 million US dollars. For a breakdown and details, see "U.S. Assistance to the Countries of Central Asia (Taken Question)", available online.

Central Asia in a strategic context

For Central Asia's leaders, the challenges of balancing foreign policy changed with 9/11. Before 9/11, the problems of maintaining a balance between Russia and China and also between these two powers and the United States resulted in quite different strategic choices among the region's leaders. Kazakhstan tried to seek security from Russia and China. In addition, Kazakhstan maintained active membership in several international organisations with Russian and/or Chinese participation, in what seemed to be a strategy to diffuse the power of the two external powers.²⁶ The rationale was that if regional security was an issue mainly in multilateral settings, neither Russia nor China could act unilaterally or overrun the interests of the Central Asian states. Kazakhstan's president, Nursultan Nazarbaev, also saw the existence of regional organisations with a broad membership as a mechanism to minimise the potential for rivalry between Russia and China in Central Asia. Turkmenistan chose the opposite and isolated itself in inflexible neutrality. After the end of the civil war in 1997 Tajikistan was wholly dependent on Russia and its military presence there for its internal stability and external security. Kyrgyzstan was largely dependent on Russia for its security in the 1990s, and maintained close relations with Russia even after 2000. The Kyrgyz relationship to Russia under Askar Akaev was epitomised by the expression "Russia was given to us by God and by history".²⁷ President Akaev, aiming at avoiding confrontation, also kept a friendly, forthcoming line towards China. This was for example evident in late 2002, when the Kyrgyz government transferred approximately 950 square kilometres of territory to China to resolve a long-running border dispute.²⁸ In the 1990s, only

26 Legvold, "U.S. Policy Toward Kazakhstan", p. 89.

27 Askar Akaev, *Trudnaia doroga k demokratii (Pamiatnoe desiatiletie)* [The Difficult Road to Democracy (A Memorable Decade)] (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia, 2002).

28 Tajikistan also transferred approximately 1000 square kilometres of territory to China under pressure from Beijing in May 2002. John C. K. Daly, "Sino-Kyrgyz relations after the Tulip Revolution", *Asian Research China Brief*, 7 June 2005.

Uzbekistan chose in favour of the United States, with participation in the group of CIS states that acted independently of Russia, GUUAM, the Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Central-Asia (TRACECA) and in close military cooperation with the US.²⁹

In the late 1990s, Central Asia's leaders increasingly looked to Moscow as Vladimir Putin developed a more active Russian policy, while the United States seemed to be decreasing its engagement in Central Asia. This changed with 9/11. The aftermath of 9/11 improved the strategic possibilities of Central Asia's leaders. All the Central Asian states, with the exception of Turkmenistan, enjoyed a closer relationship with the US in the war on terrorism, and with the Russian-American alignment in this campaign, the danger of antagonising Russia decreased. China was negative to the Western bases in Central Asia, but as long as the Chinese leadership agreed on the need to fight terrorism, the Central Asian leaders could balance their strategic choices more freely. The main positive consequence of the war on terrorism, the fall of the Taliban in Afghanistan, was duly appreciated by the region's leaders, as epitomised in Islam Karimov's statement: "The United States did for us what our partners in the CIS could not do".³⁰ Operation Enduring Freedom radically improved the security situation and the potential for stability in the region. Apart from this, the American engagement first and foremost brought economic advantages. This highlighted how difficult it was for Russia to compete economically with the United States on investment and economic support to the Central Asian states. In addition, the US positioned itself as a credible, and perhaps more effective, security guarantor than Russia immediately after 9/11. This was realised in Russia as well as in Central Asia.³¹ When it came to competing with the United States for influence in Central Asia, large parts of the

29 Uzbekistan was a member of GUUAM (Georgia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, Moldova) from 1999 to June 2002, when it suspended its membership in the organisation.

30 Viktoriia Panfilova and Armen Khanbabian, "Patrushev, Totskii i Ramsfeld sovershaiut palomnichestvo" [Patrushev, Totskii and Ramsfeld carry out a pilgrimage], *Nezavisimaa gazeta*, 25 April 2002.

Russian elite were convinced that once other powers, meaning the United States, had been “let in”, a lack of resources would limit Russia’s possibilities to maintain a sphere of influence in Central Asia, indeed in the CIS as a whole.³² Western interest in principle also entailed more pressure to democratise, observe human rights and open up for foreign influence. But in practise, the renewed attention from Moscow, and Washington’s prioritisation of the war on terrorism, gave Central Asia’s leaders considerable leeway and shielded them from unwanted scrutiny.

To the two other external powers with important interests in Central Asia, Russia and China, the considerable increase in the Western military presence after 9/11 was a source of concern. The most worrying aspect of it was that it was dominated and led by the United States. The uncertainties surrounding the US presence – its duration, American strategic aims, and its bearings on regional patterns of conflict and cooperation – were particularly problematic in Moscow and Beijing. The American official positions on these issues were intentionally unspecified, because the war on terrorism was an open-ended, global campaign, against a “particularly elusive enemy”.³³ The American vagueness was also connected to the prominence of the war on terrorism in US security policy. As long as the war on terrorism was the prism through which foreign policy was conducted, other objectives in Central Asia were put on hold. It was therefore difficult to conceive of how

31 See Irina D. Zviagelskaia and Dmitrii V. Makarov, “Vospriiatie Rossiei politiki Zapada v Tsentralnoi Azii” [Russia’s Perception of Western Policy in Central Asia] in *Iuzhnyi flang SNG. Tsentralnaia Azia – Kaspïi – Kavkaz: Vozmozhnosti i vyzovy dlia Rossii* [The Southern Flank of the CIS. Central Asia – the Caspian Sea – the Caucasus: Possibilities and Challenges for Russia], eds. Mikhail M. Narinskii and Artem V. Malgin (Moscow: Logos, 2003), pp. 103–127, 115–116.

32 Cf. Vasilii Streltsov, “Gruzii, kotoruiu my poteriali” [Georgia that we lost], *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 20 February 2002; Artem Vernidub, “Putin pozhelal udachi amerikantsam v Gruzii” [Putin wished the Americans luck in Georgia], *Gazeta.ru*, 1 March 2002; Mikhail Khodarenok, “Starshego brata’ sdali za milliard dollarov” [They sold their elder brother for a billion dollars], *Nezavisimoe voennoe obozrenie*, 8 February 2002.

33 “The National Security Strategy ...”, p. 5.

such objectives would be interpreted and prioritised in the future. US, and by extension, Western military presence in Central Asia was required as long as it was needed to stabilise Afghanistan and perhaps for longer if this was considered necessary. In the war on terrorism, Russia was seen as a "partner". The view of China as a "strategic competitor", while somewhat downplayed in the campaign, was still valid.³⁴ Accordingly, Moscow did not exclude the possibility that that the US military presence in Central Asia could be used at some stage to deter China. Because the American military presence was added to the already strong US energy interests in the region, neither did Russian observers exclude the possibility of a heightened level of friction with Russia. The concerns around how the US would relate to potential conflicts and the future development of the region were acute in Russia as well as in China. No matter how the relationship between the major external powers developed, their long-term objectives for the development of the region were bound to differ.

34 Condoleezza Rice, "Promoting the National Interest", *Foreign Affairs*, 79, 1 (January/February 2000): 45–62, 56; George W. Bush, "Remarks by the President at 2002 Graduation Exercise of the United States Military Academy (West Point, New York)", 1 June 2002; "The National Security Strategy ...", pp. 26–27.

Chapter 2

The first weeks after 9/11

In the period from 9/11 to the Crawford summit in November 2001, many Russian foreign policy choices had to be made quickly. No choice was minor, because the Russian and international interest around the further course of Russian foreign policy was high. Russian comments and statements on this policy attracted interest as well. Except for the defence and foreign ministers, government members were reluctant to make statements before the president had outlined the Russian engagement in the campaign. General denouncements of international terrorism were of course an exception, and such denouncements naturally resembled each other. The official response to the changed international situation, and in particular the prospect of Western bases in Central Asia, was in the process of being formed.

During the first few days after 11 September 2001, the basic lines of Russia's official response to the new international situation emerged in speeches and statements from Putin and a few other key Russian officials. Like most world leaders, Putin commented on the attacks on New York and Washington with sympathy for the victims and support for the American people. The Russian response was especially welcomed in the West at the time. It was swift enough to set the tone for other leaders, not least the leaders of the CIS states. The message was simple, with offers of assistance to find and punish those responsible for the attacks. This response came on 11 September, first in a telegram to George

W. Bush, and then in a telephone conversation with the national security adviser, Condoleezza Rice. The quick reaction underlined the sincerity of Putin's statement. Russia and the United States now shared a strategic goal in the campaign against international terrorism, and this brought a new dimension into the bilateral relationship.

Russia's initial response to 9/11

The central topics of Russia's early response were

- Offers of sympathy and support for the United States, both in the United States (aid, emergency assistance), and on an international scale. This last point concerned both assistance to find and punish those responsible, and Russian support for international cooperation against terrorism;
- The global nature of international terrorism. This topic had two elements. Firstly, Russian statements stressed the need for cooperative and internationally recognised retaliation of the attacks. Secondly, Russian statements explicitly linked the war in Chechnya to international terrorism. Links between Chechen separatist groups and the Al-Qaida network were played up.
- The common strategic goals of Russia and the West, namely to fight international terrorism.

These topics reflected the general line in Putin's foreign policy. A good relationship with the West had a high priority, and the cornerstone here was a constructive approach to the United States. At the same time, Russia did not favour unilateral action by the United States, neither in the retaliation after 11 September nor in other issues, for example National Missile Defense (NMD). The emphasis Putin placed on common strategic goals, as well as on the need for a UN-led retaliation, were connected to this distrust of American unilateralism. The link between international terrorism and the war in Chechnya reflected one of the priorities of Russia's foreign policy since the start of the second war in Chechnya – avoiding or softening international criticism of the war. And indeed, as Russia aligned with the West in the war on terrorism, criticism from the West did become more muted.

Putin took the leading role in communicating Russia's position in the changed international situation. However, Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov, Defence Minister Sergei Ivanov and various other Russian officials also made statements similar to Putin's in the first few days after the attacks. The Russian response was not only directed towards the United States, but towards the West as a whole. Russia proposed a joint resolution in the Permanent Joint Council of NATO and Russia condemning the attacks and declaring the determination of both NATO and Russia not to let those responsible for the attacks go unpunished. This resolution was adopted on 13 September.

Participants in the Russian debate on foreign policy commented on the attacks on New York and Washington with shock and sympathy, but also with some uncertainty about the future that displayed considerable anxiety about the American retaliation. Their comments also reflected some of Putin's priorities, especially caution about American unilateralism, and links to the war in Chechnya.³⁵ This indicated that Putin had domestic support for some elements of his policy towards the West. But Russia's alignment with the West in the war on terrorism attracted varied comments. The issue was contentious. It remained to be seen whether the Russian elites had been *convinced* by Putin's alignment with the West, and whether they would support this policy in the longer run.³⁶

35 This included allegations by the general procurator, Vladimir Ustinov, that Moscow possessed convincing evidence of Chechen rebels going through military training in Afghan camps financed by Osama bin Laden, and similar statements by other official sources. See Armen Khanbabian and Igor Rotar, "Vas bombili, vy i voiuite" [You were bombed, so you should go to war], *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 18 September 2001; *RFE/RL Newslines*, 20 September 2001.

36 See Dmitri Trenin, "Through Russian Eyes and Minds. Post-9/11 Perceptions of America and its Policies" in *Visions of America and Europe*, eds. Christina V. Balis and Simon Serfaty (Washington DC: CSIS Press, Significant Issues Series, 2004).

US bases in Central Asia

The issue of Central Asia's place in the operation to retaliate against Al-Qaida entered into the Russian-American relationship very soon after the attacks. *The New York Post* on 14 September reported that former Soviet military bases in Central Asia could be used for the American retaliatory operations against Al-Qaida.³⁷ Similar reports soon appeared in other Western and Russian media. Also on 14 September, Russian Defence Minister Sergei Ivanov ruled out this possibility, referring to the Central Asian states' obligations towards the Collective Security Treaty (Tashkent Treaty).³⁸ The treaty would allegedly make NATO operations in Central Asia impossible.³⁹ The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) on the other hand denied that any information about the use of bases in Central Asia had been received.⁴⁰ But Washington did not deny that it had approached Moscow and some of the Central Asian governments with requests to use the bases. Sergei Ivanov's statement, combined with the apparent Russian unwillingness to let the US deploy in Central Asia, compared unfavourably with Putin's initial reaction. It also cast doubt on Russia's support for the campaign that was beginning to take shape.

Statements by officials in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan indicated that the Americans first and foremost wanted access to bases and airspace in those countries. On 14 September, Tajikistan's prime minister, Oqil Oqilov, stated that any US requests for its airspace or territory would be discussed with Moscow before responding.⁴¹ But the prime minister was

37 See Niles Lathem, "U.S. May Sock Bin Laden From Russian Bases", *New York Post*, 14 September 2001.

38 The defence minister failed to mention that this applied only to Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, as Uzbekistan was not a party to the Collective Security Treaty.

39 "Sergei Ivanov otverg vozmozhnost operatsii NATO na territorii sredneaziatskikh gosudarstv SNG" [Sergei Ivanov rejects the possibility of NATO operations on the territories of the Central Asian states of CIS], *strana.ru*, 14 September 2001.

40 Dmitri Safonov, "Soglasie molchat" [Consenting to silence], *Izvestiia*, 16 September 2001.

positive to the prospect of Tajik assistance to a war on terrorism.⁴² This was generally received as a confirmation that a request had indeed been received in Dushanbe. Later statements from Dushanbe were more equivocal on the issue of whether a request had been received. For example, the Tajik MFA first vehemently denied that a request had been received, but later stated that its previous statement was not meant as a 'no' to all assistance to the campaign.⁴³

Uzbekistan's reaction was less hesitant. A spokesman for Uzbekistan's foreign ministry on 17 September said that Uzbekistan would consider making its bases available to the United States if asked. Foreign Minister Abdulaziz Kamilov repeated this.⁴⁴ Tashkent followed this line in the next days, but generally refused to comment on landings of US airplanes until the start of operations on 6 October. In mid-September, official comments from Kyrgyzstan's government concerned fears for destabilisation in Central Asia, as well as offers of general support and assistance in providing intelligence to the United States.⁴⁵ At this point, the issue of support and assistance from Tajikistan and Uzbekistan in the coming operations in Afghanistan was much higher on the American agenda than assistance from Kyrgyzstan.

Russian reactions to US plans in Central Asia

Between 14 and 23 September, Russian officials issued conflicting statements about Western use of Central Asian airbases. It was clear that the issue of how to approach the American request to use Central Asian bases and airspace was

41 RFE/RL *Newsline*, 17 September 2001.

42 "Ataka na Ameriku. Mneniia: Rol Tsentralnoi Azii" [Attack on America. Opinions: the role of Central Asia], *Radio Svoboda*, 20 September 2001.

43 RFE/RL *Newsline*, 18 September 2001; Lidia Isamova, "Tajikistan: Won't Allow Afghan Attacks", *AP*, 16 September 2001; "Tadzhikistan vyrazil gotovnost sotrudnicat s SShA v borbe s terrorizmom" [Tajikistan expresses readiness to cooperate with the US in the war against terrorism], *strana.ru*, 17 September 2001.

44 RFE/RL *Newsline*, 18 September 2001; "Ataka na Ameriku..."

45 RFE/RL *Newsline*, 18 and 19 September 2001.

being considered, and that Russian policymakers disagreed among themselves. Sergei Ivanov's statement on 14 September clearly reflected that he was against letting the Americans use Central Asian bases in operations against Al-Qaida. It could also be seen as a warning to the Central Asian states and the US to consult Russia before any decision was made. If this was the case, one likely aim was for Moscow to become a mediator between the Central Asian states and the US through Russia's military agreements and treaties with the countries. Any such hopes were crushed as the United States' government preferred to rely on direct contact with the Central Asian states in the days that followed. Ivanov's statement was in line with a widespread opinion within the Russian military bureaucracy. However, with the volatile international situation at this moment, the statement was seen abroad as a sign that the Russian government could not decide how to approach the prospect of Western bases in Central Asia.

From 15 to 17 September there were few official Russian comments on the issue of American use of bases in Central Asia. The Moscow press speculated that the Russian government would exercise a veto over NATO or American use of Central Asian bases, especially in Tajikistan.⁴⁶ One indication that this could indeed be the case was a visit to the Central Asian states (except Turkmenistan) by the Security Council secretary, Vladimir Rushailo, on 18–21 September.⁴⁷ During his meetings with the presidents and other officials in Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, it seems Rushailo tried to convince them that allowing the United States to use their bases for operations against Afghanistan was tantamount to exposing themselves to being bombed by the Taliban. Rushailo further underlined that Russia, unlike the United States, would unfailingly protect the Central Asian states for a

46 *RFE/RL Newswire*, 20 September 2001; Khanbabian and Rotar, "Vas bombili..."; Arkadii Dubnov, "Bazovyi vopros" [The base question], *Vremia novostei*, 18 September 2001.

47 Some observers even suggested that Rushailo's visit to Central Asia was prompted by the readiness displayed by Uzbekistan's government to support the anti-terrorist coalition, see "Ataka na Ameriku..."

long time, and not only for the duration of a single military campaign.⁴⁸ Following Rushailo's visit, Tajikistan's government withdrew its offer of airspace and bases to the United States, while Uzbekistan's government stated that it had not yet committed itself.⁴⁹

This and other official statements indicated that Tashkent's decision depended more on its own president and government's assessment of the situation than on Moscow's views. Formally as well, Uzbekistan was not obliged towards Russia to the same extent as Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, due to its non-participation in the Collective Security Treaty. Uzbekistan may even have tried to use the volatile international situation to improve its own position in Central Asia.⁵⁰ Tajikistan was clearly not able to make any decision about support for the anti-terrorist coalition independently of Moscow, because stability in the country depended on Moscow's political and military support.⁵¹ Meanwhile, Kyrgyzstan's authorities were still waiting to see how the situation would develop.

'Yes' without ambiguity

On 18 September the Russian foreign minister went to Washington to discuss the war on terrorism with President Bush, the secretary of state, Colin Powell, and the national security adviser. The first result from these talks came on 19 September when Igor Ivanov said that every member state in the CIS was free to decide for itself whether to make their bases available for third countries or alliances.⁵² This was the first official Russian statement to this effect, and was undoubtedly issued on Putin's instructions. The next day, at a

48 Iurii Chernogaev, "Vladimir Rushailo zamiril Tsentralnuiu Aziiu" [Vladimir Rushailo pacifies Central Asia], *Kommersant*, 22 September 2001.

49 Chernogaev, "Vladimir Rushailo zamiril ..."; *RFE/RL Newslines*, 21 September 2001; "Ataka na Ameriku..."

50 "Ataka na Ameriku..."

51 *Ibid.*

52 *RFE/RL Newslines*, 20 September 2001.

meeting with George W. Bush, Ivanov was informed that the United States only needed Russia's cooperation, not its active participation in the anti-terrorist operations.⁵³

Putin consulted intensively with his closest security advisers before and after Ivanov's statement. That the states in the former Soviet Union were indeed free to decide for themselves whether to allow US bases on their territory was confirmed by Putin on 21 September, in an interview with German television.⁵⁴ At last, the president himself had clarified Russia's position regarding US bases in Central Asia. In the next few days, he emphasised and elaborated Russia's position on this issue, and repeatedly discussed it with President Bush and the presidents of the Central Asian states.⁵⁵ He also held a full-day meeting, only interrupted by a phone conversation with the American president, with key government officials on 22 September at his residence in Sochi.⁵⁶ The meeting was unprecedented in the number and breadth of participating security officials and the extent of consultation was uncharacteristic of Putin's policymaking style. The extraordinary character of the decisions to be made at this point was further underlined the following Monday when Putin, before appearing before the Russian public on television with the Russian programme in the anti-terrorist campaign,

53 RFE/RL *Newsline*, 21 September 2001.

54 RFE/RL *Newsline*, 24 September 2001.

55 Yuri Zarakhovich, "Russia Joins Coalition", *Time*, 23 September 2001.

56 The participants were Vladimir Rushailo, Sergei Ivanov, Minister for Internal Affairs Boris Gryzlov, Minister for Emergency Situations Sergei Shoigu, the director of the Federal Security Service (FSB), Nikolai Patrushev, General Procurator Vladimir Ustinov, the general director of the Federal Agency for Government Communications and Information (FAPSI), Vladimir Matiukhin, deputy head of the General Staff, Valentin Korabelnikov, first deputy head of the General Staff, Iurii Baluevskii, Federal Border Service Director Konstantin Totskii, the director of the Foreign Intelligence Service, Sergei Lebedev, and First Deputy Foreign Minister Viacheslav Trubnikov. The head of the General Staff, Anatolii Kvashnin, and the head of the CIS Anti-Terrorist Centre, Valerii Verchagin, were in Dushanbe at the time, meeting not only Tajikistan's president, Imomali Rakhmonov, but also with the new military leader of the Afghan Northern Alliance, Mohammad Fakhimkhan.

consulted the members of the State Council, the heads of chambers in the Federal Assembly, and the Duma's faction leaders.

In Sochi, only a small minority of the participants supported Putin's alignment with the West and consent to Western military bases in Central Asia. But Putin maintained his line. The resulting compromise between the Russian policymakers stopped short of Russian military participation in the Afghan campaign – an important point for the top military policymakers – and of offensive US operations out of Central Asia – a point emphasised by Central Asian leaders.⁵⁷ The five points of the Russian programme as outlined by Putin in a nationwide broadcast on 24 September were:

- 1 Active international cooperation among intelligence agencies. Russia has made available and will continue to offer the information it possesses about the terrorists' infrastructure, whereabouts and their training bases;
- 2 [T]he opening of Russian airspace to airplanes with humanitarian cargo to the area of the anti-terror operation;
- 3 We have coordinated our position with our Central Asian allies. They share our view, and are ready to open their air-bases to the coalition;
- 4 Russian participation, if necessary, in international search and rescue operations in Afghanistan;
- 5 We are broadening our cooperation with the Afghan Rabbani government [the Northern Alliance's government], and will contribute additional military aid to his forces, including weapons and arms supplies.⁵⁸

Putin also underlined that other forms of participation could be considered at a later point, and once more emphasised that the war in Chechnya was part of the international campaign against terror.

The phrasing of the third point placed in a positive light the extent to which Moscow had influenced the decisions of the Central Asian governments. It gave Moscow an active role in

57 Cf. Jonson, *Vladimir Putin and Central Asia*, p. 84–86.

58 Vladimir Putin, "Zaiavlenie Prezidenta Rossii" [Statement of the President of Russia], 24 September 2001.

persuading the Central Asian governments to cooperate with the coalition. It gave no indication that the Central Asian governments could have chosen to do so independently of Moscow. The rather vague phrase concerning the Central Asian bases was nevertheless the most remarkable part of the programme. In the period that followed, it became the only one of the five points above that was widely disputed in Russian society and in the Russian political elite.

A serious and long term presence

The governments of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan allowed the US Air Force the use of their territories on 24 September, and Kyrgyzstan opened its airspace to the coalition a day later. As early as 22 September, two US cargo airplanes and 100 military personnel had landed near Tashkent, although Uzbekistan's government officially denied this.⁵⁹ The landing would hardly have taken place without President Putin knowing and accepting it, although he would not have been asked for approval, as Uzbekistan was not a signatory to the Collective Security Treaty.

The US and Western engagement in Central Asia grew in October and November. This was accompanied by extensive Russian-American cooperation on intelligence in Afghanistan. By early December, the Western presence was extensive, and it reached its peak in mid-2002. The coalition used airspace in Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan. There were significant humanitarian and support operations out of Tajikistan from October 2001 to April 2002, and the US secured landing rights in the country.⁶⁰ In Uzbekistan, the coalition was allowed to use and develop an airbase at Kokaidy and a larger base at Khanabad (the Khanabad-Karshy, or K2 Base). The Khanabad Base was established under the US Central Command (CENTCOM). In early December, the coalition was allowed to use Manas airport outside the Kyrgyz capital

59 RFE/RL *Newsline*, 24 and 25 September 2001. For an account of the official Uzbek secrecy surrounding the arrival on 6 October 2001 of US troops in Uzbekistan, see Lutz Kleveman, *The New Great Game. Blood and Oil in Central Asia* (London: Atlantic Books, 2003), p. 165.

(the Manas or Ganci Base). The Manas Base was developed for coalition use in December and January. The Western presence on the ground was complemented by a US overflight agreement with Kazakhstan. In early 2002 there were about 1500 US military personnel in Uzbekistan. At the Manas Base, there were around 2000 troops. These were mostly Americans, but there were also troops from Australia, Canada, Denmark, the Netherlands, France, Italy, Norway, Poland, South Korea, Spain and Turkey.⁶¹

The US military deployment on the ground in Central Asia was accompanied by a commitment to engage. This was emphasised by the assistant secretary of state for European and Eurasian Affairs, Elizabeth Jones, in a testimony before the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee on 13 December 2001 where she said, "We are engaging – seriously and for the long term – with Central Asia".⁶² 'Seriously and for the long term' consequently became a catchphrase in the Russian debate about the Western military deployment in Central Asia. It also had repercussions in the Russian-American relationship, and influenced Russian policies in Central Asia.

60 This included eight US Air Force S-130 military cargo airplanes stationed in Dushanbe by early 2002, see Pavel Pushkin, "Tajikistan begins cooperation with NATO", *WPS Defense and Security Report*, no. 191, 8 March 2002. There were also operations out of Kuliab, but it was decided not to set up a Western base there because the former Soviet base was in a poor condition, see *Washington Post* 9 February 2002; quoted in Henry Plater-Zyberk, *Kyrgyzstan – Focusing on Security* (Camberley: Defence Academy of the United Kingdom, Conflict Studies Research Centre, 2003). Other airfields, e.g. Khujand and Kurgan-Tiube, were evaluated for use in November 2001, but were not put to use in Operation Enduring Freedom. This was probably due to their being in a state of disrepair. Around 300 Western troops participated in the operations by February 2002.

61 The Manas Base housed in mid-2002 12 F-18 Hornet, 6 Mirage 2000D, air-to-air refuelers and strategic airlift. See Plater-Zyberk, *Kyrgyzstan – Focusing on Security*, p. 11, who quotes *strana.ru* 5 December 2002 and *APMC en ligne*, 14 November 2002. In 2005, the Manas Base had been reduced to around 800 US troops and 100 Spanish troops. The base at Khanabad was leased to the US for a period of 25 years.

62 A. Elizabeth Jones, "Testimony Before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Subcommittee on Central Asia and the Caucasus", 13 December 2001.

Conclusions

This chapter is devoted to a detailed discussion of the formation of Russia's response to the changed international situation, and especially to the establishment of a Western military presence in Central Asia. I have emphasised how there were considerable doubts in the political elite before an unambiguous strategic alignment was established between Russia and the United States. This is important to the discussion. Substantial parts of the political elite remained unconvinced about the strategic alignment even after it had been established. As regards Russian policy in Central Asia, it was clear that the United States would deploy in the region regardless of Russia's position on the issue. However, Russia's signals were listened to in Central Asia, as was evident from the conflicting statements made by Central Asia's governments during the last two weeks of September 2001 on the possible Western deployment in Central Asia.

Chapter 3

Russia's reactions to the West

From Putin's televised speech on 24 September, Russia and the United States were unequivocally aligned in the war on terrorism. On 26 September 2001, Putin made a speech in the German Bundestag that paved the way for a closer alignment between Russia and the West in general, including NATO.⁶³ The most important consequence of this alignment was the founding of the NATO-Russia Council in May 2002. Another consequence, perhaps the main concession from the US to Russia in the war on terrorism, was a marked downplaying from the Bush administration on the rhetoric over the war in Chechnya. The White House adopted Putin's interpretation of Chechnya as a part of an international war against terrorism.⁶⁴

When the US Air Force started to bomb targets in Afghanistan on 6 October, Putin had been informed about the attacks beforehand. He welcomed them and supported them in a Russian public broadcast on 8 October. Sergei Ivanov, Vladimir Rushailo and other officials also supported the strikes and made positive statements about Russian-American

63 Vladimir Putin, "Vystuplenie v Bundestage FRG" [Speech in the German Bundestag], 25 September 2001.

64 Russian efforts in this regard before 11 September 2001 had largely been unsuccessful. See Wilhelmsen and Flikke, "Copy That...", p. 9–10. For the Bush administration's change of rhetoric from before 9/11, see James M. Goldgeier and Michael McFaul, *Power and Purpose. U.S. Policy toward Russia after the Cold War* (Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2003), pp. 316–319.

relations during October and November. This prepared the ground for a cordial summit between the presidents of Russia and the United States on 13–14 November.

In this chapter, I shall go through Russia's response to the establishment of Western bases in Central Asia as reflected in official statements towards the United States and the West. The chapter's overall structure is chronological. Some statements and issues will be the same as in the previous chapter, but they will be interpreted here as belonging to official Russian policy towards the West. At the end of the chapter, I shall sum up the main features of the development of the Russian response.

The Crawford summit and after

At the summit in Crawford, Texas, Putin emphasised that the events since the 11 September tragedy gave Russia and the US "an opportunity to make our bilateral relations long-term and really friendly".⁶⁵ Statements of this kind underlined that Putin's decision on extensive cooperation with the West was a strategic decision, not a tactical move. There were no Russian demands for American security guarantees or concessions. Putin repeated the long-standing Russian foreign policy goals for which he now, as before, wanted to attract American support: accession to the World Trade Organisation, foreign capital investments in Russia, a better relationship with NATO and a post-Taliban government in Afghanistan that would also be acceptable to Russia. However, these statements were not presented as demands and not received as such.

At this point, the presence of US and NATO troops and airplanes in Central Asia was an unproblematic issue in the bilateral relationship. The Taliban had still not been conclusively defeated, although it was apparent that this would happen soon. In Russia, there was some impatience with what the West could offer in return for what was seen in Moscow as concessions. An echo of this impatience appeared

65 RFE/RL *Newsline*, 15 November 2001.

when Sergei Ivanov met NATO's secretary general, Lord George Robertson, in Moscow on 22 November. The defence minister said that Russia was ready to cooperate with NATO but at the level of equals and for mutual gains.⁶⁶ Putin's statement when he met Robertson the next day was more positive – Russia was prepared to develop its relations with NATO as far as the alliance itself was prepared to go.⁶⁷ When meeting Greek journalists in early December, he repeated that the recent improvement in relations with the United States was "not a tactical move, but a strategic policy". Russia was not worried about the United States' development of closer ties with Central Asian states or the American presence in the region.⁶⁸

After the Taliban's fall in Afghanistan, there were no fundamental changes to Russia's alignment with the West in the war on terrorism. The good relations enjoyed in the autumn endured. Especially with regard to the war in Afghanistan, where cooperation between Russia and the US was seen as a success, both presidents were very positive on several occasions.⁶⁹ However, after the end of the main military operations, intelligence and other direct cooperation between US and Russian agencies in the war on terrorism seem to have decreased substantially.⁷⁰ The high point of Russia-NATO relations came in May 2002, when the new NATO-Russia Council was founded. The founding of the council was accompanied by the signing of the 'binding' Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty (the Treaty of Moscow) between Russia and the United States.⁷¹ Potentially

66 "Sergei Ivanov: 'Rossiia gotova k sotrudnichestvu s NATO na ravnopravnoi osnove'" [Sergei Ivanov: Russia is ready for cooperation with NATO on the basis of equals], *strana.ru*, 22 November 2001.

67 *RFE/RL Newslines*, 26 November 2001.

68 *RFE/RL Newslines*, 6 December 2001.

69 See Goldgeier and McFaul, *Power and Purpose*, p. 322.

70 James Goldgeier, "Relations with US wither", *Jane's Intelligence Review*, July 2005: 56–57.

71 The binding provisions of the treaty are contradicted by a provision that each party may withdraw with three months written notice. Lo, *Vladimir Putin and the Evolution of Russian Foreign Policy*, p. 79 and 151 (n. 17). See also Goldgeier and McFaul, *Power and Purpose*, p. 323.

contentious issues either did not affect the relationship, or were discussed constructively. However, on occasions statements made by high-ranking Russian representatives cast doubt on the future of the Russian-American relationship. In the longer term, the Russian-American relationship again faced the challenge of how to develop closer and more diverse ties as the war on terrorism went into a period of consolidation and change.

Seriously and for the long term?

In Russia, the question of the duration of the Western military deployment in Central Asia became a source of apprehension after Elizabeth Jones' testimony on 13 December 2001. In the testimony, she had made assurances that the US was engaging "seriously and for the long term" with Central Asia.⁷² The expression soon became a catchphrase in the domestic Russian debate on the Western bases in Central Asia. Apprehension grew as preparations for the arrival of US and NATO military personnel and airplanes at Manas airport in Kyrgyzstan started in December 2001. In January 2002, Russian politicians' concerns appeared in the bilateral relationship. This prompted repeated assurances from the United States that the Western deployment would not be permanent. General Tommy Franks, the US general in charge of the campaign in Afghanistan said on 23 January 2002 that "the US does not intend to have permanent bases in the region", although it would continue to be involved in the region as the campaign to eliminate terrorism continued.⁷³ This was the most authoritative statement about the US plans for the bases in the first half of 2002.

On 24 January a Russian MFA spokesman, Aleksandr Iakovenko, stated that Russia had no reason not to believe this and previous American statements.⁷⁴ One day later, Putin's security advisor, Marshal Igor Sergeev, who was also a

72 Jones, "Testimony Before...."

73 "Central Asia: Franks Says No Permanent U.S. Bases In Region", *RFE/RL*, 23 January 2002.

former defence minister, met US Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage in Washington. After their meetings, Sergeev stated that Armitage had assured him that the US would indeed withdraw its troops from the Central Asian countries following the end of the anti-terrorist operations in Afghanistan, and there was "no reason not to believe it."⁷⁵ The issue was also on the agenda when the US-Russia Working Group on Afghanistan met in Washington in early February. In the joint statement released by the co-chairmen, Armitage and the Russian first deputy foreign minister, Viacheslav Trubnikov, stated that the United States had no intention of creating permanent military bases in Central Asia.⁷⁶ Only a couple of days later, Putin stated that he was confident that Russia and the United States could be partners.⁷⁷

A statement released by the Russian MFA on 13 February offered a contrast to this amicable state of affairs. The statement expressed concern that the effect of 11 September was wearing off, and that "those who preached the ideas of cold war and geopolitical confrontation are rearing their heads again."⁷⁸ It was difficult to say what had prompted this statement; it could be and indeed was seen as a reaction to American unilateralism. At the time, it also seemed connected to the continued omission of Chechen terrorists from the list of terrorist organizations kept by the US State Department.

74 "MID RF: v Moskve veriat zaiavleniiam Vashingtona o vremennom kharaktere voennogo prisutstviia SShA v Tsentralnoi Azii" [Russian MFA: Moscow believes Washington's statements on the temporary character of the US military presence in Central Asia], *strana.ru*, 24 January 2002.

75 "Zamestitel Gossekretaria SShA nazval slukhi ob amerikanskikh planakh sokhranit bazy v Tsentralnoi Azii lozhnymi" [The US deputy secretary of state called the rumours of American plans to keep the Central Asian bases lies], *strana.ru*, 26 January 2002.

76 *RFE/RL Newsline*, 11 February 2002.

77 "Rossiia stroit svoiu politiku v Tsentralnoi Azii iskhodia iz realii" [Russia formulates its policy in Central Asia on the basis of realities], *strana.ru*, 11 February 2002.

78 "Mezhdunarodnyi terrorizm: pozitsiia Rossii" [International Terrorism: Russia's Position], 13 February 2002; *RFE/RL Newsline*, 14 February 2002.

The statement did not mention the American military deployment in Central Asia, but the ambiguous phrase “geopolitical confrontation” seemed to refer to it.

Another ambiguous statement came from Igor Ivanov on 2 March. In an interview with the Italian daily *Corriere della Sera*, he said that the support for the anti-terrorist coalition from countries such as Uzbekistan and Tajikistan had been “perfectly normal”. However, he continued to say that as the war had almost ended, “[t]here are those who think that the USA wants to use the fight against terrorism as a pretext for strengthening its position in Central Asia, where there are strong geostrategic and oil interests. Are they right? The answer must come from the USA.”⁷⁹ The issue of the Western military presence in Central Asia seemed increasingly sore for the Russian government, and this was apparent in the level of relations with the West.

Conflicting signals from the Russian government

Far from all official Russian statements were negative towards the United States in Central Asia. In mid-March, Sergei Ivanov in an interview with *The New York Times* said that Russia and the United States did not only have different strategic interests in Central Asia – they also had common interests and that Russia was ready for cooperation.⁸⁰ When Igor Ivanov gave a speech at Stanford University in early May, he maintained a positive view of Russian-American relations, including the war on terrorism. But he also voiced concern about American unilateralism, saying that it was received with “disquiet around the world, including Russia”, and that such an approach to the international order had no “historical perspective”.⁸¹ On the issue of US military deployment in Central Asia, he warned only a couple of weeks later that “Russia will demand from the United States transparency in

79 “Russian minister calls on USA to put cards on table over Central Asia”, *ITAR-TASS*, 2 March 2002.

80 “Sergei Ivanov: “Rossiia i SShA mogut sotrudnicat v Tsentralnoi Azii” [Russia and the US can cooperate in Central Asia], *strana.ru*, 13 March 2002.

the transportation and presence of a foreign military contingent in Central Asia." However, he applauded Russian-American cooperation in the fight against terrorism, observing, "We have almost done away with the threat to Russia and other CIS member countries through the defeat of terrorists on the territory of Afghanistan." The foreign minister also called for multilateral mechanisms to ensure security in Central Asia, and in this respect referred to the Collective Security Treaty, which was in the process of being upgraded to a Treaty Organisation (CSTO), and to the SCO.⁸²

In an interview in June with the Chinese newspaper *The People's Daily* President Putin commented on the American military presence in Central Asia. His comments amounted to a sort of clarification of the official Russian position. He emphasised that the CIS was a sphere of Russian influence, but that he was "not concerned" about the stationing of Western forces in Central Asia. He warned, however, that the presence of outside forces should not "inflame local or interstate frictions, or destabilise the situation." Nevertheless, he would not characterise the relations of Moscow and Washington in the CIS as competition, but rather as cooperation.⁸³

Disagreement over Iraq

From autumn 2002, and especially in the beginning of 2003, the relations between Russia and the United States in the war on terrorism took a turn for the worse. This was connected particularly to the disagreements between the two governments on the need to invade Iraq. Both the United

81 Igor Ivanov, "Stenogramma vystupleniia Ministra inostrannykh del Rossiiskoi Federatsii I.S. Ivanova v Stenfordskom universitete v San-Frantsisko 6 maia 2002 goda" [Shorthand report of the speech of the Russian foreign minister, I.S. Ivanov, at the Stanford University in San Fransisco, 6 May 2002], 6 May 2002.

82 *RFE/RL Newslines*, 21 May 2002.

83 "Interviu kitaiskoi gazete 'Zhenmin zhibao'" [Interview with the Chinese newspaper 'Zhenmin zhibao'], *Kremlin*, 4 June 2002.

States and Russia tried to keep the disagreements over Iraq from having a negative impact on the bilateral relationship in the long term. By and large, they were successful. But disagreements over priorities in the campaign against terror inevitably influenced the relations concerning Central Asia. This emphasised the degree to which the continued Western deployment in Central Asia was a problem for policymakers in Moscow.

From the Russian point of view, the American position on Iraq once again underlined that the US was a superpower that could act unilaterally in international politics, while Russia was no longer a great power. The leverage Russia had in international security politics rested in its permanent chair and veto in the UN Security Council. Whenever the American and Russian administrations' views diverged, Russian policymakers became acutely aware of their lack of leverage outside the Security Council. As Russia's international position was continuously compared in Russia to that of the United States, international crises tended to strengthen a latent Russian tendency to resent the United States and distrust its aims in international politics. This influenced Russian attitudes towards US policies. Central Asia was seen as one more area of traditional Russian influence to which the US and NATO had come closer during the last few years, especially after 11 September 2001. In Central Asia in particular, the Western presence had radically increased over a short period of time. As the Western presence in Central Asia was overwhelmingly a military one, and therefore infringed on Russia's security interests, this was perceived as particularly problematic.

This resentment towards the United States was first and foremost present in the internal Russian debate. However, in 2003 in particular, this resentment was occasionally reflected in statements directed towards the international community. This first happened in February, when Igor Ivanov in an Internet press conference with *The People's Daily* stated that Russia would like the UN Security Council to set up a time

frame for the presence of Western forces in Central Asia, and underlined that their presence should be linked to the mission of the international peacekeeping force in Afghanistan.

"A crucial sphere for our security"

In early October 2003, Sergei Ivanov held a speech in the presence of Putin and other important military policymakers in Moscow. The speech was widely regarded as a modification of the 2000 Military Doctrine. Ivanov emphasised the potential for instability in the CIS as a possible threat to Russian security. This and other cross-border threats could justify preventive strikes against other states and nuclear weapons as a combat weapon.⁸⁴ The speech also alluded to the potential enemy, which observers interpreted as being NATO and the US.⁸⁵ The defence minister emphasised uncertainty as a new factor in military strategy, and tied this specifically (but not exclusively) to a sphere of interests in "the CIS and regions neighbouring the CIS".⁸⁶ One observer saw in this and other parts of the speech effectively a declaration that Russia might reconsider its military strategy if NATO remained a "military-offensive alliance".⁸⁷

The speech was significant enough to prompt a telephone call from NATO's secretary general Lord Robertson to Ivanov, in which the secretary general asked for clarifications. Ivanov promised to elaborate at an upcoming meeting in Colorado Springs of the defence ministers of NATO and Russia.⁸⁸ In Colorado Springs, Ivanov presented a new, more insistent version of the familiar statement that the Western forces should stay in Central Asia only for as long as was

84 Sergei Ivanov, "Vystuplenie na soveshchaniï v Ministerstve oborony RF" [Speech at Conference in the Russian Ministry of Defence], 2 October 2003.

85 Sergei Sedelnikov, Elena Shishkunova and Boris Sapozhnikov, "My briatsaem oruzhiem" [We are rattling our sabres], *gazeta.ru*, 2 October 2003.

86 S. Ivanov, "Vystuplenie na soveshchaniï..."

87 Elena Shishkunova, "Baz NATO bolshe ne nado" [The NATO bases are no longer necessary], *gazeta.ru*, 10 October 2003.

88 Ibid.

necessary for the operations in Afghanistan. The defence minister said that Russia intended to boost its military presence in the CIS, especially in Central Asia, and that it would insist upon the ultimate withdrawal of the military bases established by the US-led coalition.⁸⁹ Ivanov also emphasised that the bases should only be used for the purposes of the coalition's aims, i.e. securing non-Taliban rule in Afghanistan and weakening al-Qaida.⁹⁰ The defence minister was focusing on general Russian interests in the CIS when he said, "the CIS is a very crucial sphere for our security (...). We are not going to renounce the right to use military power there in situations where all other means had been exhausted."⁹¹ This change of emphasis indicated that Russia was now taking a less patient view on the presence of NATO forces in Central Asia. Both the revision of the Military Doctrine and the speech in Colorado Springs communicated a Russian signal to the West that the CIS was a sphere of Russian interests in which the West should only engage to the extent that this also suited Russia's interests.

The relationship between Russia and the West in the second half of 2003 took a turn towards a less cordial alignment. From the Western point of view, it was becoming a staple objection that Russia was not wholeheartedly integrating with the West, and that real partnership demanded shared values as well as coinciding strategic interests. From the Russian point of view, the West still had not appreciated Russia's strategic interests. The continued absence of concrete strategic or financial concessions from the West in return for Russia's support in the campaign against terror was seen by Moscow as testifying to the Western view that Russia could never integrate with the West. Western leaders became impatient with and later disappointed by Russia. This inclined them to limit their engagement with Russia. Russian elites had

89 Ibid.

90 "Rossiia potrebuuet svernut inostrannye bazy v Srednei Azii" [Russia demands a rollback of the foreign bases in Central Asia], *gazeta.ru*, 10 October 2003.

91 *RFE/RL Newslime*, 10 October 2003.

their worst suspicions confirmed: the West was not taking Russia seriously and it would be better for Russia to concentrate on its own interests.

Summing up: Russia's reactions to the West

Russia's reactions to the Western military bases in Central Asia showed some development over the period from 11 September 2001 to the end of 2003. I will now summarise briefly how the response to the West developed and who was responsible for communicating it.

The president is formally responsible for conducting Russian foreign policy. Putin has actively conducted Russian foreign policy, and this is particularly true when the relationship with the United States is concerned. This applies most of all in times of crisis, like the period immediately following 9/11. Accordingly, it was the president who communicated Russia's reactions to the attacks, offers of assistance to the United States, and the major lines of Russian policy in the campaign against terror. His first reactions to the attacks, with offers of condolences and support, came quickly and reflected a well-considered decision to support the United States in a campaign against terror. However, as the question about Western use of Central Asian military bases came up, it was difficult to find an appropriate response.

Between 11 and 24 September 2001, the defence and foreign ministers also communicated with the West and Western, predominantly US, politicians. The two ministers had different roles. Sergei Ivanov initially ruled out the possibility of Western forces on the Central Asian airbases. After this, the defence minister did not make any statements that seemed directed towards the West, or were received as such, until the start of the campaign on 6 October. Igor Ivanov, on the other hand, went to Washington on 18 to 20 September to meet Bush, Rice and Powell, and was apparently entrusted with the task of reaching an understanding with the US president on the extent of Russian support for the campaign against terror.

After this initial phase the roles of the president, the defence minister and the foreign minister were clearly defined for the rest of the period under study. This appeared to be well coordinated. The president was the key figure here. Remarkably, his statements directed towards the West were consistent and nearly identical throughout the period under study. He always emphasised Russia's support for the campaign on terrorism, more often than not framing it in a global context that included Chechnya. He also emphasised Russia's and the West's shared strategic goals, and this was especially pronounced in the first few months after 11 September 2001 up until after the summit in May 2002. From the autumn of 2002, Putin mentioned this less often, and by late 2003 the emphasis was instead placed on coinciding goals in the war against terror. However, Putin did not express concerns at any point regarding the Western bases in Central Asia.

The task of communicating Russian impatience and concerns about the bases in Central Asia was firmly placed with the defence minister. Remarks about Russian-American cooperation aside, it was Sergei Ivanov who met Lord Robertson in November 2001 to say that Russia was cooperating at the level of equals and for mutual gains, and it was he who communicated the increased importance of the CIS in Russian military doctrine in October 2003. Igor Ivanov and the MFA could be placed in-between the defence minister and the president: the foreign minister occasionally expressed concerns about the Western presence, and let the optimism concerning an Russian-American alignment be accompanied by concerns over American unilateralism. The picture that emerged was not difficult to understand: there were significant worries about US goals in Central Asia in the Kremlin as well. However, Putin was not going to let them influence the Russian-American relationship more than necessary, and placed his relationship with the American president above such concerns. He left it to the defence minister to

communicate Russia's concerns, and later the revised military policy on the CIS, and left it to the foreign minister to convey all the nuances of the Russian position.

Conclusions

This chapter has discussed the development of the Russian reactions directed towards the United States and the West. While some critical statements had already been voiced at the level of the bilateral relationship in January 2002, bilateral relations did not deteriorate significantly before the disagreement over Iraq in the winter of 2002–2003. The strategic alignment deteriorated after this, but was not until autumn 2003 that it became apparent that substantial political determination in both Russia and the West would be required to save it. It is worthy of note, however, that the first negative exchanges in the strategic alignment in January 2002 were on the topic of the Western, and specifically, the US military engagement in Central Asia.

Chapter 4

The Russian political debate

In this chapter, I shall go through the Russian response to the establishment of Western bases in Central Asia as it emerged in the domestic debate. The reader will recognise some statements and issues from the previous two chapters, though here they will be viewed as a part of the domestic Russian debate. At the end of the chapter there is a summary of the main features of the development of the Russian domestic debate on the Western bases in Central Asia.

Restricted criticism in Moscow

During the autumn of 2001, doubts were raised as to whether the Russian elites had been convinced by Putin's strategic decision in favour of a closer alignment with the West.⁹² But while criticism of the closer relationship with the West emerged indirectly through criticism of its implications or was only implicit as undertones in comments, open discussion about the relationship with the West emerged rather slowly. Predictably, nationalists and communists criticised the president's strategic decision to support NATO and the United States. This did not differ significantly in content from criticism of Putin's foreign policy before 11 September, but this kind of criticism was heard more often and presented in starker terms than before. At this point, nationalist and

92 For example, in Andrei Riabov, "Putin ushel v otryv" [Putin has lost contact], *Vek*, no. 42, 26 October 2001.

communist criticism combined with criticism from another part of Russian society committed to the image of Russia as a great power, the military-security constituency.

One example of an early contribution from the military-security constituency is when, during the preparations for the attack on Afghanistan started on 6 October, army veterans and their supporters appealed to Putin not to let Russia be drawn into the coming war.⁹³ Criticism at this point also accused Putin of acting against Russia's strategic interests.⁹⁴ This was frequently heard in criticism from the military-security constituency though others also joined in. For example, the leader of the Communist Party, Gennadii Ziuganov, warned Putin of the potential of being drawn into a war with the Islamic world, as well as letting "NATO (...) come to the Pamir", implying that when the alliance would leave the region was unknown.⁹⁵ After the operations in Afghanistan started, criticism of the alignment with the West subsided.

At this point, mainstream comments focused on the bombing of Afghanistan and the American choice of strategy. This issue was gradually replaced in the political debate by muted, but widespread criticism of the decision to allow the Americans and NATO forces to use bases in Central Asia. One early example is the opinion voiced by the head of the General Staff, Anatolii Kvashnin, when on a visit to Erevan in early October. He said that there was "no sense" in US plans to use airbases in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan to attack on

93 RFE/RL *Newsline*, 5 October 2001.

94 For example, from the leader of the Liberal Democratic Party, Vladimir Zhirinovskii. When he said this on Russian television, the presenter of the programme "Geroi dnia", Savik Shuster, at the end of the interview with Zhirinovskii, tried to disassociate himself from Zhirinovskii's comments and called them "daring and controversial". "Russia will lose Central Asia if it gets involved in Afghanistan", *NTV International*, 2 October 2001.

95 "Zyuganov to urge Putin to prevent Russia from being pulled into war", *Interfax*, 24 September 2001.

Afghanistan.⁹⁶ It seemed at the time that criticism of the Western bases in Central Asia was a way in which to criticise indirectly the strategic alignment with the West.

The overall picture in Moscow's elites remained one of unconvinced support. In the words of Andrei Riabov of the Carnegie Moscow Centre, "There is undoubtedly a gap [between the president and the elite]. But the political elite cannot take issue with the president today (...). [They] declare their support for Vladimir Putin's actions, and by this they take all responsibility from their own shoulders and load it on the president".⁹⁷ One reason he cited for this passivity was the president's popularity.⁹⁸

The unconvinced support also revealed itself in a statement issued by the Council on Foreign and Defence Policy (SVOP), an independent association which acts as a forum for discussion and exchange of views on foreign and defence policy among influential politicians, bureaucrats, businessmen, analysts and journalists.⁹⁹ In a statement on 2 November SVOP supported the president's line, but this support was hardly uncontroversial, as there had in fact been disagreement within the association. In the end SVOP approved participation in the war on terrorism, because "attempts to wait it out would be costlier".¹⁰⁰

Quid pro quo

Though Russia's strategic alignment with the West was not generally approved of, there was a section of the political elite which applauded it. Pragmatic commentators and politicians saw Putin's choice as wise. Their view was that Putin's choice had been to cooperate more closely with the West without

96 RFE/RL *Newsline*, 4 October 2001.

97 "Elita ne pospevaet" [The elite does not keep up pace], *Vremia novostei*, 19 October 2001.

98 Riabov, "Putin ushel v otryv".

99 SVOP has close to 150 members. The council meets for a plenary session annually, and otherwise arranges roundtables and conferences. Its working groups also comment on current issues.

100 Yevgeny Verlin, "Some advice for the president", *Vremia MN*, 2 November 2001.

pursuing a closer strategic relationship or closer integration outside the framework of the war on terrorism. Evgenii Primakov, for example, described Putin's line as "careful", "taking into consideration Russia's own interests and concerns, without following Washington's lead".¹⁰¹ Some expected Putin to bargain with the United States for continued Russian support and cooperation in the war against terror, a quid pro quo strategy.¹⁰² The argument was that foreign policy should "give dividends".¹⁰³ This was one version of the view that Putin's decision was essentially a tactical one. In this view, his decision had been made to improve Russia's relations with the West, without aligning with it strategically. Some commentators and politicians argued that Russia should receive (temporary, limited) security guarantees from the United States or NATO, as compensation for the risks of the new foreign policy line.¹⁰⁴

Others focused on older Russian demands from the United States. Among the possible returns Russia could achieve were: complete freedom to deal with Chechnya, CIS as a Russian zone of interests, recognition of Russia's position on the development of a National Missile Defense and the future of the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty, that all Russian debts to the West be written off and an equal voice for Moscow in G-8 and NATO, or even NATO membership.¹⁰⁵ Some recommended that demands regarding Chechnya, debts and NATO enlargement not be made, but argued for the viability

101 RFE/RL *Newsline*, 1 October 2001.

102 Viktor Sokolov, "Mark Urnov: Rossiia torquetsia s SShA – i slava Bogu!" [Mark Urnov: Russia is negotiating with the US – and thank God!], *strana.ru*, 26 September 2001.

103 "My mozhem sdelat shag nazad" [We risk taking a step back], *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 20 October 2001.

104 "Viacheslav Igrunov: 'Rossiia dolzhna poluchit ot NATO garantii sobstvennoi bezopasnosti'" [Viacheslav Igrunov: Russia should receive security guarantees from NATO], *strana.ru*, 26 September 2001; Tatiana Zamiatina, "Kak daleko idti Rossii v podderzhke SShA?" [How far should Russia go in supporting the US?], *strana.ru*, 5 November 2001.

105 RFE/RL *Newsline*, 29 October 2001; Lidiia Andrusenko, "Politologi daiut nakaz Putinu" [Political scientists give instructions to Putin], *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 26 October 2001; Verlin, "Some advice...".

of demands such as US recognition of the CIS as a zone of Russian interests, recognition of Russia as a market economy and that Russian interests should be taken into account in the American plans for NMD.¹⁰⁶ On the other hand, one commentator maintained that the West was not going to accede to Russian demands or to sympathise with the Russian war in Chechnya, and therefore, it was too early to formalise Russian cooperation with the West in the war against terror.¹⁰⁷ Remarkably, in the debate on *quid pro quo* the Russian political elite did not acknowledge that Russia had already gained a major concession from the US in the downplaying of criticism of the war in Chechnya.

The debate on a *quid pro quo* tactic could be viewed differently, as suggested by Bobo Lo.¹⁰⁸ He suggests that it was a conscious strategy from the Kremlin to encourage participants in the debate, such as Duma deputies, to sound proposals about concessions from the United States that would be misplaced and crude in a formal bilateral context. On the other hand, as Dmitri Trenin argues, the debate on *quid pro quo* could simply have been a reaction in the elites to Putin's lack of strategy and explanation of the choice he had made after 11 September.¹⁰⁹ Instead of discussing the strategic aspects of this choice the elites were reduced – because of Putin's lack of arguments for the strategic decision – to commenting on the more familiar image of *quid pro quo*.

The divisive strategic decision

From these expectations regarding Putin's possible demands from the US, it emerged that many Russian observers initially received the president's support for the US-led campaign against terror as a tactical step. After the Crawford summit in November, the view of Putin's line in Moscow changed, and from now on it was regarded as a strategic decision. The

106 Georgii Ilichev, "Doroga na Krouford" [The road to Crawford] in *Izvestiia*, 25 October 2001.

107 Viacheslav Nikonov of the Politika Fund in Zamiatina, "Kak daleko..."

108 Lo, *Vladimir Putin and the Evolution of Russian Foreign Policy*, p. 40.

109 Trenin, "Through Russian..."

choice itself became more widely and openly discussed than before the summit, and Putin was criticised for his willingness to integrate with the West. However, his line was supported among the more liberal members of the elite, and among the pragmatic parts of the elite closer to the Kremlin. The strategic decision had become divisive in Moscow, but criticism in public was still not widespread. The issue of Western bases in Central Asia was discussed as a consequence of the strategic decision in favour of the West. Criticism of the strategic decision mainly took the form of wariness in relation to the US aims in Central Asia. But there was also indirect criticism of the strategic decision through covert references to division in the political elite, e.g. when observers and politicians warned against the problems Putin faced in pursuing a foreign policy against the inclinations of large parts of the elite. Some underlined the lack of support from the military establishment or the foreign and security bureaucracies; others likened Putin to Yeltsin and Gorbachev in his not seeking support from large parts of the elite.¹¹⁰ Some of this criticism left an alarmist impression, e.g. before the summit when one observer in *Nezavisimaia gazeta* speculated that Russia could be close to a coup as Putin was leaving for Crawford.¹¹¹

Positive assessments of Putin's strategic decision focused on how it had changed the international environment to Russia's benefit. This was emphasised by Mikhail Margelov, the chairman of the Federation Council's Foreign Affairs Committee.¹¹² The opposite view was also represented in the Federal Assembly. Andrei Nikolaev, head of the Duma Defence Committee, suggested in early November that the United States had used the events of 11 September as a pretext to advance its goal of greater, long-term influence in Central Asia.¹¹³

110 Vadim Solovev, "General'y ukhodiut v oppozitsiiu Kremliu" [Generals go into opposition against the Kremlin], *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 13 November 2001; *RFE/RL Newsline*, 19 November 2001.

111 Solovev, "General'y ukhodiut...", cf. "Nezavisimaia gazeta' mnogo znaet pro generalskie interesy" [*Nezavisimaia gazeta* knows a lot about generals' interests], *smi.ru*, 13 November 2001.

112 *RFE/RL Newsline*, 3 January 2002.

As the campaign in Afghanistan continued with considerable success for the coalition, fewer in Moscow emphasised the negative effects and dangers of aligning with the West in the war on terrorism. At the same time, it was becoming clear that it would take a long period of time before the coalition's tasks in Afghanistan were completed. This raised several questions in Moscow. How long would Western bases in Central Asia be needed? How did this affect Russia and its strategic interests in Central Asia? What would the future strategic position of Central Asia be? Many saw these issues as acute. Therefore, the Western bases in Central Asia gradually gained prominence in the debate. While the issue of the strategic decision attracted less interest than it had before the coalition's deployment in Afghanistan, the bases turned into one of the prominent contentious issues among participants in the debate on Russian foreign policy.¹¹⁴

Seriously and for the long term!

Developments in Central Asia and US policy towards the Central Asian states were followed closely in Moscow. Therefore, when the US assistant secretary of state for European and Eurasian affairs, Elizabeth Jones, remarked in December that the US was engaging in Central Asia "seriously and for the long term",¹¹⁵ this was received in Moscow as a confirmation of the worst fears of large parts of the elite. 'Seriously and for the long term' (*user'ez i nadolgo*) became a catchphrase in the Russian political debate from January 2002. The construction of the Manas Base was seen as a

113 "Andrei Nikolaev: SShA ispolzuiut slozhivshuiusia situatsiiu, chtoby zakrepitsia v Tsentralnoi Azii" [Andrei Nikolaev: the US is using the situation to strengthen its positions in Central Asia], *strana.ru*, 9 November 2001.

114 At this point, another debate added fuel to the debate on Western bases in Central Asia. In summer 2001, it was finally decided to close the two last bases from the Soviet period outside the former Soviet Union. The closures of the military facilities at Lourdes in Cuba and in Cam Ranh Bay in Vietnam were due to be completed by early 2002. The two debates were intertwined for a short period in late autumn 2001.

115 Jones, "Testimony Before ..."

confirmation of the American intentions to stay in Central Asia. To Moscow, this was particularly worrying because Kyrgyzstan was more closely aligned with Russia than Uzbekistan. Now, both Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan were hosting Western airbases with American dominance.

The worries of Russian politicians over a possible long-term US military engagement in Central Asia were amply illustrated in January 2002. During visits to Astana and Dushanbe in early January, Duma Speaker Gennadii Seleznev stated that he was against long-term deployment of US forces in Central Asia. He also proposed that decisions related to the establishment of permanent American bases in Central Asia should be made only after discussions involving Russia as well as the Central Asian states had taken place. He suspected that the United States was using the bases in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan in an effort to control the situation on the Indian-Pakistani border, in western China and in Kazakhstan, as well as in Afghanistan.¹¹⁶ However, politicians loyal to Putin maintained the president's line on the Western bases in Central Asia. For example, the speaker of the Federation Council, Sergei Mironov, commented on the same day as Seleznev issued his statement that, "for Russia, the question of foreign presence in the Central Asian states is a question for each state [to decide]."¹¹⁷

Two notable additions to the internal Russian debate came from Konstantin Totskii, director of the Federal Border Service, and the head of the General Staff, Anatolii Kvashnin. Totskii, in Tajikistan on 17 January, said according to one source that the Western presence should be temporary, and that "if [the Western presence] is for long, we will not be friends".¹¹⁸ A few days later, he moderated his view. On 22 January, he said that the leadership of the Federal Border Service understood that there had to be a foreign military

116 *RFE/RL Newswire*, 10 and 14 January 2002.

117 Nikolai Ulianov, "U politiki Rossii v SNG mogut poiavitsia novye niuansy" [New nuances may appear in Russia's CIS policy], *strana.ru*, 9 January 2002.

118 "Russia wants West's stay in Tajikistan short", *Reuters*, 17 January 2002.

presence in Central Asia for the duration of the anti-terrorist campaign, but that there would be "no point in keeping NATO airplanes on airbases in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan after the [end of the] anti-terrorist operation in Afghanistan."¹¹⁹ Kvashnin was somewhat more moderate when he emphasised on 19 January that the US military presence in Central Asia at this point was of a "temporary character".¹²⁰ Kvashnin's deputy, Iurii Baluevskii, in an interview in March with the main military newspaper said that the military presence of the United States in Central Asia could affect Russia's relations with some of its CIS partners.¹²¹

These statements deserve further comment. Mironov as well as Kvashnin were communicating the official Kremlin position. Kvashnin added a qualification about the Western military presence's temporary character that was becoming a standard phrase for defence officials, and Baluevskii also referred to this in the interview. For Seleznev's and Totskii's statements, there are two options. They may have conveyed a subtler message with the tacit approval of the Kremlin, or they may have signalled discontent with official policy. In Moscow, both their statements were interpreted as discontent with official policy "at the highest level".¹²² This is a likely interpretation. Firstly, there is no reason to doubt that their statements were sincerely held opinions. Secondly, neither the director of the Federal Border Service nor the Duma speaker would be the Kremlin's first choice to convey any subtle message. The official line stood firm, but it was accompanied by considerable anxiety at a high level.

119 Vladimir Egorov, "Amerikanskii general provodit konsultatsii v Tashkente i Dushanbe" [American general carries out consultations in Tashkent and Dushanbe], *strana.ru*, 22 January 2002.

120 "Rossiia i SShA dolzhny razvivat politicheskii dialog, schitaet Anatolii Kvashnin" [Russia and the US should develop a political dialogue – Anatolii Kvashnin], *strana.ru*, 19 January 2002.

121 Interview with Iurii Baluevskii: "Otvetstvenny za sudby mira" [Responsible for the world's fate], *Krasnaia Zvezda*, 13 March 2002.

122 Armen Khanbabian, "Amerika vystraivaet svoiu vertikal vlasti" [America builds its power vertical], *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 4 February 2002.

Explicit emphasis on the temporary character of the Western military presence in Central Asia, expressed at every possible occasion, also indicated that high-ranking officials within the government itself were taking the political elite's worries seriously. Typical in this respect was a comment made by Sergei Ivanov at a press conference in Moscow on 12 February. He noted that the presence of the anti-terrorist coalition in Central Asia was a positive factor for Russia, but that it was important that "the United States and the Central Asian states abide by their promises to Russia that the presence of the anti-terrorist coalition in the region is only a temporary measure, and that they will leave once the operation is finished."¹²³

A second wave of apprehension

High-ranking officers and politicians were, as we have seen, unconvinced about the consequences of support for Western bases in Central Asia, and voiced their concerns in the media. This was accompanied by an exchange of opinions by observers and journalists, academics and politicians. It is however important to appreciate the limits of participation in the debate at this point. The debate involved a limited number of politicians and observers, mostly from the military-security constituency, and mostly those with long-standing interests in CIS affairs. To them had been added a few more participants than one would have seen in foreign policy debates on the CIS states before 9/11. These added participants were mainly prominent politicians, like Seleznev, who had taken up the cause.

The Russian concerns over the Western military presence in Central Asia were rarely noticed outside Russia. The internal debate hardly affected the bilateral relationship with the US, with the exception of General Tommy Franks' statement on 23 January that the American presence was indeed temporary, which seems to have been meant to reassure the political elites

123 RFE/RL *Newsline*, 13 February 2002.

in Moscow and also the Russian government.¹²⁴ In spite of General Franks' statement, the Russian elite remained unconvinced.

The wave of Russian media interest in the American military presence in Central Asia was called by one media observer a "second wave of apprehension" as regarded the bases.¹²⁵ The first wave, in October and November 2001, had been more restricted. From January 2002, attention was being drawn to a wider range of topics, with a more openly critical view of American intentions and plans in Central Asia. The debate also took place in more diverse media, including TV news and analytical programmes.¹²⁶ There was also more variation among the participants, especially as the debate included centrist politicians, members of the government and the military elite to a greater extent at this time than in the autumn.

Who offers what in a zero-sum game?

At this point, two types of issues dominated the debate. The first issue was how to explain why the Central Asian states had chosen to welcome a Western military presence. There were two main answers, concerning finances and security respectively. The second issue was the altered strategic situation in Central Asia, consisting of two interconnected questions: the reasons for and the future of the American engagement in the region and the question of how the general regional strategic balance would develop.

The financial benefits the Central Asian states stood to gain from the Western presence became a topic in October 2001, when rumours started to circulate about how much the United States paid to use Central Asian airspace and bases.¹²⁷ By the

124 "Central Asia: Franks Says No Permanent U.S. Bases In Region".

125 Evgeniia Abramova, "SShA v predelakh byvshikh soverskikh respublik" [The US within the former Soviet republics], *smi.ru*, 24 January 2002.

126 Ibid.

127 Vladimir Georgiev, "Uzbekistan prodalsia Vashingtonu za 8 mlrd. dollarov" [Uzbekistan sold itself to Washington for 8 billion dollars], *Nezavisimáia gazeta*, 19 October 2001.

end of January 2002, the speculation that the Central Asian governments were expecting to gain financially from the American presence had become a staple in the debate.¹²⁸ Military sources inside the region confirmed that this was the case.¹²⁹ Such gains were first and foremost seen as direct, i.e. investment in military infrastructure and modernisation, payments for take-offs and landings as well as road traffic to and from the bases, and income from the use of air corridors and airbases. In addition, the discussion touched on the possibility of indirect financial gains from a long-term American willingness to invest in the region.¹³⁰ As the US government was paying very well for the use of the airbases, it was hardly surprising that financial incentives seemed important.¹³¹ The issue of indirect financial gains was however debated on the basis of expectations rather than fact, although it was known by now that US aid to Central Asia had increased substantially after 9/11. Attention was also paid to possible long-term gains for the Central Asian states. For example, Kyrgyzstan might be awarded American loans, but also possibly American support in negotiations for IMF and World Bank loans.¹³²

Others focused on Russia's inability to guarantee the security of the Central Asian states. One example consists of the remarks in *Izvestia* that Russia was "morally ready" to defend Uzbekistan and Tajikistan from a "great war with unpredictable consequences" for the regimes there. As commented by the journalist, Russia did not possess the

128 Cf. Dmitrii Gornostaev, "Amerikanskaia myshelovka dlia liderov Srednei Azii" [The American mousetrap for Central Asia's leaders], *strana.ru*, 28 January 2002; Khodarenok, "'Starshego brata' sdali za milliard dollarov"; Viktoriia Panfilova, "Na zapad – vsled za Moskvoi" [To the West – following Moscow], *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 4 March 2002; "Otvetsvennyi za sudby mira".

129 Panfilova, "Na zapad..."

130 Gornostaev, "Amerikanskaia myshelovka..."

131 The payment for each take-off and landing at the Manas Base was 7000 US dollars.

132 "Voennaia baza SShA poiavitsia na territorii byvshego SSSR" [A US military base appears on the territory of the former USSR], *Izvestiia*, 8 January 2002.

means to do so.¹³³ Better then to let the Americans do what the Russians could not, or, as one observer put it, "[it is] better to have the Americans in Afghanistan and Uzbekistan than [Chechen terrorist Shamil] Basaev in Moscow."¹³⁴ This had been a part of the debate in October and November; that the US was doing Russia a favour.¹³⁵ Some warned that it was dangerous for Russia to delegate its security interests to NATO and the United States.¹³⁶ By January, the view that the US was doing Russia a favour had slipped out of the debate. Instead, the view that Russia was not in a position to guarantee Central Asian security prevailed. One observer concluded that the establishment of a coalition base in Kyrgyzstan was for all practical purposes an acknowledgment by Bishkek that "the Collective Security Treaty cannot guarantee Kyrgyzstan's security, and actually [the base represents] a unilateral termination of the [treaty] by this country."¹³⁷ SVOP stated that Russia's inability to guarantee security in Central Asia and the Caucasus had led to a security vacuum, which was now being filled by the United States. This again was seen as a threat to Russian security.¹³⁸

The second issue was the strategic situation of Central Asia. The two main topics in the discussion were the uncertainty that surrounded American geopolitical interests and aims in Central Asia and the question of how the strategic balance of the region would develop. The view that the United States was aiming at gaining a foothold in Central Asia was widely subscribed to in Moscow.¹³⁹ Many commentators

133 Semen Novoprudskii, "Nasha voina" [Our war], *Izvestiia*, 8 October 2001.

134 "Chernoie i beloe posle 11 sentiabria" [Black and white after 11 September], *Rossiiskaia gazeta*, 17 October 2001.

135 e.g., "There is no other way", *Obshchaia gazeta*, 22 November 2001.

136 "Puti Putina" [Putin's courses], *Versty*, 27 November 2001.

137 Mikhail Khodarenok, "Nenuzhnyi soiuz" [An unnecessary union], *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 21 January 2002.

138 Sovet po vneshnei i oboronnoi politike (SVOP), *Novye vyzovy bezopasnosti i Rossiia* [New Security Challenges and Russia], 10 July 2002 (Moscow).

139 Judith Ingram, "Russian Military: U.S. Goals Hazy", *AP*, 19 October 2001.

believed that the US had come to stay for a long time, perhaps to secure access to oil and gas or control transport routes, as alleged by Leonid Ivashov.¹⁴⁰ In addition to access to oil and gas, others cited support for American corporations' interests as a US goal in Central Asia.¹⁴¹ In sum, there was considerable fear that the Americans had come to stay.

The strategic situation was discussed as a zero-sum game. In this respect, the Central Asian states could not exist in a vacuum, but had to belong to a sphere of influence, Russian or otherwise. This issue was raised very early after the American military deployment in Central Asia, and in stark terms: "Former Soviet Central Asia will inevitably become somebody's zone of responsibility, either of the Americans, of the Russians, of the Americans and Russians together, or of the radical Islamists."¹⁴² Politicians close to the Kremlin unsurprisingly disagreed with the prevailing view that in a competition for influence in Central Asia between Russia and the United States, Russia would likely be the loser. But they nonetheless shared the approach of a zero-sum game. For example, on 14 January, Mikhail Margelov, the chairman of the Federation Council's Foreign Affairs Committee, remarked that he was not concerned about reports that the US was planning to set up permanent military bases in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan: "Russia is sure it will preserve its influence in the region even with an American presence there. (...) the United States is well aware that efforts to counter Russia's historical and geographical impact on the region are doomed to failure". He concluded that the US was unlikely to take the risk.¹⁴³ But many observers in Moscow argued that this was exactly what the United States was planning to do. In one comment in *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, it was even argued that as the members of the Collective Security Treaty, especially Russia, ignored

140 "Leonid Ivashov: 'Likvidatsiia baz za rubezhom – strategicheskaiia oshibka'" [Leonid Ivashov: The elimination of the bases abroad was a strategic mistake], *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 18 December 2001.

141 E.g., Boris Volkhonskii: "SShA na meste SSSR" [The US instead of the USSR], *Kommersant*, 23 January 2002.

142 Novoprudskii, "Nasha voina".

143 *RFE/RL Newslime*, 17 January 2002.

their own interests, the Americans were likely to create a regional military and political bloc of Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, and possibly also Tajikistan and Kazakhstan. In his view, the Russia-led and the US-led blocs were unlikely to complement each other and thereby guarantee the security of Central Asia. Rather, it would probably mean that the Central Asian states would become even more distant from Moscow.¹⁴⁴ These speculations betrayed a view of the region's security as wholly dependent on the actions of great powers, and ignored the complexities of security in Central Asia.

By this time, there were very few arguing that Central Asia was not a vital sphere of Russian interest.¹⁴⁵ The sphere of interest idea was well-established, and the debate continued along these lines.

Attempts at reassurance

These topics reflected the Kremlin's continued failure to convince the elite that the Western bases in Central Asia were in accordance with Russia's own security interests. Until February 2002, this failure could be explained by a lack of trying. There were no efforts to explain to the elite or to the general public, why Putin's strategic decision had been within Russian interests. This was openly mentioned in a policy document from SVOP prepared in winter and spring 2002 and released in the summer. According to this document, the presence of the United States in Central Asia and the Caucasus "seriously worries a significant part of the Russian elite (...) [e]ven more so as official Moscow either does not explain what is going on, or explains it rather contradictorily".¹⁴⁶

144 Armen Khanbabian, "Pri iavnom ravnodushii Moskvyy" [With Moscow's obvious indifference], *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 6 February 2002.

145 One exception was one of the most prominent members of SVOP, Sergei Karaganov, from the Europe Institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences. According to his line of argument, Russia's interests should lie elsewhere. See "Sergei Karaganov: Rossiia ne dolzhno pugat prisutstvie SShA v Srednei Azii" [Sergei Karaganov: Russia should not fear the presence of the US in Central Asia], *strana.ru*, 20 December 2001.

146 SVOP, *Novye vyzovy bezopasnosti i Rossiia*.

But there were some efforts from the government to reassure the elite and the public that Russia had not given up its influence in Central Asia. In February, Sergei Ivanov made two statements that seemed to declare a Russian sphere of influence in the CIS. In the first remark, on 19 February, he said, "Russia is capable of defending itself and its allies."¹⁴⁷ This remark clearly aimed at reassuring the Russian public about Russia's influence in the CIS. The second remark, "Russia will not leave its bases in Central Asia,"¹⁴⁸ came at a press conference after a meeting of the Council of CIS Defence Ministers in St. Petersburg on 27 February, and was accordingly directed mainly towards the CIS governments.¹⁴⁹ However, it was widely cited in the Russian press, and should also be seen in the context of the internal Russian debate.

Igor Ivanov also tried to reassure the Russian public. When answering questions from the listeners of Radio Mayak, he refuted the view that Russia had made concessions to the West when aligning with the United States in the anti-terrorist campaign. Among the potential concessions, the Western bases in Central Asia were mentioned. However, the foreign minister emphasised that there had been "no concessions", and that Russian policy was guided only by "our own interest". Moreover, "Russia did not and will not go for any unilateral concessions."¹⁵⁰

147 Aleksandr Orlov, "Sergei Ivanov: Rossiia sposobna zashchitit sebia i svoikh soiuznikov" [Sergei Ivanov: Russia is capable of defending itself and its allies], *strana.ru*, 19 February 2002.

148 At this point, Russia had no bases in Central Asia. The deployment at Kant was at a very early planning stage, and the 201st Division outside Dushanbe was very far from being transformed into a base, although the transformation had been agreed between Russia and Tajikistan in 1999. Russia was responsible for guarding Tajikistan's outer (non-CIS) borders, but this deployment was not within the frame of a base.

149 "Sergei Ivanov: Rossiia ne sobiraetsia ukhodit s voennykh baz v Srednei Azii" [Sergei Ivanov: Russia is not going to leave its military bases in Central Asia], *strana.ru*, 27 February 2002.

150 "Foreign minister denies Russia making concessions to USA", *RIA Novosti*, 16 March 2002.

A naïve foreign policy

In the public debate, the question of unilateral concessions and Russian interests in Central Asia remained a contested topic. One observer called the Kremlin's foreign policy line "naïve" and called for more active protection of Russian interests.¹⁵¹ Another comment went further and emphasised that "Russia should not share its interests with anyone," adding somewhat enigmatically that for Russia, the events in Afghanistan were a prologue to the "fight for Siberia".¹⁵² Others accused the Kremlin of not being able to formulate a suitable and clear response to the US military presence in Central Asia, a presence that had narrowed Moscow's geopolitical options.¹⁵³

But a few comments supported the Kremlin's foreign policy, especially the alignment with the West. One commentator close to the Kremlin propagated the view that the closer Russia was to the United States, the stronger Russia would be, as the US "is the centre of world power and strength [and] (...) for Russia to resist this and to look for an adequate reaction to every move Washington makes is counterproductive."¹⁵⁴ Another comment from a member of the academic community criticised the current dualism in foreign policy, where the Kremlin focused on economic priorities and integration with the West, while there was a tendency to prefer an anti-Western, "imperial" foreign policy in the political elite. And while the pro-presidential parties in the Duma and officials from the foreign affairs, military and security establishments formally supported the Kremlin's line, to this observer it was apparent that they were either confused

151 Pavel Zolotarev, "Kholodnyi dush v zvezdnuiu polosochku" [A cold starry-striped shower], *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 22 March 2002.

152 Vladimir Kvachkov, "Afgan: istoriia dvizhentsia po spirali" [Afghanistan: History moves in spirals], *Nezavisimoe voennoe obozrenie*, 29 March 2002.

153 Mikhail Khodarenok, "Ozherele iz amerikanskikh baz" [A necklace of American bases], *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 25 March 2002 (*Nezavisimoe voennoe obozrenie* 29 March).

154 Sergei Markov, the director of the Institute of Political Research in RFE/RL *Newsline*, 21 March 2002.

by or opposed the pro-Western line. This comment was one of the few that referred to divisions in the political elite at this point. Unlike a few months earlier, the distance between the Kremlin and the rest of the political elite was now hardly mentioned in the debate. The opinion piece in question was also nearly alone in supporting the Kremlin's line.¹⁵⁵

However, in May Evgenii Primakov joined in with cautious support for the alignment with the West and offered explicit criticism of those who talked of unilateral concessions to the West. This was to Primakov "the approach of a haggler".¹⁵⁶

Putin speaks

Until April 2002, Putin's views were absent from the debate. From time to time his closest advisors on foreign policy, for example Mikhail Margelov, reiterated the official position. Putin himself first referred to the debate in his annual address to the Federal Assembly on 18 April, where he emphasised that the CIS was a foreign policy priority for Russia. Igor Ivanov further elaborated this on 21 May, when he called for multilateral mechanisms to ensure security in Central Asia. He also warned again that Russia would "demand from the United States transparency in the transportation and presence of a foreign military contingent in Central Asia."¹⁵⁷

A more explicit attempt at co-optation of the political elite came on 22 May, when Putin chaired an extended meeting of the Presidium of the State Council, at which foreign policy was discussed. In addition to the regional leaders represented in the presidium, the meeting included the most prominent foreign policymakers in Russia, e.g., the leaders of political factions represented in the Duma and the Federation Council, the leaders of the foreign affairs committees of both chambers, Vladimir Rushailo, Sergei Ivanov and Igor Ivanov, the prime minister, Mikhail Kasianov, the head of the Foreign

155 Vladimir Kulagin, "Dvoevlastie' vo vneshnei politike" ['Dual power' in foreign policy], *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 27 March 2001.

156 Interview with Evgenii Primakov: "A Heavyweight's Forecast", *Moskovskii Komsomolets*, 17 May 2002.

157 RFE/RL *Newsline*, 21 May 2002.

Intelligence Service, Sergei Lebedev, and the leader of the General Staff's main intelligence command, Valentin Korabelnikov. This meeting was supposed to secure, through co-optation, the support of the political elite for the Kremlin's foreign policy line before the summit between Putin and Bush, which was to start the next day.¹⁵⁸ As such, the meeting was unprecedented. The State Council was a consultative body set up in September 2000 to give a role to the regional leaders in the Federation Council, who at this point lost most of their powers. The State Council had discussed foreign policy issues only once before this meeting. This had occurred on 24 September 2001, when it had been summoned to a plenary session by President Putin, and was consulted on Russia's strategic alignment with the West in the campaign against terror, a decision that had in fact been made before the consultation.

The sensitivity of the issues at hand demanded that the discussion be closed to observers and journalists. In a comment after the meeting, Mikhail Margelov lauded the president for his "unprecedented level of openness in making foreign policy decisions".¹⁵⁹ Nonetheless, the Presidium's recommendations to the president were not discussed in detail, allegedly to "maintain political correctness before the upcoming summit".¹⁶⁰ Putin touched on the most sensitive issue, the extent to which the alignment with the West was within Russia's interests, only once in his opening speech, when he described the current state of Russian-American relations:

158 RFE/RL *Newsline*, 22 May 2002; Irina Nagornyykh, "Prezidium Gossoveta vyshel na mezhdunarodnyi uroven" [The State Council Presidium goes out on the international level], *Kommersant*, 23 May 2002; Anna Zakatnova, "Prezidium Gossoveta zaniatsia vneshnei politiki" [The State Council Presidium engages in foreign policy], *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 23 May 2002.

159 "Mikhail Margelov: Prezident pokazal bespretsedentnyi uroven otkrytosti v priniatii vneshnepoliticheskikh reshenii" [Mikhail Margelov: The president shows unprecedented openness in making foreign policy decisions], *VVP.ru*, 22 May 2002.

160 Zakatnova, "Prezidium Gossoveta..."

The atmosphere of mutual trust and clear understanding, [the sense] that our countries are no longer enemies, that we have attained [in Russian-American relations] over the past year, have allowed us to make new agreements ... to limit the strategic potential of our country. This is not only within Russia's interests, but also [in the interests of] the global community.¹⁶¹

This statement was similar to official statements Putin had made at summits on the international level. The style did not encourage critical comment.

The statements from Sergei Ivanov in February, Igor Ivanov in March, and Putin in April and May seemed to be part of an effort to reassure the political elite that Russia's alignment with the West was in Russia's interest. The extended session of the State Council's Presidium in May indicated that there was a need for further efforts to convince the political elite.

One consequence of the efforts to reassure the elite was that the interest in the Western bases in Central Asia waned somewhat. This was undoubtedly welcome in the Kremlin. These efforts also effectively set the limits of what the political elite could comment upon. The Western bases in Central Asia could be discussed, and discussion continued. But gradually, this became the preserve of the military-security constituency. This part of the political elite is considerable, but in the debate on the Western bases in Central Asia, the participants tended to be less influential in policymaking. In the general political elite, Putin's strategic decision to align with the United States in the campaign against terror was now even less than before a topic open for discussion. In this respect, co-optation was a success. Nevertheless, when the relationship between Russia and the United States deteriorated later in 2002, a significant part of the political elite was again ready to be generally critical of American foreign policy.

161 Vladimir Putin, "Vystuplenie na rasshirennom zasedanii prezidiuma Gossoвета" [Speech at the extended session of the State Council Presidium], 22 May 2002.

Martial arts in foreign policy

A debate in the daily *Nezavisimaia gazeta* reflected the internal Russian debate in autumn 2002. It started on 11 September, with a feature article about what Russia had gained and lost by aligning with the United States one year earlier. According to the newspaper, the most significant question for Russia in considering the consequences of 11 September 2001 was whether Russia had gained or lost in the geopolitical balance of "expenses and income". In sum, the newspaper found that Russia had lost. The primary reason cited was the Western bases in Central Asia, "an actual geopolitical surrender of positions" in the region, which the "NATO forces will not leave". Among the other Russian defeats cited in the article were NATO's enlargement to the Baltic states, the US unilateral abrogation of the ABM treaty, and the failure of the international community to write off Soviet debt. The article ended with a table that listed twelve anticipated Russian demands from the United States under the heading "What Russia wanted to receive", side by side with the corresponding list of "What Russia received".¹⁶²

It was not uncommon to hear statements along these lines, but the feature article was unusually frank and detailed. The quid pro quo mode of thinking was still predominate in the Russian political elite. The feature article in *Nezavisimaia gazeta* led to a new rush of comments on the US presence in Central Asia. Not everyone agreed that the US was in Central Asia to stay. For example, Viktor Kremeniuk of the USA and Canada Institute did not agree that the US presence in Central Asia would last, and found it unlikely that the American influence in the region would increase. If this did nevertheless happen, he thought it even more unlikely that the Central Asian governments would welcome this.¹⁶³ However, other analysts subscribed to the view that the American influence in the region was increasing, while the Russian influence

162 Lidia Andrusenko and Olga Tropkina, "Mezaliants s Amerikoi" [Misalliance with America], *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 11 September 2002.

163 "Rossiia zhdet konflikt s NATO" [Conflict with NATO awaits Russia], *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 23 September 2002.

decreased. Among these was Stanislav Belkovskii of the Council for National Strategy, who argued rather pessimistically; "Russia ceased to be a power centre for the Central Asian republics when American bases were established in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan."¹⁶⁴ This view was supported by Viacheslav Igrunov, deputy chairman of the Duma Committee for CIS Affairs from the Yabloko Party. He acknowledged that after the confrontation between Russia and NATO had ended, there were no "formal reasons" to reproach CIS states for acting against the interests of Russia. But he observed that Russia's monopoly on security in the CIS had ended, and accused the Russian government of being passive when faced with American competition in Central Asia. He also expected that this development could end up with Central Asia being declared a zone of special American interests.¹⁶⁵

At the end of 2002, Viacheslav Igrunov's opinion and three other statements summed up the current state of the internal Russian debate on the American bases in Central Asia. Sergei Lebedev shared Igrunov's worries as he said that Russia was "concerned" by NATO's "declared interest in Central Asia and the Caucasus".¹⁶⁶ Igor Ivanov emphasised the official Kremlin line in remarks made on an ORT television show, where he mentioned the Western bases in Central Asia as one of many concessions to the United States that were in line with Russian national interests, and an example of how Russia's national interests could coincide with American foreign policy objectives.¹⁶⁷ Mikhail Margelov participated in the same TV

164 Stanislav Belkovskii, "Poslednie dni sodruzhestva" [The commonwealth's last days], *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 8 October 2002.

165 Vasilina Vasileva, "Strany Sodruzhestva promeniali starshego brata na zaokeanskogo diadiu" [The commonwealth states changed their big brother for an uncle from overseas], *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 2 December 2002.

166 *RFE/RL Newslines*, 20 December 2002; "Sergei Lebedev: tot fakt, chto deistvuiushchii president – professionalnyi razvedchik, pomogaet mne kak direktoru SVR" [Sergei Lebedev: the fact that the present president is a professional intelligence officer helps me as the director of the Foreign Intelligence Service], *strana.ru*, 20 December 2002.

show. His opinion was that Russia had enhanced its national security without sacrificing the lives of its soldiers because of the United States' operations in Afghanistan. He also compared this aspect of Russian foreign policy to martial arts like judo,¹⁶⁸ "in which you use the energy of your adversary to achieve your own goals."¹⁶⁹ Margelov's views were considered close to those of Putin's advisers, and Putin was reported to consult him directly as well.

These comments also show one other aspect of the internal Russian debate as it had developed towards the end of 2002. The room for comments critical of the Kremlin's policy in Central Asia was clearly restricted. This applied less to general media coverage than to mainstream politicians and bureaucrats, but the tendency was apparent in all types of criticism. The comments cited here hardly amount to a debate. Coverage of Central Asian issues in general, especially in relation to Russian foreign policy, also decreased in 2002. In the coverage that did appear, there were few critical comments from visible political actors. Viacheslav Igrunov's repeated commentaries became the exception. Remarks like that of Sergei Lebedev, cited above, were also exceptions. But Lebedev's remark was only briefly cited at the Internet news page *strana.ru* and cited in translation to English by Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. The interview from which it was taken was printed in *Rossiiskaia gazeta*, but his comment on NATO in the Caucasus and Central Asia did not appear in the newspaper.

A lost region for Russia?

The worsening relationship between Russia and the United States in early 2003 was reflected in the Russian debate about the Western bases in Central Asia. It now focused on the issue of Russian influence in Central Asia: how to preserve it, and why it was waning. That Russian influence was waning had

167 RFE/RL *Newsline*, 23 December 2002.

168 President Putin practises judo.

169 RFE/RL *Newsline*, 23 December 2002.

by now become an axiom in the press at least. From comments made by sources closer to the Kremlin, it emerged that this view had not yet taken hold there. The view that Russia's interests and American foreign policy goals had coincided when the Western bases were established still predominated among the central foreign policymakers. But there were fewer comments of this type, and they all seemed to contain a certain ambiguity towards the American deployment in Central Asia. This contributed to the impression that Kremlin's officials were not as thoroughly convinced as they had previously been that the presence of American forces in Central Asia was wholly in agreement with Russia's strategic interests.

The two topics in the internal Russian debate at this point, the 'lost' Central Asia and how Russian influence could be preserved or even enhanced, were by now firmly established. The idea that Russia had 'lost' Central Asia was a conclusion undisputed in the Russian press. The Kremlin was accused of having been passive towards the region, thereby contributing to this loss. A few observers discussed what to do about this, and how to reengage with Central Asia, but the debate was relatively muted. There were few media reports from Central Asia, and the Western bases there were yesterday's news. The upcoming Duma elections at the end of the year did not contribute to raising public interest about this rather unspectacular region.

The topic of Russia's strategic loss of Central Asia was also connected to the allegedly aggressive behaviour of the United States in the region, leaving an impression of a competition for influence. In one view, the competition for influence in Central Asia was connected to the American invasion of Iraq: "One of the consequences of the anti-Iraqi military operation that has not yet begun is the renewal of the struggle between the strongest states in the world for influence in Central Asia."¹⁷⁰ The article then gave the example of a recently completed visit to Dushanbe by Igor Ivanov, during which

170 Viktoriia Panfilova, "Moskva za nimi" [Moscow is after them], *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 14 March 2003.

Russia had allegedly tried but failed to influence Tajikistan's government to repudiate its "close cooperation" with the United States "at the eve of the anti-Iraqi campaign". This was taken as evidence that the United States was trying to "increase its military influence in Central Asia on the quiet during the anti-Iraqi campaign".¹⁷¹ Viacheslav Igrunov in the same article voiced his fear that countries like Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Georgia would become clients of the United States. In his view, Russia had no chance to match the US "gifts" to Tajikistan. However, to increase its influence in Central Asia and the world in general, it should disassociate itself from the US and enter into closer alignment with "balancing" countries.¹⁷² But he did not exclude the possibility that Russia was more acceptable as a partner for the Central Asian states in the long run than was the United States.

Others were more directly critical of the Kremlin's handling of relations with the Central Asian allies. One observer even opined that Russia's influence in Central Asia had been lost "deservedly", as Moscow's efforts had been too blatantly aimed at controlling the states. Viktor Kremeniuk again emphasised that Moscow's intention to retain the Central Asian states as allies had never been followed up by "impressive material resources". He also drew attention to how "nobody in Moscow" had ever explained the Russian interests in Central Asia in a "distinct manner".¹⁷³ His advice for Russian policymakers was to avoid a clash with the US in Central Asia through a change in tone in the ongoing dialogue between the US and Russia.

For the government, it was important to emphasise the development of Russian influence in the region rather than draw attention to Russian-American relations there. The Kant Base in Kyrgyzstan was steadily growing, and the plans to

171 Ibid.

172 "Rossiia ispolzuet SShA v kachestve bufera v Tsentralnoi Azii" [Russia uses the US as a buffer in Central Asia] in *Nezavisimaa gazeta*, 30 April 2003.

173 Ibid.

develop the 201st Division in Tajikistan into the Fourth Base were proceeding. These were good opportunities for the Kremlin to promote its Central Asia policy, and the defence minister duly did so a couple of times during the first half of 2003. However, the delays in finalising the base were becoming an embarrassment to the Kremlin, as it contradicted the image of Tajikistan as a close ally of Russia in Central Asia. The official opening of the Russian base had by now been postponed from July to October.¹⁷⁴ A persistent rumour in Tajikistan, which claimed that the US had offered Tajikistan one billion dollars in long-term loans in return for ending the Russian military presence, made it into Moscow newspapers that summer.¹⁷⁵ Unreliable coverage like this seemed closely connected to the lack of official information and reliable media reporting, about the very real problems that Russia and Tajikistan had encountered in the negotiations over the new base.

Renewed interest in Central Asia

The relationship between Russia and its allies in Central Asia was dominated in autumn 2003 by the official opening of the Russian base at Kant. The internal Russia debate reflected this, with renewed attention on Russia's policies and aims in Central Asia as well as in the CIS as a whole.

The topics in the internal debate in this period remained the same as previously. Various officials emphasised the continued development of Russian influence in Central Asia, and asserted that the CIS was a sphere of Russian influence. Such assertions were met positively in the few other comments there were, and also generally in media coverage of the region. The few comments that originated from outside official circles remained critical of the lack of direction in the Kremlin's efforts to form a Central Asia policy. However, it is important to keep in mind that at this point, there was very little room

174 RFE/RL *Newsline*, 27 June 2003.

175 Igor Plugatarev, "Moskve predlozhili pokinut Tadjikistan iz-za milliarda dollarov" [Moscow was offered a billion dollars to leave Tajikistan], *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 16 July 2003.

for debate about Russia's policies in Central Asia inside Russia. Therefore, comments from non-state participants in public debate left an impression of being suspended in air, i.e. non-official responses were slow in coming, and often beside the point. Official comments contained only oblique references to non-official contributions in the debate.

During most of the autumn, the opening of the base at Kant overshadowed the problems connected with the projected Fourth Base in Tajikistan. One exception was the former head of the General Staff, Leonid Ivashov, who in an interview with *Nezavisimaia gazeta* on 6 August commented that Moscow had made a series of mistakes in the negotiations with Tajikistan over the new base, e.g. by not placing the necessary emphasis on Russian investments in Tajikistan, unnecessary delays in the General Staff, and the lack of a Russian strategy towards Central Asia.¹⁷⁶ But his was one of very few comments on the issue.

A new Military Doctrine

Official comments, on the other hand, were not only assertive towards Central Asia, but contained critical comments on the Western position in Central Asia as well. The first indication came when Deputy Foreign Minister Aleksandr Losiukov in an interview with *Vremia novostei* said, "neither China nor Russia are happy about the American military presence in Central Asia," although he emphasised that the American military presence was a natural consequence of the operations in Afghanistan, which had removed a source of threat to Russia.¹⁷⁷ This comment was at the time remarkable for its outspokenness.

176 Viktoriia Panfilova, "Tiazheło v tadzhiksko-rossiiskom uchenii..." [Tough Tajik-Russian studies], *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 6 August 2003.

177 Katerina Labetskaia, "Rech ne o tom, kogo Rossiia predpochtet – Iaponiiu ili Kitai" ['The question is not about whom Russia prefers, Japan or China'], *Vremia novostei*, 24 July 2003.

The most authoritative contribution to the internal debate this autumn came from the deputy foreign minister responsible for CIS affairs, Viacheslav Trubnikov. In a feature article in *Nezavisimaia gazeta* on 15 September he stated that

the Russian position [on the foreign military presence in Central Asia] is unalterable: a military presence here of powers from outside the region can be seen as a stabilising factor only when strictly co-ordinated with the aims and timeframes for solving the concrete tasks of the anti-terrorist operation in Afghanistan.¹⁷⁸

He also called for transparency and accordance with international norms and regulations from Russia's partners against terrorism inside and outside of the CIS. Specifically, he accused plans of the US and GUUAM to create a regional anti-terrorist centre under GUUAM of being unclear and "without any practical purpose".¹⁷⁹ Trubnikov's views were echoed in an article contributed to the July-September (Russian) issue of the foreign policy journal *Russia in Global Affairs*.¹⁸⁰ Here, Mikhail Margelov elaborated what was meant by the often-repeated view that seemed to prevail in the Kremlin – that the CIS was a traditional sphere of influence for Russia:

This should not be interpreted as a revival of some latent imperial ambitions: Moscow has no plans of dictating to its neighbors whom to befriend or how to behave, nevertheless, problems emerging in the CIS countries do have direct bearing on Russia, and the world community must reckon with it.¹⁸¹

178 Viacheslav Trubnikov, "Vneshnepoliticheskii front Rossii" [Russia's foreign policy front], *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 15 September 2003.

179 Ibid.

180 In Russian: *Rossia v globalnoi politike*, www.globalaffairs.ru. The journal is published in Russian and English, but the Russian and English issues differ in content and number of volumes per year.

181 Mikhail Margelov, "Pobeda po ochkam", *Rossia v globalnoi politike*, vol. 1, no. 3 (July-September 2003): 8–16, 12–13. As translated in Mikhail Margelov, "Victory on Points: Pragmatism in Foreign Policy", *Russia in Global Affairs* vol. 1, no. 3.

Trubnikov's and Margelov's articles prepared the ground in Moscow for the more assertive line towards the CIS and Central Asia taken by Sergei Ivanov in his speech on 2 October. In the speech, the defence minister emphasised the links between Russian security and potential instability in the CIS. Preventive strikes within the CIS were mentioned as a possibility for Russia for the first time. Judging by the speech, NATO and the US were again seen as adversaries at least within in the territory of the CIS, instead of partners, let alone allies.¹⁸²

This was again consistent with the negative view of the Western military presence in Central Asia that Sergei Ivanov signalled in Colorado Springs later in October. It was clear that to the Kremlin's official position on the Western military presence in Central Asia as temporary, limited and useful but not without drawbacks had been added apprehension and a view that it could damage Russia's own interests in the region. Russia's foreign policy position had changed, but in the domestic debate, these were older thoughts.

Summing up: the Russian political debate

Of course, the Russian debate on the Western bases in Central Asia had far more participants with more diverse opinions than the official Russian reactions directed towards the West show. However, in this debate the president and the defence minister were also important participants.

As regards the president, this was a presence that differed markedly from that of other participants in the debate. There was a difference both in the number of appearances Putin made in the debate, as well as in the role he assumed once participating. Firstly, as regards Putin's number of appearances in the debate, he was in fact conspicuous by his absence from the debate, rather than for his participation in it. Other participants in the debate commented upon his absence. Comments of this kind often argued that the political elite was unconvinced by the president's strategic decision, indirectly

182 S. Ivanov, "Vystuplenie na soveshchanii ..."

charging that Putin had not sufficiently explained his policy to the political establishment. In this way, Putin's long periods of non-participation in the internal debate were also periods within which his participation appeared called for. This applies especially to the autumn of 2001 and spring of 2002. After Putin's televised speech, in which he outlined Russia's strategic decision, there were no further efforts to explain and elaborate on this choice. The Crawford summit, and the high profile that Putin at this point maintained in international politics, meant that in Russia firsthand reports about developments in Russian foreign policy were received mainly from non-Russian media or from the Russian media's reporting on Putin's meetings with international leaders. On the home front, the president kept a low profile on foreign policy issues. This lasted until April 2002, when the annual address to the Federal Assembly contained some comments on foreign policy. But the speech did not place much emphasis on foreign policy in general, and the few comments about the CIS that it contained were clearly not enough. This was indicated by the extraordinary meeting in May, at which Putin met central parties of the political elite to gather support for his foreign policy line.

This leads on to the second point – the role Putin assumed in the debate. Throughout the spring of 2002 there were many critical comments from politicians and officials with a high profile about the Western military presence in Central Asia. A fair share of the political elite did not approve of the president's strategic decision from the previous autumn. This was particularly reflected in the general suspicion and disapproval with which the Western bases in Central Asia were met. After Putin's meeting with the political elite in May, however, the criticism quieted, and disappeared outright from the media. The president's efforts may have convinced the elite, but as pointed out earlier in this chapter, the disappearance of the widespread criticism may just as well have been caused by a general perception that the president's intervention had narrowed the room and scope for criticism. Of course, as new developments in international politics

eclipsed the Western bases in Central Asia and the war in Afghanistan, these topics were less prominent in the public debate. The sudden disappearance of all criticism does however lead one to think that the president's intervention was important. Also, critical questions regarding Russian policy, be it in the war against terror, or in Central Asia, disappeared from the public debate. The debate became narrower, focusing instead on the secondary issues of American policy or policies of the Central Asian governments. Accordingly, one may speak of Putin's forceful presence in the debate.

Putin's participation in the debate is characterised by a feature often noted in Russian politics: the president loftily poses as being 'above politics'.¹⁸³ In this case it may be added that not only did Putin make himself appear to be above politics, he was also above explaining or elaborating policy as well. This left the political elite unconvinced at first (autumn 2001), later concerned (first half 2002), and thereafter disinterested to a degree bordering on apathy.

Apart from Putin's conspicuous absence, punctuated by short breaks of forceful appearances, there are other notable characteristics in the debate. The range of participants varied over time. At times, for example just before the Crawford summit in November 2001 and in the first months of 2002 it included large parts of the political elite. At other times, for example the period just after the president's speech on 24 September 2001, and partly also in autumn 2002, it consisted mainly of a military-security constituency. This included some participants from the military and security agencies, retired officers and a few analysts and politicians with a professed

183 See Peter C. Ordeshook, "Re-examining Russia: Institutions and Incentives", *Journal of Democracy* 6, 2 (April 1995): 46-60. Reprinted in Archie Brown: *Contemporary Russian Politics. A Reader* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001). The expressions 'above party' and 'above politics' were first used to refer to Boris Yeltsin's refusal to be associated with any Russian party, especially in the 1996 presidential election campaign. Vladimir Putin has continued this tradition, although he has been associated with United Russia and its predecessor Unity more directly than Yeltsin was with any so-called party of power during his presidency.

belief in Russia's need to maintain great power status. This constituency was mostly critical of the Kremlin's foreign policies, especially of the Kremlin's perceived inaction or passivity in the CIS, and any Russian concessions to the United States.

Very few voices in support of the Kremlin's policies were heard. In the autumn of 2001, Russia's liberals welcomed Putin's strategic decision, though they did not later participate in the debate. One persistent Kremlin supporter throughout the period under study was Mikhail Margelov, chairman of the Federation Council's Foreign Affairs Committee.

Margelov was seen in the period as one of Putin's key advisors on foreign policy. His participation in the debate took on official overtones, especially when he elaborated on Putin's strategic decision and explained it for domestic consumption.

More direct answers to domestic criticism came from the defence and foreign ministers. This happened in February and March 2002, when Sergei Ivanov maintained that Russia was reasserting itself in the CIS, while Igor Ivanov refuted that Russia had made concessions to the United States in the war against terror. The amendments to the military doctrine concerning the CIS may also be seen as an answer to the criticism that Russia was too passive in the post-Soviet space. While the focus on CIS and Central Asia in general was undoubtedly called for to make Russian foreign and security policy more consistent, it also answered a large part of the elite's concerns, especially those of the military-security constituency.

The questions in the debate were increasingly framed in narrow terms. There were three main topics: the alleged unilateral Russian concessions to the United States, the question of why Central Asia was lost to Russia, and the question of how Central Asia could be regained for Russia. While the question of unilateral concessions emerged before the Crawford summit and nearly disappeared in spring 2002, the two latter topics emerged more gradually, but persisted longer. Their content is discussed above in this chapter. The dominance of these questions in the debate emphasises the

degree to which geopolitical thinking, characterised by zero-sum games, notions of balance of power and spheres of influence, shapes the worldview of the Russian political elite.¹⁸⁴ Apart from the geopolitical mindset, however, a notable feature in the domestic debate was the absence of questions about the strategic decision in favour of an alignment with the West in the war against terror. This would not have been remarkable if the domestic debate had indicated that one consequence of this choice, the Western bases in Central Asia, was welcomed by the Russian political elite. However, the lack of criticism of Putin's strategic decision remained a contrast to the unpopularity of the Western bases and the general scepticism in the Russian political elite towards the American goals in the war against terror. In this respect, one can say that the Kremlin succeeded in its efforts to set the limits for discussion.

Conclusions

In this chapter, we have seen how the issue of the Western bases in Central Asia became contentious in the Russian political elite, and how this was especially visible in January-February 2002. The elite's support for the strategic alignment remained unconvinced. Efforts from the Kremlin to co-opt the elite in April and May 2002 were not a success, and can best be characterised as too little, too late. The debate remained framed in the view that a competition for influence in Central Asia existed, a zero-sum game, and it became an axiom that Russian influence there was waning. In autumn 2002, comments from the Kremlin indicated that uncertainty about US goals in Central Asia had spread even to the most prominent policymakers. As regards the Russian-American relationship, it is noteworthy that room for domestic political debate on this issue became restricted, especially in spring

184 Cf. Lo, *Vladimir Putin and the Evolution of Russian Foreign Policy*, p. 72.

2002, in what may have been a conscious effort by the Kremlin to reduce the impact of the domestic political debate on this relationship.

Chapter 5

Russia's policies in Central Asia

This chapter contains the narrative of Russia's response to the establishment of Western bases in Central Asia as it emerged in Russian policy and Russian political signalling towards the Central Asian states. Some statements and issues are the same as in the previous chapters, but in this chapter they are seen as belonging to this aspect of the Russian response. I will also focus on how concrete steps followed political signalling with an emphasis on military steps. However, energy resources and their transport are important in the engagement of external powers in Central Asia. Towards the end of the chapter, I will discuss Russia's energy engagement in Central Asia in some detail. Finally, I sum up the main features of the Russian policy towards the Central Asian states.

Renewed Russian interest in Central Asia

The Central Asian countries received renewed attention from Russian politicians, media and commentators after 11 September and Putin's speech on 24 September.¹⁸⁵ Also Western, especially American, politicians, journalists and NGO representatives visited the Central Asian states to an extent never experienced before. The new attention from the West concentrated on security issues, and mainly concerned Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan were still more interesting for their energy

185 Putin, "Zaiavlenie Prezidenta Rossii".

resources. Russian interest in multilateral settings involving all the five countries also increased.¹⁸⁶ Policy towards the Central Asian states was no longer the preserve of a few officials, the military establishment and politicians with special interests. Russian politicians from government ministers to lesser Duma politicians toured the Central Asia capitals to discuss the war on terrorism. This campaign influenced the full set of foreign policy priorities. In this way, one could say that the war on terrorism reinforced the more active Central Asian policy that Putin had introduced.

Typical of the increased interest in Central Asia was a particularly heavyweight delegation to Dushanbe in late October. Four of the top security and defence officials visited the Central Asian capitals.¹⁸⁷ In Dushanbe, Vladimir Rushailo and Sergei Ivanov joined President Putin, who made a stopover on his way from the APEC summit in Shanghai to Moscow.¹⁸⁸ On the agenda was the campaign against terror and Russia's and Central Asia's place in it. Most importantly, Putin, Tajikistan's president, Imomali Rakhmonov, and Burhanuddin Rabbani, the political leader of the Afghan Northern Alliance, had a trilateral meeting to discuss the post-Taliban government in Afghanistan.¹⁸⁹ Prior to Putin's arrival, Sergei Ivanov, Nikolai Patrushev, and President Rakhmonov had discussed upgrading the Tajik-Russian security cooperation.¹⁹⁰

186 Many of these settings involved four countries, as Turkmenistan participated less in accordance with its neutrality policy.

187 Specifically, Security Council Secretary Vladimir Rushailo, the head of the General Staff, Anatolii Kvashnin, FSB Head Nikolai Patrushev, and Defence Minister Sergei Ivanov.

188 Putin was accompanied by Igor Ivanov, the deputy head of the presidential administration Sergei Prikhodko, and the emergency situations minister, Sergei Shoigu.

189 "V Dushanbe sostoialas vstrecha Vladimira Putina, Emomali Rakhmonova i Burkhanuddina Rabbani" [Vladimir Putin, Imomali Rakhmonov and Burkhanuddin Rabbani met in Dushanbe], *strana.ru*, 22 October 2001.

190 *RFE/RL Newswire*, 22 October 2001.

Another sign that Moscow's interest in Central Asia was growing was a proposal from the Russian-Kyrgyz interparliamentary commission on 5 October. The commission proposed to create a joint Russian-Kyrgyz military base in southern Kyrgyzstan, within the parameters of the CIS Collective Security Treaty. The head of the Russian delegation to the commission, Duma Speaker Gennadii Seleznev, stated that such a base would be in Kyrgyzstan's interest.¹⁹¹ One more indication of an increased Russian military presence in Central Asia came on 7 December, when Sergei Ivanov discussed a strengthening and re-equipping of the 201st Motorised Rifle Division in Tajikistan with President Rakhmonov.¹⁹² This had already been agreed to in 1999 in connection with an agreement to transform the 201st Division to a fully-fledged Russian base; however, the plans had not been followed up afterwards.

There were also other offers. On 14 November, Deputy Interior Minister Viacheslav Tikhomirov said that Russia could possibly offer CIS governments special technologies to help them combat terrorism.¹⁹³ Through a variety of channels, Russia was using the opportunity offered by the war on terrorism to develop its military and security relations with the Central Asian countries.

Seriously and for the long term

By early 2002, Russia was increasing its military engagement in Central Asia. This renewed activity was directed mainly towards Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. In both countries, the plans involved military bases. An obvious explanation for this was that after the fall of the Taliban, it was important to maintain stability in the wider region. Undoubtedly, Moscow sought to secure positions to observe and influence further developments in and around Afghanistan as well. But there

191 RFE/RL *Newsline*, 9 October 2001.

192 RFE/RL *Newsline*, 10 December 2001.

193 RFE/RL *Newsline*, 15 November 2001.

were also indications that the increased Russian engagement was partly there to balance the Western presence in the Central Asian states.

That balancing was the aim was particularly evident after Elizabeth Jones's statement about the American engagement in Central Asia, which in her words, as discussed at the end of chapter 2, was intended "seriously – and for the long term".¹⁹⁴ One indication came in the apprehensive comments Russian politicians made in January 2002 on the presence of Western forces in Central Asia. These comments, discussed on page 64, contributed to the internal Russian debate on the Western military presence in Central Asia. However, the Central Asian leaders follow debates and statements in Russia very closely. They may certainly regard them as indications of how official policy may develop. The level of freedom of speech was higher in Russia than in any of these countries in the period under study, and this may have further disposed them to see political debate as a medium for conveying semi-official signals.¹⁹⁵ Some statements may simply carry more weight when approached from Central Asia than they do within a specifically Russian context. This particularly applies to the statements from Gennadii Seleznev in January. As discussed in the previous chapter, Seleznev was against the long-term deployment of US forces in Central Asia. He said that any decisions related to the establishment of permanent American bases in Central Asia should be made only after discussions involving Russia as well as the Central Asian states, and expressed suspicions that the US was using the bases in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan in an effort to control the situation on the Indian-Pakistani border, in western China and in Kazakhstan.¹⁹⁶ These statements were made in Central Asia, while Seleznev was visiting Astana and Dushanbe. Therefore, it is more likely that they were intended for the Central Asian governments and these governments saw them as Russian political signals.

194 Jones, "Testimony Before ..."

195 Point emphasised by Azhdar Kurtov. Interview 19 November 2004.

196 RFE/RL *Newsline*, 10 and 14 January 2002.

A more active policy

The level of Russian activity towards the Central Asian states was kept up in the spring of 2002. Its two characterising features were firstly that the main concerns belonged to the military and security spheres, and secondly, that it focused on bodies and mechanisms that did not include the West, accompanied by statements that were mildly wary of the United States' intentions in Central Asia.

By the time of the unofficial CIS summit in Almaty in late February, it was evident that a period with growing Russian activity in Central Asia had begun. In Almaty, President Putin declared that the CIS states' support for the campaign against terror had been the only possible strategic and moral choice in the circumstances after 11 September 2001.¹⁹⁷ Throughout March and April, the assertive rhetoric observed from January and February towards the Central Asian countries with Western bases was accompanied by concrete plans and measures. This activity was first and foremost concerned with Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

In a meeting with the speaker of the lower chamber of the Kyrgyz parliament in early April, the chairman of the Duma Committee for CIS relations and former deputy foreign minister, Boris Pastukhov, said that the agreement signed by the Kyrgyz government concerning a one-year lease for the US-led base at Manas should not be prolonged.¹⁹⁸ A few days later, at a meeting in Almaty of security council secretaries from the member states of the Collective Security Treaty, Vladimir Rushailo called for the treaty states to cooperate more actively in the war on terrorism. He also underlined that the treaty was open to new members.¹⁹⁹ Plans for turning the

197 "Vladimir Putin: podderzhka stranami SNG antiterroristicheskoi koalitsii – edinstvenno vozmozhnyi shag" [Vladimir Putin: support for the anti-terrorist coalition from the CIS countries is the only possible step], *strana.ru*, 1 March 2002.

198 *RFE/RL Newslines*, 3 April 2002.

199 *RFE/RL Newslines*, 12 April 2002.

treaty into a treaty organisation were approved by the presidents of the participating states at a presidential summit in Moscow in May.

Both Rushailo and his Kyrgyz colleague, Misir Ashirkulov, made statements concerning the Western forces in Central Asia. Ashirkulov opened for a prolonged Western military presence if the antiterrorist operation lasted longer than anticipated. Rushailo, on the other hand, said that although Russia viewed the US as its strategic ally, "the tasks, goals, and schedule of the Western military presence in Central Asia should be 'clearly determined'."²⁰⁰

The focus was not only on the Collective Security Treaty. From mid-April, the development of security cooperation was the topic of bilateral contact between Russia and Kyrgyzstan. The contact included telephone contact between Putin and President Akaev and meetings between Nikolai Patrushev and Akaev, and between the director of the Federal Border Service, Konstantin Totskii and the Kyrgyz defence minister, Esen Topoev.²⁰¹ From the outset Patrushev tied his visit to Bishkek in to the US military presence in Kyrgyzstan. In a comment, he said that the main aim of his visit was "to renew the full extent of security cooperation between the two countries" [Russia and Kyrgyzstan], on the grounds that the Americans were in Central Asia for a short period only.²⁰² In line with this, Patrushev and Akaev discussed expanded bilateral cooperation against international terrorism within the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation as well as external to this organisation.

Totskii and Topoev signed a protocol on military-technical cooperation between the Russian Federal Border Service, the Kyrgyz Defence Ministry, and the Kyrgyz National Security Service. The cooperation mainly concerned equipment for the Kyrgyz borders, the aim being to establish an independent Kyrgyz border service by 2003.²⁰³ These contacts with

200 RFE/RL *Newsline*, 15 April 2002.

201 RFE/RL *Newsline*, 17 and 24 April 2002.

202 Panfilova and Khanbabian, "Patrushev, Totskii i Ramsfeld ...".

Kyrgyzstan indicated that Russia was trying to raise the level of bilateral cooperation with Kyrgyzstan to the level that already existed in its relations with Tajikistan.

Russia's policies in Central Asia were significantly tilted towards security contacts. For example, in April, Russian, Kyrgyz, Kazakh and Tajik forces participated in a Russian-led anti-terrorism exercise in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.²⁰⁴ The direction of the efforts to develop the relationships with Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan demonstrated that this was to be continued. Statements by Akaev and Putin and by Rakhmonov and Putin after bilateral meetings on the sidelines of the summit that more should be done to strengthen bilateral trade sounded insubstantial in comparison with what was being discussed on the military and security sides.²⁰⁵

The closer relationship between Russia and Kyrgyzstan was formalised the following month when Sergei Ivanov and Esen Topoev met in Bishkek to sign several bilateral cooperation agreements. One of them permitted Russia to maintain its military installations in Kyrgyzstan and according to Ivanov they would remain for another 7 to 15 years.²⁰⁶ There were also agreements on the joint training of crack military units and Russian purchases of Kyrgyz military goods.²⁰⁷ Another confirmation of a close relationship came at a joint press conference with Ashirkulov and Rushailo in Bishkek on 13 June, when Ashirkulov said that the Western deployment in

203 Independent of CIS assistance and as an entity separate from the Kyrgyz Army. In 2001, Kyrgyzstan had received equipment for border surveillance from Russia to the value of 2.5 million rubles. Panfilova and Khanbabian, "Patrushev, Totskii i Ramsfeld ...".

204 *RFE/RL Newslines*, 15 April 2002; Ariel Cohen, "CIS Remains Top Priority In Russian Foreign Policy", *Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst*, 24 April 2002.

205 *RFE/RL Newslines*, 15 May 2002. The economic side of bilateral relations was also weakened by the Duma's refusal to approve the plans to restructure Kyrgyz debts to Russia (133 million USD), on the grounds that the American use of the Manas Base gave the Kyrgyz state a substantial income. See Panfilova and Khanbabian, "Patrushev, Totskii i Ramsfeld..."

206 *RFE/RL Newslines*, 14 June 2002.

207 Marina Kozlova, "Russian military to remain in Kyrgyzstan", *UPI*, 13 June 2002.

Kyrgyzstan should end within six months of the mandate's expiry, i.e. within the first half of 2003. Rushailo added that Moscow would consult with Kyrgyzstan if the terms of that withdrawal were changed.²⁰⁸ This indicated that Russian influence over Kyrgyzstan's security priorities would remain strong and was unlikely to decrease in the future.

Russia also seemed to be trying to strengthen Russian-sponsored alternatives to a close relationship with the United States in the war on terrorism. But the increased Russian activity could simply have been an effort to secure Russian influence in the region when faced with purely regional organisations. A new regional organisation – the Central Asian Cooperation Organisation (CACO) – had been constituted on 28 February, on the basis of the Central Asian Economic Cooperation.²⁰⁹ This may have served as a motive for Russia. The planned upgrade of the Collective Security Treaty to a Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) seemed to reflect such Russian efforts to secure its influence in the CIS. Before the presidential summit in Moscow, the defence and foreign ministers of the member states had proposed a joint military force under the command of the Russian General Staff. The member states' presidents rejected this proposal, as they had failed to reach agreement.²¹⁰ Clearly, the other member governments were reluctant to give the Russian General Staff command over some of their forces, and access to internal staff procedures. However, they endorsed the upgrading of the Tashkent Treaty to an international organisation.

The CSTO was controversial for another reason too. Uzbekistan's government was strongly critical of the creation of CSTO on the basis of the Collective Security Treaty, from which it had withdrawn in 1999. Uzbek Defence Minister Kadyr Guliamov's failure to come to a meeting of the SCO

208 *RFE/RL Newslines*, 14 June 2002.

209 The members at this point were Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. The Central Asian Economic Cooperation was constituted in 1998 when Tajikistan joined the Central Asian Economic Union from 1994.

210 *RFE/RL Newslines*, 15 May 2002.

defence ministers in Moscow directly after the CSTO presidential summit was taken as a sign of Tashkent's disapproval of the CSTO.²¹¹

Focus on Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan

From summer 2002, Russia's efforts to increase and reaffirm its military presence in Central Asia gathered new speed. The efforts focused on Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. The relationship between Russia and Uzbekistan did not develop much in this period. On the military side, the level of cooperation remained very low. In contrast, the much closer bilateral relationships with Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan became increasingly tilted towards security and military affairs.

In summer 2002, it became known that Russia was providing Kyrgyzstan with equipment and spare parts worth around 130,000 US dollars to modernise its air defence system.²¹² Further assistance in the form of anti-aircraft missiles was possible.²¹³ The two presidents also followed up their foreign ministers' conclusions from June when they discussed a possible extension of military-industrial cooperation between the two countries mainly in the form of Russian purchases of Kyrgyz defence hardware at their meeting in Sochi in September.²¹⁴

However, the most important development in Russian-Kyrgyz relations this autumn was the start of the Russian deployment at Kant Airbase outside Bishkek.²¹⁵ On 2

211 Viktoriia Panfilova and Armen Khanbabian, "Uzbekistan ne zhelaet druzhit armiaiami" [Uzbekistan does not want a friendship in armies], *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 16 May 2002.

212 Aleksandr Bogatyrev, "Iuzhnyi rubezh" [The southern frontier], *Krasnaia Zvezda*, 5 December 2002. One source claims that the free of charge Russian deliveries in 2002 were worth 7.6 million rubles, or around 250,000 US dollars, and that the total sum for Russian deliveries of air defence equipment to Kyrgyzstan since 1998 equalled 14 million rubles. See Vladimir Shvarev, "'Shkvali' iz Bishkeka" ['Squalls' from Bishkek], *Nezavisimoe voennoe obozrenie*, 31 October 2003. Regardless of which sum is correct, the contribution was quite small.

213 *RFE/RL Newslines*, 11 July 2002.

214 *RFE/RL Newslines*, 10 September 2002; Viktoriia Panfilova, "Skazano – sdelano" [Said and done], *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 23 September 2002.

December, Russian combat aircraft landed at the site of the future base. According to Kyrgyzstan's defence minister, Esen Topoev, the Russian deployment planned to extend to about 20 aircraft²¹⁶ and 700 personnel.²¹⁷ It escaped nobody's attention that the future Kant Base was located about 30 kilometres from the Western Manas Base, and some observers cited this as one of two main reasons for the location of the base.²¹⁸ An obvious reason for the choice of location was Kant's relative proximity to Russia's borders compared with the 201st Division in Tajikistan. This eased the logistical arrangements for the deployment in Tajikistan. On the other hand, while being a convenient stop on the way to Dushanbe, Kant was far enough from Kyrgyzstan's troubled southern borders to minimise the threat from militant Islamic radicals. One aim could even have been to suppress outbursts of militant Islamic radicalism and handle security threats such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan's military incursions from Tajikistan into Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan in 1999 and 2000. The location close to Bishkek also fuelled speculations that one objective of the base was to offer President Akaev and the Kyrgyz government armed support if necessary, perhaps even to "[prop] up Akayev's embattled

215 The plans for a Russian base on Kyrgyz territory were initiated by Askar Akaev, see Roman Streshnev, "Shchit dlia otechestva", *Krasnaia Zvezda*, 24 October 2003. Incidentally, Kant had been considered as a location for the coalition base, but the Western evaluation team preferred Manas. See Bogatyrev, "Iuzhnyi rubezh".

216 RFE/RL specified the aircraft as "10 fighters, five training aircraft, two transport planes, and two multi-purpose helicopters", a total of 19 aircraft. *RFE/RL Newslines*, 03 December 2002. These aircraft were in Bogatyrev, "Iuzhnyi rubezh", given as five Sukhoi Su-27 fighters, five Sukhoi Su-25 attack aircraft, two Antonov An-26 transport aircraft, five L-39 aircraft, two Mi-39 helicopters and two Iliushin Il-76 transport aircraft.

217 Zamira Eshanova, "Central Asia: Diplomatic Visits Highlight U.S., Russian Competition", *RFE/RL*, 3 December 2002.

218 Viktoriia Panfilova and Sergei Sokut, "Putin spaset Akaeva" [Putin will save Akaev], *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 2 December 2002.

administration".²¹⁹ When Akaev was in fact unseated in March 2005, the troops at the Kant Base remained neutral and passive.²²⁰

The importance of the deployment was further underlined by Putin's visit to Bishkek on 5 December, the same day Sergei Ivanov attended the arrival of two Russian combat aircraft at Kant. Putin met Askar Akaev and the two presidents discussed a wide variety of matters. This included signing an agreement to write off two thirds of Kyrgyzstan's debt to Russia,²²¹ an issue that the Russian State Duma had delayed in the spring. When summing up the meeting, Akaev proclaimed that Kyrgyzstan's aspiration was to become Russia's "main strategic partner" in Central Asia.²²²

The bilateral relationship between Russia and Tajikistan was not characterised by such high-level contact in autumn 2002, but there were a few visits by Russian officials and politicians. There were also assertions that Kyrgyzstan was developing a closer relationship to Russia, while Tajikistan at this point was trying to distance itself from Moscow.²²³ The highest-ranking visitors to Dushanbe this autumn were Nikolai Patrushev, on a visit in October, and the chairman of the CIS Collective Security Treaty, Valerii Nikolaenko, who came in September. Nikolaenko also visited Kyrgyzstan on the

219 Justin Burke, "Russian deployment in Kyrgyzstan could prompt growing domestic turmoil", *Eurasia Insight*, 11 December 2002.

220 Nikolai Bordiuzha, secretary general of CSTO, later regretted that the organisation's mechanism for stabilising member states was not put to use during the unrest in Kyrgyzstan. See *RFE/RL Newslines*, 5 April 2005.

221 Artem Vernidub, "Istrebiteli Putina seli v Kirgizii" [Putin's fighters have landed in Kyrgyzstan], *gazeta.ru*, 5 December 2002.

222 *RFE/RL Newslines*, 6 December 2002. "Russia, our strategic partner" was also the slogan displayed on posters held by children along the road from the airport to the city as Putin arrived. See Viktoriia Panfilova and Natalia Melikova, "S beregov Ganga v tumannyi Bishkek" [From the banks of the Ganges to misty Bishkek], *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 6 December 2002.

223 Sergei Sokut, "Grozit terroristam budem iz Bishkeka" [We will threaten the terrorists from Bishkek], *Nezavisimoe voennoe obozrenie*, 6 December 2002.

same trip. Both Nikolaenko and Patrushev met President Rakhmonov, the former to discuss political and military cooperation, the latter to discuss regional security.

Meanwhile, the frequency of contact between Russia and Central Asia in multilateral settings had slowed down compared to the preceding months. There were no high-level meetings in the SCO or other international organisations in the region, on the sidelines of which bilateral contacts regularly took place. Additionally, the most important changes to the regional security situation following the arrival of Western troops had already been addressed.

The contacts between Russia and Kyrgyzstan and Russia and Tajikistan in this autumn underlined two increasingly characteristic features of Russia's policy in Central Asia. Firstly, there was a continued reliance on security and military aspects of bilateral cooperation. This included regular visits from Russian security and military officials to the governments in Bishkek and Dushanbe. Russia's military presence in the region had now been significantly increased with the new Kant Base, which had not yet been officially opened but was already partly operative. Secondly, it seemed that plans for strengthened bilateral relations and Russian promises on financial assistance were slowly becoming a reality. Russian policy in Central Asia had long been based mainly on rhetoric. In 2002 however, both military deployment and restructuring of debts were realised in the relationship between Russia and Kyrgyzstan. This could be one indication that policymakers in Moscow had realised that real alliances and real military access to Central Asia would not come for free.

Progress at Kant

In 2003, Russian policies in Central Asia continued to concentrate on the Russian forces there, namely the 201st Division in Tajikistan and the new base at Kant in Kyrgyzstan, officially opened in October. One may discuss the extent to which Russia's approach to its close partners in Central Asia throughout the second part of 2002 and 2003 went back to

the usual pattern, in the sense that (especially) bilateral and multilateral contact was again maintained by military and security officials with a few Duma politicians thrown in. But there was still more frequent contact than had been the case before September 2001.

The Russian policy in Central Asia also in this period concentrated on Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. In Kyrgyzstan, the focal point of interest was of course the Kant Base. In early 2003, the plans for this base involved organising it as a base for a rapid reaction force under the CSTO, with forces from Russia and Kyrgyzstan.²²⁴ Most of the cost of equipping and modernising the base would be covered by Russia according to an agreement reached in January.²²⁵ The talks in January were held at the level of air force deputy commanders. By March, the negotiations had reached the level of air force commanders. The number of Russian soldiers now to be deployed was eventually to be 500, while the first contingent to arrive in April would number 200. The Russian Air Force commander, General Vladimir Mikhailov, said the task of the Russian military presence was to maintain "peace in the Central Asian region".²²⁶ The final agreement between Russia and Kyrgyzstan was reached in June.

The CSTO, under whose aegis the Kant Base would operate, was formally established only on 28 April 2003 when the presidents of the signatory states met in Dushanbe. Even at this first summit, it could be surmised that one of the purposes of the CSTO was to limit the influence of outside powers, especially the United States, in the security policies of the CSTO states. This was especially evident from the interest with which the summit participants asked the Kyrgyz representatives about the duration of the Western deployment in Kyrgyzstan.²²⁷ Another notable result of this summit was

224 In addition to the Russian aircraft outlined above, the base would house the following Kyrgyz aircraft: four training aircraft, two helicopters and two fighters. *RFE/RL Newslines*, 24 January 2003.

225 *RFE/RL Newslines*, 24 January 2003.

226 *RFE/RL Newslines*, 17 March 2003.

227 Maksim Glikin, "V Dushanbe sozdali 'vostochnyi blok'" ['Eastern bloc' created in Dushanbe], *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 29 April 2003.

that a joint military force, under the command of the Russian General Staff, received the support of the CSTO members. This may even have been connected to the US military campaign in Iraq and the Russian view that this marked a “watershed in the territorial redivision of the world”.²²⁸

A colder climate between Moscow and Dushanbe

The relationship between Russia and Tajikistan in the first half of 2003 was dominated by delays in transforming the 201st Division to a base. This was on the list of issues to be discussed in meetings between Putin and Rakhmonov on the sidelines of the CSTO summit in Dushanbe.²²⁹ The issue had first come to the attention of the Russian public in December 2001, when the Moscow newspapers *Izvestiia* and *Nezavisimaia gazeta* wrote about the alleged plans of Tajikistan’s government to demand rent for the presence of the 201st Division in the country from 2002 onwards.²³⁰ These rumours seemed to originate both from the Russian Ministry of Defence and from defence sources in Tajikistan, though Tajikistan’s government and the Russian Ministry of Defence promptly denied them.²³¹ In the agreement between Russia and Tajikistan that regulated the transformation of the 201st Division, the issue of rent from Russia to Tajikistan was not even touched on. The agreement was from 1999 and was ratified in 2001. Plans to implement it by early 2002 were

228 This is suggested by Wilhelmsen and Flikke, “Copy That...”, p. 28–29.

229 Vladimir Mukhin, “Moskva pokupaet soiuznikov” [Moscow buys allies], *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 21 April 2003.

230 According to *Izvestiia*’s sources, the demand from Tajikistan could amount to 150–200 million US dollars annually. According to *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, the demand was 250 million dollars. Aleksandr Grigorev, “Soiuznikov vybiraiut” [Choosing allies], *Izvestiia*, 25 December 2001; Sergei Sokut, “Dushanbe Moskvu ne vygoniaet” [Dushanbe is not expelling Moscow], *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 26 December 2001.

231 “U Rossii v Tadzhikestane poiavitsia voennaia baza” [Russia to have a military base in Tajikistan], *strana.ru*, 26 December 2001; RFE/RL *Newsline*, 3 January 2002.

clearly delayed, apparently because of the rent issue. This was at least the interpretation of *Nezavisimaia gazeta's* journalist, who wrote, "Tajikistan is practically blackmailing Russia using the American presence as an alternative."²³²

Throughout 2002, the Russian side kept quiet about the plans for the 201st Division and the place of rent in these plans. Tajikistan's government also declined to comment. The process of establishing a Russian base in Tajikistan was at a standstill.

The Tajik government seemed to be trying to balance itself between Russia and the United States. Russia was kept at arm's length, while Tajikistan tried to achieve benefits from the US. On the issue of the 201st Division and its future, the Tajik government was trying to have the division transformed to a base *de jure* as well as *de facto*, because a Russian base in Tajikistan would mean that Russia would have to shoulder a substantial proportion of its costs as well as pay rent to Tajikistan. A Russian base with the legal status of a joint peacekeeping force, or with forces formally organised as a subdivision of a base inside Russia, could not as easily be subjected to demands for rent.

In March 2003 it became known that the US Defense Department had resumed talks with the Tajik government on a proposal to lease three airbases in Tajikistan.²³³ This proposal had been largely forgotten after the first months of 2002. The resumption of talks met with negative reactions from Russia. Igor Ivanov, on a visit to Dushanbe in March, seems to have tried to dissuade the Tajik government from entering into closer military cooperation with the United States.²³⁴

The other purpose of the foreign minister's visit was to prepare for Putin's visit to Dushanbe in late April 2003. From the signals that came from the Kremlin before Putin's visit, one might have expected the plans for a Russian base in

232 Sokut, "Dushanbe Moskvu ne vygoniaet."

233 *RFE/RL Newsline*, 10 March 2003.

234 Farangis Najibullah, "Central Asia: Why Is Russia Suddenly Paying So Much Attention To Dushanbe And Bishkek?" *RFE/RL*, 18 March 2003.

Tajikistan to have leapt forward during the visit. However, this did not happen. In spite of continued declarations to the contrary, the process was not moving forward. The plan to award formal base status to the 201st Division during Putin's visit did take place, though this was a purely formal measure not accompanied by an inauguration.²³⁵ In front of the 201st Division's commanders Putin repeated earlier promises to increase the military presence in Tajikistan.²³⁶ Over summer 2003, it became evident that relations between Moscow and Dushanbe were souring again. This led to a revival of the persistent rumour that the US was offering Tajikistan a credit of one billion dollars in return for ending Russian military presence. This time, the rumour matched well with the bad state of affairs in Russian-Tajik relations, and it was quoted even by the serious daily *Nezavisimaia gazeta* in Moscow.²³⁷ The US ambassador to Dushanbe later denied the rumour in a letter to *Nezavisimaia gazeta's* weekly military review, *Nezavisimoe voennoe obozrenie*.²³⁸

Rumours aside, it was evident that Russian-Tajik relations had changed from "absolute indifference to obvious irritation".²³⁹ Nevertheless, the Russian side developed its plans for an increased military presence in Tajikistan. As expressed by Colonel-General Aleksandr Baranov, the commander of the Volga-Urals military district in charge of the working group on development of the base, this included, "a powerful group of forces, with an aviation component. [The group] will be equipped with the most modern weaponry, and it will co-operate closely with the power structures in [Tajikistan]."²⁴⁰

235 Viktoriia Panfilova, "Rossiia ukrepit svoe voenno-politicheskoe vliianie v Tadzhikistane" [Russia will strengthen its military-political influence in Tajikistan], *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 25 April 2003.

236 *RFE/RL Newslines*, 28 April 2003.

237 Plugatarev, "Moskve predlozhili pokinut Tadzhikistan iz-za milliarda dollarov."

238 Franklin P. Huddle, "Ni snom, ni dukhom" [Neither heard nor seen], *Nezavisimoe voennoe obozrenie*, 8 August 2003; *RFE/RL Newslines*, 11 August 2003.

239 Panfilova, "Rossiia ukrepit ...".

Two Russian-controlled bases

The official opening of the Russian base at Kant took place on 23 October 2003. The agreement authorising the base had been signed a month previously in Moscow. The most difficult parts of the negotiation process had concerned the funding of the base. According to the agreement, Russia paid no rent for the space the base occupied. However, a substantial delivery of free Russian arms to Kyrgyzstan was widely rumoured to be Russia's compensation for Kant,²⁴¹ and the writing off of two thirds of Kyrgyzstan's gas debts to Russia in autumn 2002 were also a part of this context. In addition, Russia alone financed the base.²⁴² Kyrgyz authorities vigorously denied that the arms deliveries were compensation or payment for access to the base, insisting that they were being provided free of charge because of Kyrgyzstan's financial problems.²⁴³

When answering questions after the opening ceremony, both Putin and Akaev made a point of emphasising that the nearby Manas Base had been established "only for the concrete task of fighting terrorism in Afghanistan and for the duration of that operation", while the Kant Base was there "on a permanent basis".²⁴⁴ It was emphasised that the base was there to maintain security and stability in Central Asia. The initiative to build the base had been taken by the Kyrgyz government and President Akaev personally. All in all, the opening of the base seemed more important to Kyrgyzstan than to Russia.²⁴⁵

240 Vladimir Mukhin, "Rossiia sozdaet krupnuiu voennuiu bazu v Tsentralnoi Azii" [Russia will establish a major military base in Central Asia], *Nezavisimaja gazeta*, 21 May 2003.

241 E.g., Andrei Reut, "Putin otkryl pervuiu rossiiskuiu voennuiu bazu v Tsentralnoi Azii" [Putin opens the first Russian military base in Central Asia], *Gazeta Gzt.ru*, 24 October 2003. The delivery was worth around 3 million US dollars. It included small arms, different uniforms and equipment, radio communications, and an overhaul of a Mi-8 helicopter. See Shvarev: "Shkvali' iz Bishkeka".

242 "Rossiia otkryvaet aviabazu v Kirgizii" [Russia opens airbase in Kyrgyzstan], *Gazeta Gzt.ru*, 22 September 2003.

243 RFE/RL *Newsline*, 4 November 2003.

244 Reut, "Putin otkryl..."

In contrast to the successful opening of a new base at Kant, the plans for the conversion of the 201st Division in Tajikistan into the Fourth Base were progressing slowly. According to the Tajik defence minister, Sherali Khairulloev, the delays were not caused by excessive demands from Tajikistan, but were the fault of the Russian side.²⁴⁶ Denies notwithstanding, the problem seemed to be that the Tajik government did not want to pay for the base, and demanded ownership of the Russian military hardware on its territory. In addition, Tajikistan claimed a rental fee of 50 million US dollars for the Russian satellite surveillance station "Okno" in Nurek, which had become fully operational in July 2002.²⁴⁷ Tajikistan also expected Russia to write off the 300 million dollars it owed Russia. The Russians were reluctant to fulfil all the Tajik demands, making this a risky strategy, with the potential of costing the "the present leadership in Dushanbe dearly" in the unlikely event of a Russian pullout.²⁴⁸

In the end, the Tajik strategy was successful. The opening of the Fourth Base took place on 16 October 2004 in the presence of Putin and Rakhmonov. The signing of a new bilateral military cooperation agreement in June 2004 had eased the transformation of the 201st Division into the Fourth Base.²⁴⁹ Among the bilateral agreements signed during the visit were agreements on extensive economic cooperation. According to these agreements, Russian firms, state-owned and private, would invest over two billion dollars in

245 "Rossiia vozvrashchaetsia?" [Russia returns?], *Radio Svoboda*, 25 October 2003. This point was also made by Fedor Lukianov in an interview with the author, 19 November 2004.

246 *RFE/RL Newswire*, 15 August 2003.

247 *Okno* means "window" in Russian. Rustam Burnashev and Irina Chernykh, "Vooruzhennyye sily respubliki Tadjikistan" [Tajikistan's Armed Forces], *Tsentralnaia Aziia i Kavkaz*, 6, 2002, 119, and Russian Centre TV, Moscow, 19 June 2003, FBIS, quoted in Henry Plater-Zyberk, *Tajikistan. Waiting For A Storm?*, (Camberley: Defence Academy of the United Kingdom, Conflict Studies Research Centre, 2004), p.5 and 17 (fn 19). "Okno", an optical-electronic sensor, is part of Russia's space surveillance system.

248 *RFE/RL Newswire*, 17 March 2004; Plater-Zyberk, *Tajikistan. Waiting...*, p. 5.

249 See *RFE/RL Newswire*, 8 June 2004.

Tajikistan. The Russian aluminium company Rusal and the Russian electricity monopoly, Unified Energy System (UES), would invest more than one billion dollars in aluminium and hydropower projects. As remarked by Anatolii Chubais, the UES chief executive officer and a staunch advocat of a Russian 'liberal empire' based on economic integration in the former Soviet Union, this was indeed a step forward in creating a liberal empire.²⁵⁰ The "Okno" surveillance station in Nurek was sold to Russia for 242 million dollars of Tajikistan's debt to Russia. "Okno" will return to Tajik ownership only after 49 years.²⁵¹ Tajikistan committed itself to investing the remaining 50 million dollars of the debt in Russia's share of the Sangtuda hydroelectric power plant, which supplies power to Tajikistan's aluminium industry.²⁵² Accordingly, the Tajik side succeeded in attaining most of their demands from the Russian side. Interestingly, they also acquired full control of their own borders, as withdrawal of the Russian border service from Tajikistan's borders was stipulated in another of the agreements in the package.²⁵³ In return, the Russians were relieved of an embarrassing situation and obtained a military base, the second new base in Central Asia in two years.

The change in military doctrine

The changes to the Military Doctrine presented by Sergei Ivanov in early October 2003 represented a new view in the Kremlin on the place of the CIS in Russian security. The doctrine now specifically declared the CIS and neighbouring

250 Vitalii Tsepliaev, "Vostochnaia diplomatiia" [Eastern diplomacy], *Argumenty i Fakty*, 20 October 2004. For 'liberal empire', see "RAO UES chief sees Russia as liberal empire", *Russia Journal*, 26 September 2003.

251 Aleksandr Chudodcev, "Prishla na bazu" [Arrived at base], *Itogi*, 26 October 2004.

252 Alexander Dubovoi, "Advantages and Disadvantages of the Russian-Tajik Military Cooperation", *WPS Defense and Security Report*, 314, 22 October 2004; Konstantin Parshin, "Tajikistan: The Russians Are Coming Back", *Transitions Online*, 3 November 2004. UES invested 200 million USD, see Tsepliaev, "Vostochnaia diplomatiia".

253 Chudodcev, "Prishla na bazu".

regions a Russian sphere of interests. Within this sphere, cross-border threats could justify both preventive strikes with conventional weapons and the use of nuclear weapons.²⁵⁴ This revision of the Military Doctrine was an unambiguous signal to the Central Asian leaders that Russia's reengagement in the region was part of an effort to re-establish the CIS as a zone of security and military Russian interests. Trade interests, investments and writing off debts were means to this end. It was also a signal to the West that in the CIS, Western interests should be coordinated with Russia's interests and that the former were subordinate to the latter.

Russia's energy engagement

So far in this chapter, I have mainly discussed Russia's military engagement in Central Asia and the general political signals that accompanied this. However, to provide a fuller picture of Russian policy in Central Asia in the period under study, I also feel it necessary to discuss Russia's engagement in the exploitation and transport of energy resources. This engagement involves Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan as well as Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

Russian companies participate through joint ventures with Kazakh companies in the exploitation of three Russian and Kazakh offshore fields in the Caspian Sea.²⁵⁵ The oil pipeline (the Caspian Pipeline Consortium, or CPC pipeline) from the Tengiz field through Russia to Novorossiisk on the Black Sea, which started to operate in 2001, was also a result of Russian-Kazakh cooperation. The Russian oil company Lukoil is involved, apart from Tengiz, in two Kazakh projects, Karachaganak and Kumkol. Kazakhstan also exports oil through the Atyrau-Samara pipeline. Russia's involvement with hydrocarbons from Kazakhstan is well supplemented by

254 S. Ivanov, 'Vystuplenie na soveshchanii ...'

255 See Robert M. Cutler, 'The Caspian Energy Conundrum', *Journal of International Affairs*, 56, 3 (Spring 2003), 89-102; Iurii Borovskii, 'Energeticheskaia bezopasnost Rossiiskoi Federatsii v ramkakh SNG' [Russia's Energy Security in the Context of the CIS], *Analiticheskie zapiski NKSMI MGIMO*, no. 4 (6) (March 2005), p. 25.

many other economic, security and military ties, securing a continued close relationship between two states that are strategically important to each other.²⁵⁶ Russia's ties with Kazakhstan are supplemented by the other Russian economic and security engagements in Central Asia. However, the importance of the Russian-Kazakh relationship is independent of Russia's other engagements in the region – this is a relationship that will continue to grow irrespective of how other relations develop.

In 2003 and 2004, Russia's energy ties with Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan were significantly bolstered. For both countries, natural gas is the most important energy export. The long-term export of Turkmen gas to Russia was secured in April 2003 after several years of difficult negotiations between the two countries. According to an inter-governmental agreement, Turkmenistan will export gas to Russia for 25 years at rates that are favourable to Turkmenistan. Only half the cost will be paid for in cash, the rest taking the form of barter.²⁵⁷ Gazprom, the Russian gas monopoly, on the other hand, acquires Turkmen gas for domestic use. This gives Gazprom considerable flexibility in supplies, which makes it possible to export the more expensive Russian gas to Europe. The agreement was mutually beneficial, and it was at the time unclear which side gained more.²⁵⁸ One provision of advantage to Turkmenistan was the possibility to reconsider the conditions of the agreement every five years. The Russian side received the advantage of a considerable energy presence in Turkmenistan before the Turkmen gas market opens to non-Turkmen companies, a development which is expected within a few years. This was ensured when the Russian companies Gazprom, Zarubezhneft and Itera were awarded exploitation rights in the Turkmen sector of the Caspian in October 2004.

256 Cf. Vitalii Naumkin, "Russian Policy Toward Kazakhstan" in *Thinking Strategically...*, ed. Legvold, pp. 39–65.

257 This arrangement was renegotiated in 2005, and Russia now pays with cash in full. See *RFE/RL Newswire*, 18 April 2005.

258 Michael Lelyveld, "Turkmenistan: Niyazov Seals Energy, Security Contracts With Russia", *RFE/RL*, 11 April 2003.

The successful outcome of the negotiations between Russia and Turkmenistan was accompanied by a security cooperation agreement and a protocol that confirmed a bilateral friendship treaty. For Turkmenistan's president, Saparmurat Niyazov, an important non-energy issue resolved during the gas negotiations was the elimination of a dual citizenship agreement between the two states. Turkmen authorities quickly acted on the agreement and set a two-month deadline for dual-citizenship holders to choose citizenship preference. For Turkmenistan's up to 100,000 citizens with Russian passports, as well as for the reported 100,000 who had applied for Russian citizenship, life was becoming very difficult.²⁵⁹ This led to public outrage in Russia. But the deal was politically important to the Russian energy engagements in Central Asia. Russia wanted to avoid Turkmenistan exporting its gas through other countries, for example across the Caspian Sea to Baku and further through the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline to the Mediterranean.²⁶⁰ That would be a least favoured scenario for Russia. In addition, the energy agreement was meant to be a cornerstone in Russia's relations with Turkmenistan. This relationship had been difficult for some time, partly because of the problems of reaching an agreement. Turkmenistan's strict neutrality in foreign policy meant that many of the usual perks that Russia could offer, such as weapons, military equipment or security cooperation were irrelevant.

Fully-fledged energy cooperation with Uzbekistan materialised a year later. In October 2002 Gazprom acquired an export agreement with the Uzbek energy company Uzbekneftegaz, regulating Uzbek gas supplies to Russia through 2012. In the strategic partnership agreement entered into by Russia and Uzbekistan in June 2004, such cooperation was central. Lukoil and Uzbekneftegaz now had a production-sharing agreement for 35 years, worth around one billion US dollars, in gas fields in southwest Uzbekistan, and Gazprom also invested in development and exploitation.²⁶¹ As with

259 RFE/RL *Central Asia Report*, 3, 16 (1 May 2003).

260 Borovskii, "Energeticheskaia bezopasnost ..." p. 27.

Turkmenistan, energy was a considerable part of the bilateral relationship. While the strategic partnership focused also on regional security, the military cooperation between Russia and Uzbekistan was not particularly extensive. But this did not preclude close cooperation in intelligence.

In Kyrgyzstan as well as in Tajikistan, Gazprom became a supplier of natural gas in 2003. This was gas from Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan bought by Gazprom and resold to Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. With Gazprom assuming the position of intermediary between buyers and suppliers, this arrangement moderated the political consequences of Kyrgyzstan's and Tajikistan's energy dependence on Uzbekistan. At times, the relationships between these states had been very tense. The agreement also contained provisions for assistance from Gazprom in developing Tajikistan's and Kyrgyzstan's own energy resources over the next 25 years.²⁶² From 2002 onwards, Russian companies, especially Gazprom and UES, entered into agreements with Kyrgyz and Tajik authorities on substantial investments in hydro energy and gas, and particularly on the modernisation of power plants in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.²⁶³ This continued throughout 2004, when Russia and Kyrgyzstan agreed on investment in the reconstruction of power plants in Kyrgyzstan to the value of one billion US dollars.²⁶⁴ Some of these deals were brokered with the Russian government's involvement, demonstrating the importance of energy issues in relations with Russia's close partners in Central Asia.

In Tajikistan, investments in hydro energy were explicitly tied to the Russian military base in the country when this was formally established in 2004. The planned investments

261 Antoine Blua, "Russia/Uzbekistan: Presidents Sign Strategic-Partnership Agreement", *RFE/RL*, 17 June 2004; Borovskii, "Energeticheskaia bezopasnost ...", p. 29.

262 Bruce Pannier, "Central Asia: Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan Hope Gazprom Deals Will Make Their Winters Warmer", *RFE/RL*, 22 May 2003; Borovskii, "Energeticheskaia bezopasnost ...", p. 29.

263 See Jonson, *Vladimir Putin and Central Asia*, pp. 103–104 and 107–110; Borovskii, "Energeticheskaia bezopasnost ...", p. 30.

264 *RFE/RL Central Asia Report*, 16 November 2004.

originated with Russian companies and with the Tajik government's reinvestment of cancelled debts to Russia. This part of the deals surrounding the Fourth Base was particularly useful to Tajik and Russian companies and politicians. Not only were they necessary to develop Tajikistan's aluminium industry, but they also had the potential to solve Tajikistan's energy problem, which added credibility to Russia's position as a guarantor of Tajik security.

Summing up: Russia's policies in Central Asia

Russia's relations with the Central Asian states before the period under study were tilted towards the domination of military and security interests over other interests, although economic interests did play a part as well. Especially in the Central Asian states less discussed here (Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan) energy was an important part of Russia's interests. However, the parts of the government occupied with security and military policies took on top-level responsibility for Russia's relations with Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. The infrequent attention given by other parts of the political elite to Central Asia as a whole could have led to conflicting signals to the Central Asian governments.

The first reaction in Russia to the Western request to use of bases in Central Asia seemed to be confusion over how to respond. Policymakers issued conflicting statements, and in particular, Sergei Ivanov's negative response contradicted Putin's initial acknowledgement of the American right to retaliate. Following Ivanov's statement, there were efforts to dissuade the Central Asian governments from responding positively to the American request. This was connected to Vladimir Rushailo's visit to the Central Asian capitals on 18–21 September 2001. Following his round-trip, the Tajik government, already hesitant, seemed to be preparing to give a negative answer to the Western request, while the Uzbek government seemed more equivocal than it had been. Moscow may also have tried to become effectively a mediator between the United States and the Central Asian governments, but this effort did not succeed.

Following the establishment of the Western bases in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, Russian interest in Central Asia increased. In the period from 11 September 2001 and through spring 2002, not only military and security officials, but also many other officials and politicians went to the Central Asian capitals to discuss various aspects of the war against terror and Central Asian security. This contact was mainly concerned with the military and security spheres, a consequence of the war on terror. However, there was some contact connected to the energy sphere as well.

Military and security issues dominated the content of ties between Russia and the Central Asian states, especially regarding Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. There were several such issues:

- Joint military exercises under the aegis of the Collective Security Treaty, and later the CSTO;
- Efforts to create a joint military force under the command of the Russian General Staff within the CSTO;
- Plans for Russian bases in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan;
- The development of a CIS anti-terrorism centre in Central Asia, located in Bishkek.

These issues had three characteristics. Firstly, the new security situation in Central Asia motivated the governments involved to find solutions to Central Asia's security problems. While the answers were not really new, they were nevertheless different from the situation before September 2001. While joint military exercises had also been carried out at regular intervals before September 2001, the exercises after September 2001 focused on combating terrorism. They were also larger and more frequent than had previously been the case. The plans for a Russian base in Tajikistan had been more or less forgotten after their initiation in 1999, but they were reopened in 2001. This also applied to the CIS anti-terrorism centre. However, the plans for a base in Kyrgyzstan were new.

The second characteristic was that Russian-Central Asian efforts to improve Central Asian security did not involve the West. Joint exercises with NATO troops in the region had an emphasis on civil-military coordination in emergency

situations, and they did not involve Russia. Exercises involving Russia were larger, directed more explicitly against terrorism or military aggression, and did not involve Western troops. This seemed a natural consequence of the Central Asian states' close ties to Russia on the one side, and the newer benefits of being in the centre of attention on the other side. But it is remarkable that there was no effort to involve both NATO and Russia in at least one of these exercises. Accordingly, there were no exercises involving scenarios for shared international assistance to the Central Asian governments in case of an emergency.

Thirdly, the Russian policy in Central Asia in the period under study centred on military solutions to security problems. This reduced the possibilities for closer cooperation with Uzbekistan. There was some cooperation on intelligence and a less strained relationship between Russia and Uzbekistan but the Russian strategic reassertion in Central Asia initially passed Uzbekistan by. Uzbekistan's close strategic partnership with the United States left Islam Karimov little room for military cooperation with Russia at the time. While the Russian military engagement in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan partially compensated for this, the prominence of Uzbekistan in the region made it a glaring exception for some time to come.

However, the strategic reassertion was not only conducted through military engagement, although this was the most central part of it. As regards Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, energy relations were just as important. And in conjunction with the opening of the bases in Kant in 2003 and in Dushanbe in 2004, more attention was paid to financial and trade relations between Russia and Kyrgyzstan and Russia and Tajikistan. In conjunction with the establishment of the Kant Base, Kyrgyzstan's debts to Russia were reduced by two-thirds. The Fourth Base outside Dushanbe was accompanied by a larger financial package. In effect, all of Tajikistan's debts to Russia were written off against Russian ownership of the satellite surveillance station "Okno" and Tajik investment in a Russian-owned hydro electrical power plant in Tajikistan. In

addition to the Kant base Kyrgyzstan acquired Russian arms worth 3 million US dollars for free, while Tajikistan received an investment package of 2 billion US dollars.²⁶⁵ The bases themselves were paid for by Russia, but in return, Russia was exempt from paying rent. It is worth noting that the financial gains for Tajikistan from the establishment of the Fourth Base were far more substantial than the compensation Kyrgyzstan received for the Kant Base. However, as cooperation between Russia and Kyrgyzstan on hydro electric energy developed further in 2004, Kyrgyz gains from the closer relations with Russia grew by an estimated one billion US dollars.²⁶⁶

Notwithstanding the trade and financial arrangements, the opening of the Russian bases in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan bases highlighted the lack of trade and financial ties in the relations between Russia and these Central Asian states. The Russian government and the business community had ignored repeated calls from the Kyrgyz and Tajik government and from Russian officials in charge of relations with Central Asia for more Russian investment in the region for a long time. Serious interest from the Russian business community and serious financial assistance from the Russian government came only in conjunction with the Russian bases in Central Asia. In this respect, the Russian bases underlined the continued emphasis on military and security ties with the Central Asian governments.

Conclusions

To outline the main conclusions in this chapter in brief, the Russian activity towards the Central Asian states was substantial from 9/11 onwards. It was characterised by an emphasis on military and security ties, but it was complemented by comprehensive energy engagement. Russia's activity took place in structures which excluded the West. Statements that indicated reservations towards Western

265 It remains to be seen how much of this investment package that will be realised.

266 *RFE/RL Central Asia Report*, 16 November 2004.

activity in Central Asia also accompanied the renewed Russian activity. The main partners in Russia's policy in Central Asia were Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. These features had been characteristic of Russian policy in Central Asia before 9/11 as well. But while policy had at best seemed half-hearted before, there was a new determination to achieve results from the Russian side after 9/11. This was especially visible in the way in which Russia offered real investments, real economic ties and substantial military support to Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

Chapter 6

Analysis: Russia's reactions to the Western bases

This chapter contains a systematic, comparative analysis of the three aspects of Russia's reactions to the Western military bases in Central Asia. The aim is to discuss the degree of correspondence and possible discrepancies between the three aspects of Russia's reactions. In particular, I shall be discussing the question of whether Russia's ambitions towards Central Asia were portrayed differently in relations with the West than inside Central Asia.

The chapter starts with a summary of the main conclusions from the previous chapters.

Reactions towards the United States and the West

Initial hesitation before the president's decision. There was considerable initial hesitation concerning how Russia should respond to the American request to use Central Asian airbases in the assault on the Taliban. While Russian policymakers realised that possible Western deployment would be decided by the Central Asian governments, it was obvious that Russia's position on the issue would be important as well. The decision to welcome the Western military bases was made by President Putin after extensive consultation with the main

decision-makers in the security field. Putin's stance, endorsing an American military presence in Central Asia was supported by only a minority of the political elite.

Stability in the communication of Russia's position.

Russia's position on the Western bases as it was communicated to the United States and the West remained relatively stable throughout the period of study. This particularly concerns the division of labour between the three main figures involved in this communication: Vladimir Putin, Sergei Ivanov and Igor Ivanov. Putin emphasised Russia's support for the war on terrorism and Russia's alignment with the West in this campaign. Putin did not at any point express concerns over the Western military presence in Central Asia. Quite the contrary, even in September 2003 he stated that Russia "welcomed US activity in Central Asia".²⁶⁷ The defence minister, meanwhile, communicated Russia's worries, and the foreign minister conveyed the nuances of the Russian position.

A change of emphasis occurred in 2002. In spite of the relative stability of Russia's response to the appearance of Western military bases in Central Asia, a change of emphasis did occur from spring to autumn 2002. After the Moscow summit in 2002, Putin mentioned the 'shared strategic goals' less often when referring to Russia's alignment with the West in the war on terrorism, and instead used the expression 'coinciding goals'. Igor Ivanov expressed reservations about the United States' "geostrategic" goals in the war on terrorism as early as March 2002, and connected his reservation explicitly to the American military presence in Central Asia.²⁶⁸

267 Vladimir Putin, "Vystuplenie i otvety na voprosy v Kolumbiiskom universitete" [Speech and question and answer session at Columbia University], 26 September 2003.

268 "Russian minister calls on USA to put cards on table over Central Asia."

The Russian political debate

Putin's absences and appearances. Putin's role in the domestic debate on the Western bases in Central Asia can be characterised as being 'above politics', a heritage from the time of Boris Yeltsin's presidency.²⁶⁹ In the debate, the president was conspicuous by his absence. He failed to explain the choice of a strategic alignment with the West in the war on terrorism. This was especially noticeable to the large part of the elite that did not agree with the strategic alignment. When Putin did finally make an effort to gather support for his policy, choosing a consultative body – the State Council – to do so indicated that the aim was not to compromise with the political elite but to co-opt it. The effect was less room for general criticism. A majority of the political elite, however, continued to disagree with the strategic alignment. The Kremlin's efforts to gather support for the strategic alignment could be described as too little, too late. This was pertinent to the debate on the Western bases in Central Asia because the bases were the most visible, and most controversial, consequence of the strategic alignment. Throughout 2002, criticism of the bases in Central Asia became increasingly synonymous with criticising choosing a strategic alignment with the West. However, as the scope for criticism of the strategic alignment narrowed, expressing concerns about the Western bases became a way of expressing such criticism indirectly.

A varying range of participants. The range of participants in the internal debate varied over time. While at times the military-security constituency dominated the debate, at other times – for example from November 2001 to March 2002 – large parts of the political elite participated. The main governmental participants were the defence and foreign ministers. Another notable participant closely associated with the official line was Mikhail Margelov, chairman of the Federation Council's Foreign Affairs Committee.

269 Ordeshook, "Re-examining Russia: Institutions and Incentives".

A narrow range of topics. The topics in the debate were framed in increasingly narrow terms. In autumn 2001, an important topic was the perception of unilateral Russian concessions to the United States. The Western bases in Central Asia were most frequently mentioned as a concession. Two other topics emerged between October 2001 and January 2002; the question of why Russia had 'lost' Central Asia, and the issue of the changed strategic situation in the region. These topics quickly became framed within a geopolitical perspective. Accordingly, the main underlying premise became the issue of 'who offers what in a zero-sum game?' Alternative interpretations, such as shared goals in the strategic alignment, disappeared from the debate. Answers to why Russia had lost Central Asia increasingly concentrated on financial explanations and security explanations. The truths were soon established – the United States paid more for their military presence in Central Asia than Russia could. Russia had also failed to address the security challenges in the region. The discussion of the changed strategic situation focused on possible American aims for the engagement in Central Asia, and the question of how the strategic balance in the region might develop. In this discussion, a substantial worry was that the Americans might have come to Central Asia to stay. In sum, the future strategic situation in the region was interpreted as largely depending on the interests and resources of the United States and Russia.

Russian policy in Central Asia

Dominance of military and security ties. By 2000, the dominance of military and security ties in relations between Russia and the Central Asian states had been firmly established. After 9/11, Russian policymakers realised that Russia needed to provide economic incentives to the Central Asian states to expand cooperation and strengthen Russia's position. Even so, the understanding that economic incentives were more effective in securing Russian influence than

assurances of eternal friendship came only slowly, as evident from the Russian State Duma's repeated delays in approving the restructuring of Kyrgyz gas debts in spring 2002.

The period after September 2001 saw an increase in military and security cooperation between Russia and the Central Asian states. This included the establishment of Russian bases in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, the establishment of a CIS anti-terrorism centre in Bishkek, and more frequent joint military exercises under the aegis of the Collective Security Treaty/CSTO. In sum, the Russian policy in this respect developed considerably in the period under study, under what has been aptly described as a 'strategic reassertion'.²⁷⁰

The use of financial and economic incentives in strengthening military and security cooperation. The dominance of security and military ties in the Russian policy towards the Central Asian states did not preclude developing financial and economic ties. This development was initially slow in coming, mainly because Central Asia was not seen by Russian business as a region ripe for massive investment. However, particularly after September 2001, policymakers in Russia started to realise that investments in the Central Asian states could only benefit Russian security ties with the region. Financial incentives accompanied the establishment of the Kant Base in Kyrgyzstan in 2002 and 2003, but the restructuring of debts and deliveries of military equipment to Kyrgyzstan were modest compared with the financial compensation Tajikistan received when the Fourth Base was established a year later. While this development seems connected to the differing security policies of Kyrgyzstan's and Tajikistan's governments, the Russian awareness of the need to provide financial incentives in security cooperation also increased throughout the period under study.

Military and security cooperation did not include Western countries. The renewal of activity in the military and security sphere took place without cooperation, and with little contact

270 Allison, "Strategic reassertion in Russia's Central Asia policy."

below the top level with the United States or NATO. When the US and NATO trained and equipped personnel and forces in Central Asia, this took place in parallel with and separate from Russian efforts. This was also evident in the institutional framework for security cooperation, as organisations and programmes that included Russia (CSTO, SCO) did not include NATO member states and vice versa.

The strategic reassertion of Russia in Central Asia initially passed Uzbekistan by. This was a consequence of the focus on Russian military engagement, and military ties with the Central Asian states, in the strategic reassertion. Uzbekistan's policy of military cooperation with the United States and no military relations with Russia did not change after 9/11. However, this changed gradually throughout 2004 and 2005 as the US adopted a less enthusiastic attitude towards Islam Karimov's regime and Uzbekistan became increasingly reliant on Russia as a security and, later, strategic partner.

Correspondences and discrepancies

To what extent are there correspondences between the three aspects of the Russian response to the Western bases in Central Asia? Do the different aspects of the response seem to be coordinated? Does external policy, for example towards the Central Asian states, seem to reflect the domestic debate?

Or, if there is a lack of correspondence between the three aspects of the Russian response, are the participants in the domestic debate altogether different from the main communicators of Russian foreign policy on the topic under study here? Does there seem to be a lack of coordination between Russia's response directed towards the West and its policy in Central Asia? Can one describe any possible lack of correspondence between the three aspects of the response as discrepancies?

Correspondences between the aspects of the response

Overlap of participants. One source of correspondence between the three aspects of the Russian response is the degree to which participants in the Russian political debate overlapped with those who were charged with communicating the Russian response to the West, or those who participated in policymaking towards Central Asia.

The participants in the Russian political debate mostly come from three groups: security and military officials and retired officers, Duma and Federation Council politicians, and prominent members of the government, which includes the president. The president, defence minister and foreign minister had the main responsibility for communicating the official Russian reactions towards the United States. Accordingly, they also provided a correspondence with and even a connection to the Russian political debate.

There was a similar correspondence between the Russian political debate and the Russian policy in Central Asia. The main participants in Russian policymaking towards Central Asia were prominent security and military officials, especially the secretary of the Security Council, Vladimir Rushailo, the president, defence minister and the foreign minister. In January 2002, when the interest surrounding the Western bases in Central Asia peaked in Russia, Duma representatives also participated in Russian signalling towards Central Asia. However, one cannot assume that this signified participation in policymaking as such, because of the general lack of influence that the Federal Assembly, including the Duma, has on foreign policy. Putin, Sergei Ivanov, Igor Ivanov, the General Staff head, Anatolii Kvashnin, and the head of the Russian Border Service, Konstantin Totskii, provided the overlap between the Russian political debate and Russian policy in Central Asia.

The two directions of Russian foreign policy discussed here – towards the West and Central Asia – overlapped through the efforts of Putin, Sergei Ivanov, Igor Ivanov, his deputy Viacheslav Trubnikov and Vladimir Rushailo.

In sum, although certain correspondences between the three aspects of the Russian response were provided through the participants in debate and policymaking, relatively few participants participated in more than one aspect of the response. However, the participants that were involved in more than one aspect of the response were very prominent, including the president and his closest advisors.

Similarity and overlap of expressions and topics. The overlap of participants between the three aspects of the Russian response also points towards possible correspondences in the expressions used and between the topics in the Russian political debate and the content of foreign policy.

Central policymakers' expressions were rather similar in all aspects of the Russian response. However, the main correspondence between topics in political debate and in policy was between the dominance of military and security officials and ties in Russia's Central Asia policy and the dominance of security considerations and strategic issues in the Russian political debate. This was not only an overlap of participants. In the political debate, there was a tendency for the security issues to be debated more thoroughly and with more diverse participation than economic issues. For example, very few participants in the Russian political debate stressed positive economic gains for Russia from aligning with the West in the war on terrorism and consenting to Western military bases in Central Asia.²⁷¹ When the issue was raised, there was little or no response. Most comments focused on strategic gains for Russia from the alignment with the West.²⁷² Economic gains were seen as befalling the Central Asian states only, and mostly in relation to the United States. In the relationship with the Central Asian states, security issues were emphasised over economic issues. When economic ties with the Central Asian states were made an issue, this was as a prerequisite for attaining security goals.²⁷³ The Russian

271 The issue was raised by Ilichev, "Doroga na Krouford"; see also Kulagin, "Dvoevlastie' vo vneshnei politike".

272 E.g. Fedorov, "Rossiia stoit pered vyborom"

government was criticised for not doing enough to strengthen business and economic ties with the region, and this was cited as a reason for the delays in and problems with strengthening Russia's strategic position.²⁷⁴

The emphasis in the Russian political debate on security issues and arguments seems connected to the dominance of security and military officials in Russia's policy in Central Asia. In contrast, it is very difficult to see any such correspondence between the Russian political debate and the official policy towards the West as regards the Western bases in Central Asia. The political debate reflected official policy towards the West in a different way: through a disagreement in the Russian political elite with the strategic alignment with the West. As outlined in chapter 4, this disagreement had already been commented upon in the debate in autumn 2001 and was most often referred to as the elite's 'unconvinced support' for the strategic alignment.²⁷⁵ While a minority of the elite supported the strategic alignment, the willingness to share the political burden for the strategic alignment in the domestic Russian setting was limited. Those who supported the strategic alignment and the president's policy participated in the political debate to a lesser extent than those who did not. And as the prospect of a long-term Western military deployment in Central Asia became more likely, the support for the strategic alignment decreased. This again limited the discussion of the strategic alignment in the political debate. After the Kremlin's efforts to reassure the political elite in February and March 2002, and the president's efforts to co-opt the political elite in September 2001 and May 2002, criticism became less widespread. But there was also little discussion of, or support for, the strategic alignment with the West.

273 See Panfilova, "Patrushev, Totskii i Ramsfeld ..."; Panfilova, "Na zapad ..."

274 E.g. Panfilova, "Tiazhelo v tadzhiksko-rossiiskom uchenii..."

275 See Riabov, "Elita ne pospevaet"; "Putin ushel v otryv".

Discrepancies between the aspects of the response

This leads onto a discrepancy between the Russian political debate and the official response to the West. These two aspects of the Russian response to the Western bases in Central Asia did not correspond. This lack of correspondence left an impression that the official response to the West had not resonated well with the political elite. Indeed, the domestic political support for it could be and was questioned. However, the lack of correspondence had another component – the political debate did not influence Russia's official line directed towards the West. As concluded in chapter 4, this may have been a consequence of what seemed to be conscious efforts from the Kremlin to reduce the impact of domestic criticism on the Russian-American relationship.

On the one hand, one may argue for several reasons that there was nothing unusual in the lack of correspondence between the Russian political debate and the official line directed to the West. Firstly, governments do not always let domestic debate influence their foreign policies, especially when unpopular policies are concerned. Though this is of course a typical feature of undemocratic regimes, it is hardly unusual in democratic states either. Secondly, there are different traditions of unity or dissent around foreign policy issues in different countries. In Russia, one cannot speak of a broad foreign policy consensus, although policymaking in Putin's first period was more based on consensus and less politicised than under Yeltsin.²⁷⁶ Under Putin, the tendency has been for disagreements to be less open and vocal than was the case previously, but there has nevertheless been a certain level of discussion. A third reason is that when foreign policy is the president's domain, as indeed it is in Russia, there may be dissent within the political elite, but this may influence policy less than in states where several institutions are involved in foreign policymaking. A fourth reason is that those who oppose a policy are more inclined to defend their

276 See Lo, *Russian Foreign Policy* ...pp. 3–6; Lo, *Vladimir Putin*

position in public than those who support it. This is particularly relevant in Russia, where a military-security constituency eagerly debates foreign policy, and there is widespread opposition to policies that bring Russia closer to the West. As a consequence, those who agreed with the strategic alignment may simply have reasoned that repeated statements of support for the Western military bases in Central Asia would not increase public support for the strategic alignment with the West in the war on terrorism.

On the other hand, certain features of the lack of correspondence between the official policy towards the West and the Russian political debate were arguably remarkable. Firstly, this lack of correspondence reflected a divide between the parts of the elite that preferred different directions in foreign policy. The military bureaucracy was still largely opposed to closer integration with the West, and even those who agreed that this was indeed necessary found it difficult to accept the appearance of Western bases in Central Asia. Therefore, it seemed significant that those who were sceptical of the Western bases in Central Asia retained a responsibility for Russia's Central Asia policy, while those in favour of the strategic alignment were left in charge of relations with the West. This leads on to a second point. The lack of correspondence between the Russian political debate and the official line towards the West contrasted with the correspondence between the political debate and Russia's policy in Central Asia. This is in itself interesting. Russia's Central Asia policy was well-founded in the Russian political elite, at least in the way the elite expressed itself in the political debate. The official line towards the West did not however enjoy a similar level of support. Thirdly, Putin's efforts to co-opt the political elite in September 2001 and May 2002 indicated that he wanted to gather support for the strategic alignment with the West, yet he made few other efforts to explain the strategic alignment and gather support for it. The efforts left a half-hearted impression. This may be because co-optation was the only way to produce a semblance of collegiality in foreign policy without compromising the

strategic alignment with the West.²⁷⁷ However, to take the matter further than co-optation and seek to broaden support for the strategic alignment would perhaps have risked sparking off an adverse reaction.

The portrayal of Russia's ambitions

How were Russia's ambitions towards Central Asia portrayed in relations with the West? How did they come across in the actual Russian policies in Central Asia? Were there any discrepancies between the ways in which this part of Russian foreign policy came across in the official line directed towards the West and in the actual policy towards Central Asia?

In the official line towards the West, Russia's ambitions in Central Asia were referred to indirectly. A recurrent theme was the emphasis placed on the Western military presence in Central Asia being temporary – and the importance of maintaining transparency around the bases and the transport of Western troops. This was repeated from autumn 2001 and throughout the period under study. The topic became especially important in January 2002, when the Russian political debate went through a 'second wave of apprehension' as regards the Western military bases in Central Asia.²⁷⁸ The issue of the temporary, transparent nature of the Western military presence was then brought into the bilateral relationship with the United States, where Russian worries met with repeated US statements and assurances that the military presence was indeed temporary and limited.²⁷⁹ But even after these assurances, wariness about the Western military bases in Central Asia was evident in statements by the foreign minister as well as the defence minister.²⁸⁰

277 Cf. Lo, *Vladimir Putin ...* p. 20.

278 Abramova, "SShA v predelakh ..."

279 See "Central Asia: Franks Says No Permanent U.S. Bases In Region"; "Zamestitel Gossekretaria SShA nazval slukhi ..."; *RFE/RL Newslines*, 11 February 2002.

280 "Russian minister calls on USA to put cards on table over Central Asia"; *RFE/RL Newslines*, 21 May 2002; *RFE/RL Newslines*, 27 February 2003; Shishkunova, "Baz NATO ..."

While the insistence on a temporary Western military presence in Central Asia referred indirectly to Russian interests in Central Asia, other statements were more direct. Another topic in the official line towards the West was that of Central Asia as a sphere of Russian interests, and a Russian foreign policy priority. This was underlined by an emphasis on the limitations on the Western military presence, i.e., that it had only been established for non-offensive purposes. Putin made explicit references to Central Asia as a sphere of Russian interests in June 2002, while in April he had declared the CIS as a Russian foreign policy priority.²⁸¹

However, the clearest reference to Russian ambitions in Central Asia came as late as October 2003 in a statement directed towards the West. In his remarks at the press conference after meeting NATO's defence ministers in Colorado Springs, Sergei Ivanov emphasised that Russia would boost its military presence in the CIS and particularly Central Asia, and that Russia retained the right to use military power in "[this] crucial sphere for our security", that is, the CIS.²⁸² While the official line towards the West was consistent on the existence of Russia's *interests* in Central Asia throughout the period of study, the defence minister's clear statement of Russian ambitions reflected a real change in Russia's policy in Central Asia. A reassertion was taking place. Therefore, when considering whether Russia's ambitions in Central Asia came across differently in relations with the West from Russia's actual policy in Central Asia, it is reasonable to discuss the period before October 2003, when reassertion had not yet made its way into Russian-Western relations.

As discussed in chapter 5, the increased Russian interest in Central Asia was evident in autumn 2001 from 11 September onwards. This was not remarkable, but a natural consequence of the impending military campaign in Afghanistan and the role of the former Soviet Central Asian states in this campaign. However, one could also see signs that Russia was

281. "Interviu kitaiskoi gazete 'Zhenmin zhibao'".

282. Shishkunova, "Baz NATO ..."; *RFE/RL Newslines*, 10 October 2003.

strengthening its ties with Central Asia, first with Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. The first nine months after September 2001 were characterised by close multilateral and bilateral contact between Russia and the Central Asian states, via the CIS, the Collective Security Treaty and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation. Plans for a joint Russian-Kyrgyz military base in southern Kyrgyzstan had already been launched in October, while the renewal of the plans to transform the 201st Division to a Russian base in Tajikistan took place in December.²⁸³ The Russian government repeatedly stated that the Russian base at Kant had not been established because of the Western Manas Base at the other side of Bishkek but out of concern for the security challenges in Central Asia in general. Accordingly, the plans were presented as relevant only to the regional security of Central Asia and as a Russian-sponsored effort to combat terrorism. This representation was similar in statements to Western, Central Asian or Russian audiences. And Russia's interests were presented relatively similarly in relations with the West and with Central Asia.

However, there were two differences. Russia's relations with the West were characterised by top-level contact, repeated assurances of a strategic alignment in the war on terrorism and an emphasis on political ties. Therefore, Russia's reassertion in Central Asia did not make its way into the relationship with the West until Sergei Ivanov explicitly placed it there in October 2003. The relations with Russia's main partners in Central Asia – Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan – were different. Here, close organisational ties and technical support complemented everyday contact at many levels, whether in the political, military or economic spheres. Not only was it possible to convey a wider range of messages than was possible in the relationship with the West; partnership in Central Asia went well beyond the strategic level. The reassertion affected these states directly. Nothing of the sort was taking place in relations with the West. Therefore, changes of nuance and emphasis in Russian policy were not

283 *RFE/RL Newslines*, 9 October 2001; *RFE/RL Newslines*, 10 December 2001.

necessarily as easily understood in the West as in Central Asia. Secondly, it is important to remember that this development and the entire Russian reassertion in Central Asia were taking place in security structures of which neither the US and NATO were members or observers. There were no regular connections between Russian-sponsored and Western-sponsored mechanisms for cooperation on security or military matters. This was a contrast to repeated Russian assurances that the relationship with the United States in Central Asia was a cooperative, rather than a competitive, relationship.²⁸⁴ It also made the emphasis placed on multilateral organisations in providing regional security appear as another way of excluding the West.

Conclusions

In this chapter, I have discussed the correspondences and discrepancies between the aspects of the Russian response to the establishment of Western bases in Central Asia. While there was a discrepancy between the Russian domestic political debate and the official policy towards the West, I found that the dominance of military and security ties in Russia's Central Asia policy corresponded to an emphasis on strategic and security considerations in the domestic political debate. As regards Russia's ambitions in Central Asia, they were clearly present in Russian policy in Central Asia only a few weeks after 9/11. In contrast, in Russia's relationship with the West, Russia's ambitions in Central Asia appeared only gradually. From autumn 2001 onwards, they were indirectly referred to when Russian officials underlined the temporary, transparent character of the Western military presence in Central Asia. From June 2002, Central Asia was referred to as a sphere of Russian interests even when addressing the

284 "Sergei Ivanov: Rossiia i SShA ..."; "Interviu kitaiskoi gazete 'Zhenmin zhibao'"; "Putin gotov sotrudnicat s SShA v reshenii problem Srednei Azii" [Putin is ready to cooperate with the US in solving Central Asia's problems], *gazeta.ru*, 26 September 2003.

international community. Only in October 2003 were Russian interests tied to Russia's ambitions in Central Asia in a statement relevant to the official line towards the West.

Chapter 7

Motivations for Russian policy

This chapter contains the discussion of a main analytical question in this study. What influences Russian policy in Central Asia after 11 September 2001? Do the findings discussed in the previous chapter suggest any particular motivations? The aim here is not to present an exhaustive overview of every possible motivation for Russian policy, but rather to discuss the motivations suggested by the findings in this study. That is why I prefer to use the term 'motivations' instead of 'explanations'. In addition, the motivations presented here are not *a priori* mutually exclusive, i.e. any combination may occur. To find out how they relate to each other is neither an aim nor a possibility in a study like this. However, there will be a few suggestions that may be explored further elsewhere.

The timeframe set for this study implies that I cannot investigate how motivations for Russian policy in Central Asia developed before 11 September 2001. While it would have been interesting to discuss how the findings here relate to Russian policy in Central Asia before 9/11, this is not the place for such a comprehensive discussion. The findings and discussion here may however shed some light on how Russian policy in Central Asia developed from 9/11 through 2004, which in turn may be a basis for further study.

The analysis of the three aspects of the Russia response to the establishment of Western bases in Central Asia points towards three interesting motivations for Russian policy in

Central Asia after 9/11. I will discuss in turn the domestic politics motivation, a motivation based on the Russian-American bilateral relationship and strategic concerns as a motivation.

Domestic politics as motivation

How could domestic Russian politics have motivated Russia's policies in Central Asia? As noted in the introduction, Central Asia had received relatively little attention in discussions about Russian foreign policy before 2001, with interest coming largely from a military-security constituency. This constituency was primarily interested in strategic issues. In their view of foreign policy, Russia's position in Central Asia, as in the CIS, was an issue of geopolitical influence. Closer relations with the West could easily be interpreted as giving up positions in the CIS, and the findings in chapter 4 suggest that they were interpreted in this way. Accordingly, many in the political elite perceived the choice of a strategic alignment as being in favour of the West and to the detriment of Russia's strategic interests in the CIS. Moreover, this was a part of the elite that had a direct interest in preserving and increasing Russia's interests in Central Asia, as an increased military engagement in the region could increase their influence and possibilities in Russia as well. For example, increased Russian military engagement in Central Asia could enhance the opportunities for military bureaucrats and actors in the defence-industrial complex. Did the changed strategic situation in Central Asia after September 2001 increase their opportunities to influence Russia's policy in the region? Can one see the political elite's misgivings about the strategic alignment as a motivation for Russia's Central Asia policy?

If this were the case, one would not only see a similarity of expressions between the political debate and the official rhetoric in relations with Central Asia, but also an emphasis on the same issues, and perhaps references to domestic considerations in official contact with the states in the region. If domestic discontent brought about a change of policy, it

would have to precede a policy change. This would however not exclude that other motivations as well could have shaped policy.

The political elite's lukewarm support for the strategic alignment is well documented, from the initial doubts raised at the high-level meeting in Sochi on 22 September 2001, to the more widespread discontent that surfaced first in November 2001 and again in January 2002. While such discontent was expressed less often after spring 2002, it did not altogether disappear. There is also evidence that the Kremlin took the implicit criticism from the political elite seriously, as can be seen in the attempts at reassurance by Sergei Ivanov, Igor Ivanov and President Putin from February to May 2002. In addition, these attempts at reassurance, and also contributions to the political debate from participants close to the Kremlin, engaged with the political elite's worries. This happened for example when Mikhail Margelov in January 2002 expressed his certainty that Russia would preserve its influence Central Asia even with an American presence in the region, as discussed on page 72.²⁸⁵ The effort to co-opt crucial members of the political elite through an extended State Council Presidium meeting in May 2002 also showed that the Kremlin was not indifferent to the elite's level of support for the strategic alignment with the West.²⁸⁶ Accordingly, while the Kremlin's efforts to reassure the political elite seemed best characterised as too little, too late, the elite's worries were taken into account, and accordingly, could be a motivation for changes in Russia's Central Asia policy. In other words, the political elite could have influenced the strategic reassertion of Russian policy in Central Asia after September 2001.

On the other hand, the initiatives to establish Russian bases in Central Asia and assist CIS countries with defence equipment, a central pillar in the strategic reassertion, came very quickly after September 2001. The full extent of the political elite's discontent was however not visible before early

285 *RFE/RL Newsline*, 17 January 2002.

286 *RFE/RL Newsline*, 22 May 2002; Nagornykh, "Prezidium Gossoveta vyshel ..."; Zakatnova, "Prezidium Gossoveta zaniatsia ..."

2002. In addition, the emphasis on security and military ties in the strategic reassertion was a natural consequence of previous Russian policy in Central Asia, as well as of the war on terrorism. Therefore, it seems likely that more direct influences than that of the political elite's discontent pushed Russia's Central Asia policy towards a strategic reassertion. It does seem that strategic reassertion followed a conscious effort at the highest level to alleviate some of the least desired effects of an American deployment in Central Asia. The first signs of a strategic reassertion seem not to be tied as closely in with elite discontent as with the immediate consequences of 9/11. However, discontent in the political elite may have reinforced the tendency towards a strategic reassertion, and influenced the Kremlin to continue with the initiatives towards the Central Asian states that followed 9/11. The speed with which these initiatives were followed up, policies implemented and the obvious satisfaction this produced among high-ranking officers and the military-security constituency in general indicate that this may have been the case. With the military-security constituency already taking responsibility for much of Russia's engagement in Central Asia, the issues that were addressed quickly after 11 September, such as military bases, were probably just waiting for approval by the Kremlin. To summarise, domestic factors influenced the shape and speed of the Russian strategic reassertion in Central Asia, but the circumstances of this reassertion suggest that the elite's discontent alone cannot explain it.

Russian-American bilateral relations – a motivation?

Can one say that Russian policymakers let considerations from the bilateral relationship with the United States influence their policy in Central Asia? Russian foreign policy is predominantly Western-centred. One would think that with the new strategic alignment with the West in the war on terrorism, maintaining a good working relationship with the United States was of importance to Russian policymakers.

This was not only because the United States was the most important power in the West, and the only superpower in international politics today, but also because of its leadership in the war on terrorism after 9/11. In addition, in the Western-centred Russian foreign policy, the United States is taken as the "principal point of reference".²⁸⁷ In addition, the findings in chapter 4 suggest that the Kremlin consciously narrowed the room for debate of the strategic alignment, and the Western bases in Central Asia, in what may have been an effort to alleviate the impact of the domestic political debate on the bilateral relationship.

The Russian reactions towards the United States as regarded the Western military bases in Central Asia indicated increasing concerns about the American presence in the region. These worries were accompanied by repeated assurances from Russian foreign policymakers about Russian-American cooperation, as opposed to competition, in Central Asia.²⁸⁸ However, Russian-American cooperation in Central Asia did not materialise, and the Russian-sponsored cooperation there seemed to represent an alternative, not a supplement, to US efforts to enhance security in the region. This was also visible at the rhetorical level of Russian policy in Central Asia. For example, the Security Council secretary, Vladimir Rushailo in Almaty in April 2002 commented that although Russia viewed the US as its strategic ally, "the tasks, goals, and schedule of the Western military presence in Central Asia should be 'clearly determined'."²⁸⁹ In other words, the strategic partnership between Russia and the West did not include partner-like, and open-ended, Russian-American cooperation in Central Asia.

In addition, on the level of practical measures offered to the Central Asian states by Russia, the United States did not emerge as Russia's partner but as Russia's rival. This was emphasised by regular Russian statements such as the one cited above. The message was clear; Central Asia was Russia's

287 Lo, *Russian Foreign Policy ...*, p. 8.

288 "Sergei Ivanov: Rossiia i SShA ..."; "Interviu kitaiskoi gazete ..."

289 *RFE/RL Newslines*, 15 April 2002.

sphere of influence, in which the West, and the US especially, was an outsider. At the level of Russian-American bilateral relations, the cooperation rhetoric was accompanied by demands of transparency around the Western military presence in Central Asia, as well as an emphasis on its temporary character. In sum, cooperation belonged to the rhetorical level, while in its policy in Central Asia, Russia positioned itself as an alternative to the United States.

Why was a Russian alternative to the United States' policy in Central Asia the preferred choice? It is interesting here to take a brief look at the other side of great power relations in the region. While there was little interest on the Russian side in creating an open and cooperative security structure in Central Asia, the United States did not consult Russia or China on its expanding engagement in the region. This pattern of policy has been described as acting "regardless of, rather than in consultation with or as a counterbalance to Russia and China".²⁹⁰ Accordingly, for both Russia and China, balancing behaviour was a safe option for meeting the US as an increasingly important actor in Central Asia. The response could be formed according to Russia's strategic concerns.

Briefly, therefore, if considerations about American actions motivated Russia's policy in Central Asia, this had less to do with cooperation than with competition. The strategic alignment with the West was built on the premise that there was no competition between Russia and the United States. In the reality of Russian-American relations in Central Asia, there was competition for influence between the two states. Accordingly, it does not seem that the consideration of maintaining a good and cooperative relationship with the US mattered as a motive for Russian policy.

290 S. Neil MacFarlane, "The United States and regionalism in Central Asia", *International Affairs*, vol. 80, no. 3 (May 2004): 447-461, 459, citing Todd Diamond, "US Unilateralism Fuels Great Power Rivalry in Central Asia", *Eurasia Insight*, 1 October 2003.

Strategic interests and Russian Central Asia policy

On page 125, the development of Russia's policy in Central Asia was described as a strategic reassertion. It is therefore relevant to discuss whether strategic interests really did motivate this policy. The findings in this study, particularly the conclusions in chapter 5, point towards the use of military and security ties in strengthening Russia's position in Central Asia. In chapter 4, particularly from page 70, it was discussed how the domestic Russian debate in autumn 2001 and winter 2002 became dominated by the view that the competition for influence in Central Asia was a zero-sum game. I will now try to draw the lines between these two sets of findings via a discussion of Russia's interests in Central Asia. This is performed in two steps. First, I shall discuss how Russian strategic interests may be realised in the engagement in Central Asia after 9/11. Secondly, I shall look into the demand side of Russian policy in Central Asia as a possible alternative motivation for Russian policy, before I go back to Russian leaders' own presentations of strategic interests in their presentations of Russian policy in Central Asia.

As mentioned in the introduction, Russia's strategic concerns in Central Asia before September 2001 were to "maintain regional stability, and to prevent 'outsiders' from gaining influence in the Central Asian states."²⁹¹ These concerns reflected one of the first Russian aims in Central Asia from the early 1990s onwards – what Dov Lynch calls Russia's aim to maintain a "Russian-oriented status quo" in the region, closely connected to its claims to being a great power.²⁹² Here, I will see the Central Asian states' orientation towards Russia as especially desirable when it corresponds to Russia's interests in the region. These interests have been described by Dmitry Trofimov as "stability in the region (...);

291 Jonson, "Russia and Central Asia", pp. 98 and 114.

292 Dov Lynch, *Russian Peacekeeping Strategies in the CIS. The Cases of Moldova, Georgia and Tajikistan* (London: Macmillan Press/RIIA, 2000), pp. 175–176.

unrestricted use of the Central Asian transit potential to maintain partner relations with China, India, and Iran (...); [the] continued existence of common economic expanse with Central Asia” to aid “Russia’s economic modernization (...); use of the region’s geostrategic potential (...) to preserve its status of a world and regional power (...); international recognition of Russia’s leading role in the region.”²⁹³ How does Russia’s military engagement realise Russian interests in Central Asia? Does Russia’s energy engagement complement the military engagement in realising these interests? Energy engagement is discussed here because it is the main component of Russia’s engagement in Central Asia besides the military engagement.

The military engagement

Both the base at Kant and the military engagement in Tajikistan are maintained with the aim of contributing to *stability* in the region. In Tajikistan, regime stability seems to be the main aim, while stability as protection from armed incursions and terrorist attacks is more important in the deployment in Kyrgyzstan.²⁹⁴ Establishing a military presence in the two weakest states in Central Asia seems to serve Russia’s interest well in maintaining stability in the region, although there is always a danger that such measures may backfire. This could be the case in Tajikistan, where militant Islamism represents a more immediate threat than in Kyrgyzstan. But this possibility is far outweighed by the benefits of having an opportunity to support the incumbent regime in a country only recently out of civil war. There is also a danger of contributing to great power rivalry in the region, which would hardly increase regional stability.

293 Dmitry Trofimov, “Russia and the United States in Central Asia: Problems, Prospects, and Interests”, *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, no. 1 (19) (2003): 72–82, 76.

294 This view, widespread at the time of the Kant Base’s establishment, was confirmed at a later point by the non-interference of the forces at Kant in the change of regime in Kyrgyzstan in March 2005. *RFE/RL Newslines*, 5 April 2005.

However, to some Russian policymakers, the danger of great power rivalry may not deter them from engagement in Central Asia. Instead, one would expect that should great power rivalry develop, the main task in Russian policy would be to bolster Russia's position by strengthening the military presence.

The bases also serve the interest of maintaining a *Russian-oriented* stability, as they pull the two closest Russian allies in the region closer to Russia. As regards coordination in threat management, regular, Russian-sponsored exercises emphasised the shared goal of maintaining stability and fighting terrorism and incursions. This was the case in "South – Anti-terror", the anti-terrorism exercise in April 2002 as well as the SCO's anti-terrorism exercise in August 2003.²⁹⁵ There were also other forms of assistance and regular contact between Russian, Kyrgyz and Tajik military forces, e.g. in joint training arrangements.²⁹⁶

The bases arguably contribute towards securing Central Asia's *transit potential* in partner relations with other powers close to the region, such as China, India and Iran. While maintaining bases is not sufficient to secure the region's transit potential, it seems a necessary contribution towards having this option in the longer term, because a Russian military presence may be required to maintain the requisite stability. The bases also provide a focus for contact, especially with China, and are a signal of Russia's interests in the region.

As regards the continued existence of a *common economic expanse* with the Central Asian states, the military bases in themselves are less directly connected to this than the various agreements that accompanied the establishment of the bases. There are two types of such agreements. Some pertain mainly to investments in civilian infrastructure, debt reduction and the like. Others refer to investments in military infrastructure

295 RFE/RL *Newsline*, 15 April 2002; RFE/RL *Newsline*, 7 and 11 August 2003. For a good overview of joint bilateral and CSTO exercises that involve Tajikistan, see Plater-Zyberk, *Tajikistan. Waiting For A Storm?* p. 6–7.

296 Kozłova, "Russian military to remain in Kyrgyzstan".

and trade in military equipment and technologies. As regards the Kant Base in Kyrgyzstan, its establishment was accompanied by an agreement that wrote off two-thirds of the state's debts to Russia. In addition, Russia covered most of the costs of establishing the base as well as its maintenance.²⁹⁷ Several of the agreements on military equipment, technologies and training entered into in spring and summer 2002 were also later connected to the establishment of this base.²⁹⁸ In April 2002, a protocol regulated Russia's assistance in the formation of a properly equipped Kyrgyz border service.²⁹⁹ An agreement that allowed Russian military installations in Kyrgyzstan to be maintained for another 7 to 15 years was signed in June 2002, and at the same time it was agreed that Russia would purchase Kyrgyz-produced military goods.³⁰⁰ Apart from technology directly connected to the establishment of the Kant Base, equipment for Kyrgyzstan's air defence system came from Russia, and one source estimated such assistance to be worth around 14 million rubles in the period from 1998 to 2003.³⁰¹

In the process of establishing the Fourth Base in Tajikistan, it was evident that the compensations and accompanying agreements expected by the Tajik side were not going to be matched by the Russian side. Russia, on its side, would have to go through a tough negotiation process to achieve its aims for a comprehensive military presence in Tajikistan. As it turned out, the Russian investment in Tajikistan connected to the establishment of the Fourth Base was far more substantial than Kyrgyzstan had been offered on establishing the Kant Base. Not only was most of Tajikistan's debt written off as the price Russia had to pay to obtain the satellite surveillance station "Okno" in Nurek, there was also substantial Russian investment in hydro energy and in aluminium production. All in all, investments of over two billion US dollars were

297 *RFE/RL Newsline*, 24 January 2003.

298 Vernidub, "Istrebiteli Putina seli v Kirgizii."

299 See Panfilova and Khanbabian, "Patrushev, Totskii i Ramsfeld ..."

300 *RFE/RL Newsline*, 14 June 2002; Kozlova, "Russian military to remain in Kyrgyzstan."

301 Shvarev, "'Shkvali' iz Bishkeka."

planned. In this instance, the establishment of a military base was directly connected to economic ties between Russia and Tajikistan, and one could even say that it could prove to aid Russia's economic modernisation. However, investments like these alone would hardly turn the negative trend in trade and investment between Russia and the Central Asian states. It remains difficult to see how economic ties with the Central Asian states can directly affect Russia's economic modernisation.

The bases are also a step in increasing the region's *strategic potential* for Russia. The establishment of a base in Kyrgyzstan significantly increased the logistical support, as well as the variety of potential tasks, for Russia's military deployment in the region. Both Kant and the Fourth Base are military outposts for Russia to the south, now that other bases and military installations outside of the former Soviet territory have closed down. When it comes to the strategic potential of the bases, it is important to consider the directions in which their potential may be realised. The Fourth Base, and the 201st Division before it, seemed to be connected primarily to stability in Tajikistan, and the continued threat of Islamic militancy in the region in general. This does not preclude other possible strategic aims. The Kant Base and the aircraft stationed there, on the other side, seem ill suited for fighting terrorism in the region.³⁰² However, the presence of the base considerably increases the control of Kyrgyzstan's airspace, important not only to the country's security, but also to Russia's interests. The presence of aircraft at Kant, including an Il-18, suggests that air reconnaissance might be a prioritised task.³⁰³ As a supporting force for the Fourth Base, Kant is rather small, but strategically located for refuelling between Russia and Tajikistan. One may think of other possible strategic aims for establishing an airbase at Kant, such as the Western Manas Base nearby. In addition, neither the proximity of China, nor the importance of Uzbekistan's aspirations to becoming a regional centre of power should be

302 Jonson, *Vladimir Putin and Central Asia...*, p. 96.

303 Plater-Zyberk, *Kyrgyzstan – Focusing on Security*, p. 11.

overlooked. It is therefore a reasonable conclusion that for Russia, the possibility of watching the general strategic scene in Central Asia played a considerable part when establishing the Kant Base. This also seems to have influenced the composition of forces and aircraft at the base. While the Fourth Base in Tajikistan is less directly connected with the regional strategic scene, Russia's acquisition of the satellite surveillance station "Okno" in Tajikistan was highly relevant to its interests. "Okno" became operational in July 2002, and it complements Russia's other military presence in the region with a window to the global strategic scene through space surveillance.

To preserve Russia's status as a *global and regional power*, a military presence in Central Asia is necessary for several reasons. Firstly, this presence signifies Russia's position in the region to other powers with a direct interest in Central Asia, such as the United States and China, as well as to other regional powers whose interest may increase over time, such as Iran and India. Secondly, it is a signal of Russian power to the two states in the region most likely to contend for domination of the region – Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. While the rivalry between these two states in periods becomes less intense, it cannot be overlooked. One cannot exclude that establishing the Kant Base was partly directed against Uzbekistan's claims to regional hegemony. These claims, and practical Uzbek measures, have upset Uzbekistan's neighbours, especially Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. Accordingly, a third reason for Russia to tie military presence in Central Asia to its status as a global and regional power is that a credible claim for regional power status should be underpinned by a military presence. After all, if Russia cannot protect its closest allies in Central Asia, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, it can hardly claim to be a regional power. With two bases complemented by other forms of military assistance in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan Russia's claim to being a regional power was far more credible.

How does Russia's military presence realise the aim of achieving international recognition for its *leading role* in the region? This is tightly connected to being a regional, if not a global, power. With a military engagement, Russia can underpin aspirations for an internationally recognised leading role, through a position as a security guarantor for the region. Nevertheless, comprehensive engagement in other arenas will probably be just as important to secure Russia's interests in Central Asia. Without Russian engagement in the Central Asian economies, other powers will be more welcome in the region than they are today. Thus, while the military presence is necessary to signal that Russia claims a leading role, one may doubt whether it is sufficient. Will other powers accept that Russia plays a leading role and structure their own engagement accordingly? This remains an open question. The United States has kept a relatively low profile after establishing bases in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, but there are no guarantees that other powers will act similarly. While China for now limits its military engagement in Central Asia to the SCO and to growing bilateral economic ties, this might not remain so in the future. Accordingly, a Russian military presence seems necessary to achieve international recognition for having a leading role in the region, but only time will show whether the current size and characteristics of this engagement can lead to such recognition.

A lack of economic engagement

In addition to the military engagement, other types of engagement in Central Asia may contribute to the realisation of Russia's interests in the region. Our attention goes first and foremost to energy engagements. Energy engagements are always interesting in a strategic context, but in Russia's Central Asia policy, they are the main engagements of an economic nature. I will now make a brief excursion into the lack of other types of Russian economic engagement in the region.

Russia's failure to engage in the region's economies outside of the energy sphere has been a source of irritation to Central Asian leaders. This has been an especially acute problem in Russian-Tajik relations. Russian interest has simply not lived up to Tajik expectations.³⁰⁴ In addition, a major economic connection between Russia and the Tajik economy, that of Tajik migrant workers in Russia, was subjected to tensions in the bilateral relationship in 2002, when Russian regulations concerning migrant workers were reviewed.³⁰⁵ The bilateral trade between Tajikistan and Russia has remained at a low level after the end of the civil war. One of the accompanying agreements to the establishment of the Fourth Base in 2004 stipulated substantial investment in Tajikistan's aluminium industry. So far, this is the only major Russian investment in the country. The level of economic interaction outside energy is somewhat higher in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, but not significant enough to draw much government attention beyond speeches at summits. The Russian engagement in Kazakhstan's economy is varied and considerable. This is one of the primary indications that the relationship between Russia and Kazakhstan is different from the one between Russia and the other Central Asian states.

The engagement in energy

On pages 112–116, a considerable Russian engagement in energy was outlined. The conclusion in chapter 5 was that while military and security interests were at the core of the ties between Russia and the Central Asian states, energy

304 Jonson, *Vladimir Putin and Central Asia*, p. 108.

305 The number of Tajik migrant workers in Russia could be as high as 650,000. See Jonson, *Vladimir Putin and Central Asia*, pp. 108–109 and 225, fn. 149, citing the head of the Dushanbe office of the International Organization for Migration, Igor Bosc, in comment to ITAR-TASS, 19 November 2002. The issue of Tajik migrants' status in Russia was partially resolved in connection with the establishment of the Fourth Base. See Chudodetev, "Prishla na bazu."

engagements were a complement. Does Russia's energy engagement also complement military ties in realising Russia's strategic interests in Central Asia?

As outlined on pages 143–144, Russia's interests in Central Asia are to: promote stability, preferably a Russian-oriented stability, secure the region's transit potential, have a continued common economic expanse with Russia in the region, use the region's geostrategic potential, establish Russia as a global and regional power and to gain international recognition for this role.

Energy ties with Russia do not necessarily promote *stability* in Central Asia. The strategic significance of energy leads to a dilemma similar to that of military power; it may encourage great power rivalry. The drive to secure energy resources and to control their transport may lead to a modern 'great game' of power rivalry in a region like Central Asia. A Russian energy engagement in the region, if caught up in a great power rivalry, will not promote stability. On the other hand, Russian failure to develop an energy engagement in Central Asia may also have a negative influence on the region's stability. It may lead to a Russian engagement reliant on military and security ties, and increase Central Asian uncertainty about Russian interests in the region. A failure to engage will also deprive Russia of opportunities to influence the strategic balance. Currently, renewed Central Asian military and energy ties with Russia seem to lead to a continued regional orientation towards Russia. In this respect, while military ties and energy engagement are closely related only in Tajikistan in the case of hydro energy development, the two lines of engagement are both working in the same direction, towards an increased Russian presence.

While the *transit potential* of the Russian military bases is indirect, energy engagement, especially in the development and transport of regional energy resources, is central to maintaining the possibility to connect with China, India and Iran as partners in the future. In this regard, it is especially important to Russia that Russian, not Western, companies control the main transit lines to these partners. One could also

argue that an energy engagement complements Russia's military presence. While the military engagement may not necessarily have a positive effect on partnerships with other powers, the possibilities for cooperation, trade and interaction inherent in the energy engagement could influence partnerships positively.

Likewise, energy engagement and military ties may complement each other in contributing towards the continuation of a *common economic expanse* in Central Asia. The potential is clearly illustrated in the various agreements that accompanied the establishment of the Kant and Fourth bases. However, only in the case of the Fourth Base were agreements concerning hydro energy tied to the establishment of the base. In the case of Kant, a Russian-Kyrgyz investment forum was arranged in conjunction with the inauguration of the base.³⁰⁶ As regards energy, there were no agreements directly related to the establishment of the base. But the energy agreements discussed in chapter 5 coincided with the establishment of the base, and they probably benefited much from the good bilateral relations brought about by the plans for the base. Agreements on energy also accompanied the establishment of a strategic partnership between Russia and Uzbekistan. Accordingly, the connection between an energy engagement and a military presence strengthens a continued common economic expanse in Central Asia. A renewed effort to engage economically in fields other than energy is certainly called for to preserve and strengthen the common economic expanse. But without an energy engagement, Russia would face the imminent danger of disengagement in Central Asia.

The issues of using Central Asia's *strategic potential*, preserving the status as a *global and regional power* and having its role as a *leading power* in the region recognised relate to the combined energy and military engagement in similar ways. For all three aims, it is highly important that Russia have a comprehensive set of energy engagements as well as a military presence in the two bases. This situation

306 See Reut, "Putin otkryl pervuiu ..."

adds credibility to any claim that Russia will have to be important in Central Asia as well as in the world. However, one may discuss whether energy engagement is enough to achieve these last three aims from page 144.

As for using Central Asia's strategic potential, the bases give Russia better opportunities to watch – and potentially also participate – on the region's strategic scene. The energy engagement complements the military bases in a crucial way, because energy resources as a regional strategic arena are no less important to Russia than security. What remains to be seen is how it will develop: will promised investments materialise? Will Russian companies maintain their interest in the region? And will the Kremlin continue to emphasise the importance of economic ties, so that a broader field of economic cooperation can support Russia's energy engagement? The use of Central Asia's geostrategic potential is already there, but to preserve it Russia will have to engage more extensively outside the energy field as well.

A similar line of argument can be seen for the preservation of Russia's status as a global and regional power. Russia's status as a regional power seems secured, at least for the time being. But the question of whether energy and military engagements are sufficient to enhance Russia's status as a global power is more complicated. There are two main reasons to doubt that regional power status in Central Asia may be converted into great power status on the global arena through an energy engagement. First, there is a lack of transport for Central Asia's energy resources to markets outside the region at present. Secondly, while Central Asia's energy resources are substantial and interesting, the unrealistic expectations of the international energy community from a few years ago are now giving way to widespread appreciation of the costs involved in exploiting and transporting them. Accordingly, regional power status in Central Asia is certainly no disadvantage to becoming a truly global power. However, with Russian involvement in other economic fields lagging

behind that of energy, and Russia's problems in fulfilling many other sides in achieving global power status, Central Asia is not sufficient to make Russia a global power.

While it seems that Russia is accepted as playing a leading role in Central Asia, this may not continue unless Russia also becomes more active in fields other than energy and defence. Again, an energy engagement is certainly important to play a leading role in the region, but to preserve this situation, it is only a prerequisite and not a sufficient condition in itself.

To sum up this part of the analysis, Russia's energy engagement in Central Asia is a necessary complement to the military presence to achieve the Russian strategic aim of maintaining a Russian-oriented status quo in the region. Activity within both types of engagement was stepped up during the period under study, and the increases in both fields were at times explicitly connected to each other through political agreements. While a combination of military and energy engagements in Central Asia was not sufficient to achieve Russia's aim in the region, they were necessary. The conclusion from this part of the analysis is that Russia's strategic interests seemed to motivate Russian policy. However, to support the argument, I will use the last few pages of this chapter to take a step back and discuss the case for and against the proposition that Russian policy was motivated by strategic concerns.

Demands for Russian involvement

The discussion in this chapter so far can be concluded briefly in the following way. While domestic concerns, particularly elite discontent, and issues in the Russian-American relationship may have contributed towards Russia's policies in Central Asia after 9/11, strategic concerns seem to have played a more decisive role as motivation for a strategic reassertion, as may be expected. However, other issues may also have played a part. One such issue is particularly prominent; that of Central Asian leaders' demands for a Russian engagement in the region. This issue is considered here as a possible influence on Russian policies in Central Asia after 9/11.

While Central Asia's leaders welcomed broadened Western engagement in Central Asia from September 2001, although not without apprehension, one should not overlook the demand for a Russian engagement as well. The leaders in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Kazakhstan were worried by Russia lacking a strategy towards Central Asia after the fall of the Soviet Union. Russia became a reactive, opportunistic power in a region in which it had every opportunity to be a major player. Western interest in the region at the time was in some ways a disappointment to Central Asia's leaders. The American engagement was focused on Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, on energy and human rights and less on security. This was not a real alternative to a comprehensive Russian engagement. China emphasised economic involvement and did not encroach on a perceived Russian sphere of influence; it preferred an advantageous condominium with Russia in the region.³⁰⁷ Together they sought to minimise foreign influence in the region and especially to contain US influence as well as Islamism.

Putin's reengagement from 2000 met with a positive response for two main reasons. Firstly, Russian engagement could bring investments and military and security cooperation. Secondly, with a balance between Russia, the United States and China, the Central Asian states had more to bargain for, and could avoid excessive influence from one great power alone. Thirdly, the regional security dynamics were important, too. Especially for Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, it was important not to be left alone to cope with the problems of cooperating with Uzbekistan. This applied especially to problems with border demarcation and minorities, and differing ideas on how to fight Islamic fundamentalism.

Statements from Central Asian leaders indicated that a Russian reengagement in the region was welcome. For example, when the Russian-Kyrgyz agreement on the Kant Base was signed, President Akaev stated, "the opening of a military base is evidence of Russia's important role in

307 Cf. Svante E. Cornell, "America in Eurasia: One Year After", *Current History*, vol. 101, no. 657 (October 2002): 330-336.

guaranteeing Central Asian stability and security.”³⁰⁸ In this view, Akaev had support in the political elite.³⁰⁹ The initiative to establish the base belonged to Akaev, and it was closely connected with his aim of making Kyrgyzstan Russia’s main strategic partner in Central Asia.³¹⁰ One view of this issue is that Akaev had more interest in the Kant Base than Putin, because Kyrgyzstan under Akaev had the ideological aim of being friends with everyone. For Russia, on the other hand, the base was more of a symbol.³¹¹ As regards Tajikistan, regime stability here is dependent on a Russian presence, and Tajikistan views Russia as a strategic partner, as well as a guarantor of stability. The Russian military presence is considerable, with the Fourth Base and until late 2004 the control over the border service. While the Tajik government at times would have liked Russia to be more active, in general, Tajik demand has had an impact on Russian policy. This was especially visible in November 2004, when the handover of border control from Russia to Tajikistan started in the Tajik-Afghan section, in spite of previous Russian declarations that Tajik forces were not sufficiently prepared for this task.³¹² Uzbekistan provides a contrast as an example of the connection between demand for Russian engagement in Central Asia and Russian policy. As long as there is no Uzbek

308 Panfilova, “Rossiia zanovo osvivaet ...”

309 Statements to this effect can be found in “Rossiia vozvrashchaetsia?”

310 See *RFE/RL Newslines*, 6 December 2002; Panfilova and Melikova, “S beregov Ganga ...”; “Rossiia vozvrashchaetsia?”

311 Fedor Lukianov, interview with the author, Moscow 19 November 2004.

312 See *RFE/RL Newslines*, 15 November 2004. The last statement on unprepared Tajik forces before the takeover came in May 2004 from the deputy head of the Russian Border Service, Aleksandr Manilov. The Russian ambassador to Dushanbe, Maksim Peshkov, in summer 2004 said that the initiative to transfer border control came from the Tajik government, and that it was too early to carry out a transfer. He also raised fears about border security in the event of a Tajik takeover. See Turko Dikaev, “‘Absolutnyi bred’ generala Manilova” [General Manilov’s ‘complete gibberish’], *Tribune-UZ*, 27 May 2004; “‘Too early’ for Tajiks to take over border control – Russian envoy”, *Itar-TASS*, 1 June 2004; Vladimir Mukhin, “Voennye igry na fone teraktov” [War games on a background of terrorist acts], *Nezavisimoe voennoe obozrenie*, 6 August 2004.

interest in comprehensive military cooperation between the two states, this is out of the question. Other types of cooperation and contacts, however, have benefited from the strategic partnership agreement from June 2004, and this partnership would not have been initiated if not for increasing interest from President Karimov in building a closer relationship with Russia.

But while there is certainly a demand side to Russia's engagement in Central Asia, two points are well worth remembering. Firstly, the demand side should not be overstated. While the Central Asian governments are interested in Russian engagement in their region, and see it as an important component of the strategic balance in the region, it is only Tajikistan that is dependent mainly on Russia for its internal stability. The others can, and could certainly in the period under study, live without Russia, although this was not their best option. This runs contrary to the opinion among the part of the Russian political elite committed to the idea of Russia as a great power, that "Central Asia cannot live without Russia".³¹³ To secure Russian interests in Central Asia, Russia's policy is just as important. Central Asian opportunities cannot be taken for granted. Secondly, Russian activity in Central Asia in the period under study still had not shed a certain fragmentariness, a reactivity that at times led Central Asian leaders to feel insecure about its aims.³¹⁴ Accordingly, the demand from Central Asian leaders for a Russian engagement, always underlined in official speeches and documents, was paired with a wariness of being left without any options other than that of Russia for great power engagement in the region.

313 As stated in interview with the author by Sergei Mikheev. Moscow, 16 November 2004.

314 This view is corroborated by statements made in an interview by the author with Zoir Saidov, that "Russian policy [in Central Asia] is characterised by a fragmentary activity". Moscow, 20 November 2004.

Strategic interests in Russian explanations

An important reason to consider strategic interests as a motivation for Russian policy in Central Asia is that this is how Russian leaders explained it. Strategic interests were presented as motivation for both the military and the energy sides to Russia's reassertion in Central Asia after 2001. Russian leaders, especially President Putin, made statements to this effect on several occasions. For example, after the opening of the Kant Base, Putin met with a group of Russian businessmen at the Russian-Kyrgyz investment forum in Bishkek and urged them to invest more in Kyrgyzstan, saying "to be honest [...] this corresponds to the strategic interests of our country."³¹⁵ Putin also specified Russia's interests in cooperation with Kyrgyzstan in his statement to the press after the inauguration: "to broaden and strengthen our cooperation in the sphere of security and the fight against terrorism and to create the necessary conditions for further progress in the sphere of trade and economy."³¹⁶ Trade, the economy, and strategic interests were mentioned in connection with the establishment of the Fourth Base in Tajikistan as well. While Putin emphasised in his inauguration speech the fight against terrorism, collective security, and stability in Central Asia, the defence minister alluded to the connection between economic interests and military presence when he said, "[the] Russian capital flow [in the Tajik economy] is significant. And this capital should be protected."³¹⁷ Anatolii Chubais, whose idea of a Russian liberal empire based on economic integration and influence in the former Soviet Union has had substantial influence in the Kremlin, was more blunt. At the inauguration of the Fourth Base, he remarked that the energy agreements connected to the establishment of the base were a step

315 Reut, "Putin otkryl pervuiu ..."

316 Vladimir Putin, "Zaiavlenie dlia pressy po itogam rabocheho vizita v Kirgizskuiu Respubliku" [Statement to the press on the results of the working visit to the Kyrgyz Republic], 23 October 2003.

317 Vladimir Putin, "Vystuplenie na rossiiskoi voennoi baze v Tadzhikistane" [Speech at the Russian military base in Tajikistan], 17 October 2004; Parshin, "Tajikistan: The Russians Are Coming Back".

forward in creating a liberal empire.³¹⁸ At the same event, Russian and Tajik officials also remarked that Russia's strategic interests, especially in the regional competition with the US, had been strengthened.³¹⁹ Accordingly, we may conclude that the creation of a common economic expanse in Central Asia, as well as strengthening Russia's strategic position in the region, were prioritised aims of Russian leaders in the establishment of the military bases.

Conclusions

Strategic interests were important as a motivation for Russian policy in Central Asia after 2001, although it was pointed out above that the lack of support in the Russian political elite for the strategic alignment might have contributed in the development of this policy. However, the establishment of Russian bases in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, and also other sides of the military engagement originated in strategic concerns. The energy engagement increasingly complemented the military engagement. In Uzbekistan, where a comprehensive Russian military engagement was not a political option, energy nevertheless provided Russia with opportunities for influence and considerable points of contact. Russian leaders, including the president, explicitly stated on different occasions the connection between energy and military ties.

While strategic interests shaped Russia's engagement, there was also a demand side to it. At different points the leaders in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan were looking for closer, strategic relations with Russia. The balance between energy and military ties within these strategic relations varied, from serious efforts to strengthen the relationship with an energy and economic side in the case of Tajikistan, to the dominance of energy issues in the case of Uzbekistan. Russia's role in the region was of course not shaped only by Russia, but also by its partners.

318 Tsepliaev, "Vostochnaia diplomatiia".

319 Chudodeev, "Prishla na bazu".

Chapter 8

Russian-American relations and this study

In this chapter, I will consider the implications of the findings in the previous chapters for the bilateral relationship between Russia and the United States. The question is not only how the Russian response to the Western bases in Central Asia affected the general relationship. It is also relevant to consider how the Russian response, and the Russian-American relationship in Central Asia, relate to overall Russian-American relations. More specifically, I will discuss the idea of a strategic partnership between these two states, in light of their relationship in Central Asia and the war on terrorism.

The Russian-American bilateral relationship

The relations between Russia and the United States in Central Asia constitute only one side of the overall bilateral relationship. For the first year after 9/11, it was nevertheless a particularly prominent side of the relationship, because the war on terrorism overshadowed many other important issues. This situation did not last. The bilateral relationship between Russia and the United States is characterised by a dependency on top-level, even presidential level, contact. This was the case with the two sets of leaders before George W. Bush and Vladimir Putin. In spite of the criticism this attracted by Bush before he became president, he too eventually embraced the idea of a personal relationship with Putin. Putin, on his side,

seemed determined to develop a close relationship with Bush. When the opportunity to do so opened in Ljubljana in June 2001, Putin also successfully connected with the American president on a personal level. From a focus on Europe during Putin's first 18 months in office, Russian foreign policy reverted to a more traditional Americacentric orientation.³²⁰ This tendency was reinforced by 9/11.

This example illustrates the top-heavy characteristics of the US-Russian relationship. The top-heavy relationship is compounded by a lack of day-to-day contact at lower government levels. In spite of growing bilateral trade, and the United States' position as a major source of direct foreign investment in Russia, economic ties between Russia and the United States lag behind US-Chinese ties for example.³²¹ This leaves it to political contacts and political issues to dominate the bilateral relationship. Security and strategic issues again dominate the political side of the bilateral relationship. This is partly a consequence of the heritage of a relationship between two superpowers. Because of Russia's position as a successor state to the Soviet Union, several of the issues on the Russian-American agenda have a strategic content, e.g. the Strategic Arms Reductions Treaties and the Nunn-Lugar Cooperative Threat Reduction Program.³²² But the lack of other political issues on the bilateral agenda is also connected to Russia's weakness and the strength of the United States. Russia's leverage in international politics is limited, and certainly limited enough for the United States to disregard it on many issues. On the American side, not only are there many issues

320 Cf. Lo, *Vladimir Putin and the Evolution of Russian Foreign Policy*, p. 128.

321 Cf. Goldgeier and McFaul, *Power and Purpose*, p. 347; for a detailed discussion, see Inga Litvinsky, Matt London, and Tanya Shuster, "U.S.-Russian Trade and Investment: Policy and Performance" in *Russia's Uncertain Economic Future*, Compendium of Papers submitted to the Joint Economic Committee (Washington, D.C.: Congress of the United States, 2001), pp. 411-424.

322 The Cooperative Threat Reduction Program was initiated by US senators Sam Nunn and Richard G. Lugar in 1991 to safeguard and destroy weapons of mass destruction in the states of the former Soviet Union.

on which any American administration may ignore Russian interests; under the administration of George W. Bush, the policy of unilateralism meant that Russia's interests were not taken into account even on occasions when it would have been relevant to US policy to do so. In addition comes a tendency on the American side to underestimate Russia's centrality in the international relations of the states of the former Soviet Union.

The war on terrorism and Central Asia

The war on terrorism combined well with, even reinforced, existing mechanisms and priorities in the bilateral relationship. The bilateral relationship was already geared towards security and strategic issues, which were naturally prominent in the war on terrorism. The war on terrorism was given top priority by the American side, and this combined well with the bilateral relationship's dependence on the relationship between the two presidents. As argued by Bobo Lo, the "real shift" in foreign policy after 9/11 was not in Moscow, but in Washington. The role of Russia in the system of international relations was "greatly enhanced", but this was caused not by Russian efforts, but by the redefinition of the international system by the American government.³²³ To President Bush, Russia was an ally in the war on terrorism: the shared threat brought the US and Russia closer to each other.³²⁴ The campaign added direction and emphasis to the bilateral relationship, but it also represented a framework for this relationship. The priority of fighting terrorism overshadowed the lack of shared values and everyday contact that in the previous years had made ordinary conflicts escalate into political problems. In the war on terrorism, the priority was on security and strategic interests, which suited both governments better.

However, the United States shared the war on terrorism not only with Russia, but also with the Central Asian states. Here,

323 Lo, *Vladimir Putin and the Evolution of Russian Foreign Policy*, p. 129.

324 See Goldgeier and McFaul, *Power and Purpose*, p. 331.

the strategic interests of the United States and Russia differed. While Central Asia in Moscow was seen as belonging to a sphere of Russian influence, Central Asia for Washington was a region of increasing importance not only to the war on terrorism, but also to the long-term energy security of the United States and the West. For both powers, there were considerable economic, security and strategic interests in retaining a comprehensive engagement in the region. To Russia, unlike the United States, Central Asia represented a last sphere of influence, as well as a "crucial sphere for [Russian] security".³²⁵ Therefore, it was difficult for Moscow to accept the US military presence in Central Asia, just as it was difficult to accept that the Central Asian states could have security problems that were solved not by Russia, but by the West.

Russian misgivings were perceptible at the level of Russian-US relations in January-February 2002, when American officials found it necessary to reassure Russian politicians that the Western military bases in Central Asia were there only for the duration of the operations in Afghanistan. However, the real impact of Russia's unease on the bilateral relationship coincided with the disagreement between Moscow and Washington over the future of Iraq and the war on terrorism. The standoff over Iraq and later the war there emphasised in Russia's eyes the degree to which the international system was shaped by American unilateralism. Moscow's attention was once more drawn to the presence of Western military bases in Central Asia. Unlike the misgivings of early 2002, the domestic Russian debate about the bases from autumn 2002 to the end of 2003 was muted. It was even more muted on the level of the Russian-American relationship, as the Kremlin tried to establish that lack of support for the strategic alignment was first and foremost a matter for domestic debate. This may have led to a less negative relationship with

325 As stated by S. Ivanov. *RFE/RL Newslines*, 10 October 2003.

the US than would have been the case if more populist considerations had been allowed to influence Russian policy.³²⁶

From autumn 2002 through 2003, the Russian government obviously had concerns over the Western bases in Central Asia. As American unilateralism over Iraq appeared, the Western bases were becoming a problem for Russian foreign policymakers. While the bases were accepted initially as a necessary price to pay for a closer relationship with the United States in the war on terrorism, their long-term presence was difficult to endorse for the Russian government when the war on terrorism started going in a direction perceived as contrary to Russian interests.

Arguably, the problems that arose in the bilateral relationship around the issue of the Central Asian bases should not have been unexpected. The Western, and especially the US, military presence in Central Asia was open-ended. The United States' policy around the Western bases in Central Asia was no less unilateral and no less open for coordination and cooperation than was the case with other policies in the war on terrorism. Cooperation was discouraged from the US side by a lack of consultation and openness towards Russia and China on the American military engagement in Central Asia. Russia, on its side, used the war on terrorism to develop military and security ties with the Central Asian states. This strategic reassertion was closed to the West, because it took place within the framework of the bilateral relationships of Russia and the respective Central Asian states, as well as in multilateral security structures that did not include the West. The Russian reassertion was motivated by Russia's strategic concerns in Central Asia, and not by, for example, considerations arising from the Russian-American bilateral relationship. The emphasis was on competition, not on cooperation. In this respect, Russian and American policies in Central Asia appeared detached from the overall bilateral

326 Cf. Alexander A. Belkin, "US-Russian Relations and the Global Counter-Terrorist Campaign", *Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, vol. 17, no. 1 (2004): 13-28.

relationship during the first year after 9/11. While Russia's alignment with the West in the war on terrorism was built on the premise that there was no competition between Russia and the US, in reality, the Central Asian policies of both Russia and the US inclined towards competition. When the overall bilateral relationship deteriorated in autumn 2002 over Iraq, in one sense, the bilateral relationship was only catching up with what had been visible in Central Asia for several months.

Russian-American relations reconsidered

The problems of the strategic alignment in the war on terrorism revealed themselves earlier in the relationship between the two powers in Central Asia than in the overall bilateral relationship. The Russian and American policies in Central Asia appeared detached from the overall bilateral relationship in the first year after 9/11. In the short term, this was revealed as the bilateral relationship deteriorated with the standoff over Iraq. But this detachment was also an early indication that the Russian-American relationship was going into a less dynamic phase.

Periodic standstills are not a new phenomenon in Russian-American relations. The tendency for this relationship to go through more and less dynamic periods is closely related to the reliance on top-level contacts and predominance of strategic and security issues on the bilateral agenda. When it is difficult to find an understanding on strategic and security issues, or when the leaders of the two states are preoccupied with other issues, the economic issues, and everyday, comprehensive contact in the relationship between the two states are not important enough to make the bilateral relationship go forward. With a bilateral relationship dependent on at least acceptance of the other side's strategic aims and security agenda, it is inevitable that less dynamic periods occur when the Russian and American leaderships have differing views of the international situation.

The development of Russian and American policies in Central Asia from 9/11 through 2004 revealed how strategic reasoning and aims lie behind the two powers' engagements in

the region. Military bases and energy resources mattered for the Russian and American policies in Central Asia. On the Russian side, US aims and interests in the region were seen to be in conflict with Russian aims and interests. US policy, which was characterised by unilateral action and little openness in future plans for the region, was not open to coordination with Russian aims. This is not to say that coordination between Russia and the United States in Central Asia should have been expected. If it were to occur, it would certainly have been an exception to the usual policies of both states. My point here is that there was a marked emphasis on alignment, cooperation and coordination in the war on terrorism in the rhetoric of the two leaderships. Compared with the reality of both states' policies in Central Asia, however, the rhetoric sounded increasingly hollow. This could not but have a negative effect on the overall bilateral relationship as well. Compounded by the different views of the two governments on how to handle Iraq in the war on terrorism, even the war on terrorism was a problematic issue in the bilateral relationship by late 2003.

Prospects for a strategic partnership

Strategic partnerships are based on shared strategic interests, preferably a wide range of interests, and they are, at least in their intentions, quite durable. In this they differ from alignments, which more often concern only one issue, or a narrow range of closely related issues. On the other hand, a partnership has fewer notions of shared security and is less formal than an alliance and it is not based on shared values.

The idea of a strategic partnership between Russia and the United States, bolstered by close relations between Russia and NATO, dates back to the immediate period after the end of the Cold War. For Bill Clinton's administration a partnership with Russia based on shared security interests was a goal early on. However, by 1994 it was apparent that a real partnership between the two states would not develop quickly. The United States had security and strategic interests in many regions and

on diverse issues. Many of these interests did not coincide with Russia's interests and not all issues were relevant to Russian foreign policy.

There were attempts to revive the idea of a strategic partnership at some points before 9/11, notably after the coming to power of Vladimir Putin in Russia and the election of George W. Bush in the US. After 9/11, the strategic partnership idea was embraced both in Moscow and Washington. It seemed that with a common cause and a good personal relationship between the two presidents, obstacles could be overcome and the relationship between Russia and the United States could become a genuine partnership. It was possible to imagine that with the war on terrorism, broader notions of security, and shared strategic interests would strengthen the bilateral relationship and lead to long-term partner relations. However, in Central Asia as well as in the war on terrorism, it became apparent during 2002 and 2003 that the strategic interests were shared, but had a more parallel character: they were perceived – at least from the Russian side – as being mutually incompatible. The relevance of the strategic partnership idea decreased as the impulse to the bilateral relationship from the shock of 9/11 wore off. To date, it has not been possible to revive it.

Chapter 9

Conclusion

Two questions have guided the analysis here. The point of departure for the analysis was the question of what influences Russia's policy in Central Asia after 9/11. The analysis was based on a thorough investigation of Russia's response to the establishment of Western US-dominated military bases in Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and a substantial Western military presence in Tajikistan in 2001 and 2002. Furthermore, a second aim was to discuss how Russia's response to the establishment of Western bases in Central Asia influenced the bilateral relations between Russia and the United States.

Russia's response to the establishment of Western bases in Central Asia was studied at three levels: Russian-American relations, the domestic Russian political debate on the relationship to Central Asia and Russian policy in Central Asia. The three elements of the response were then compared and correspondences and discrepancies between them were discussed. The findings in the analysis were first used to answer the first question posed, i.e., to discuss possible motivations for Russia's Central Asia policy after 9/11. Three motivations were thoroughly discussed; one arising from domestic politics, another connected to the Russian-American bilateral relationship, and one with a background in Russia's strategic concerns. A motivation arising from the demand side of Russian policy in Central Asia – that of Central Asian leaders' demand for a Russian engagement in the region – was also considered. It was concluded that although Russia's

partners also shaped Russia's policy in Central Asia, strategic concerns were more important in the policy as it developed after 9/11.

The second aim was to examine a set of implications of the findings: how the Russian response to the establishment of Western bases in Central Asia influenced Russian-American relations. This discussion considered Russian-American relations in Central Asia in relation to the overall bilateral relationship, and how they affected it in the period under study. Another point here was the prospects for a strategic partnership between Russia and the United States.

I shall now discuss the most important findings and conclusions.

Russia's response to Western bases in Central Asia

The strategic alignment between Russia and the United States in the war on terrorism was controversial to a substantial part of Russia's political elite. In the political elite, criticism of the Western bases in Central Asia was used instrumentally, as a way of criticising the strategic alignment indirectly. The room for criticism of the strategic alignment narrowed throughout autumn 2001 and spring 2002, much as a result of what seemed to be a conscious policy of co-optation of the political elite by the Kremlin. This was connected to the role played in the domestic debate by President Putin. In the debate on the Western bases in Central Asia, he was conspicuous by his absence, and there were remarks from the political elite about his lack of an explanation of his choice of a strategic alignment. However, his forceful, uncompromising presence when he did engage with the elite in efforts at co-optation considerably narrowed the scope for criticism of his foreign policy line. If the intention had been to reassure the political elite, Putin's efforts were too little, too late.

This led to the Russian political debate on the Western bases in Central Asia being constricted to a narrow range of topics, with the basic premise that there was a zero-sum game,

a competition for influence in the region. This finding supports the view that the Russian political elite is still firmly committed to a realist, even geopolitical worldview, seeing spheres of influence as central to a state's power.

At the same time, Russia's policy in Central Asia was characterised by substantial activity from 9/11 onwards, and on account of this, the views of the political elite gradually came to be reflected in the Kremlin's policy in Central Asia. However, Russia's policy in Central Asia was now firmly set within the framework of the war on terrorism. This reassertion may have been based on a rationale for CIS security integration that had been developed in the Kremlin before 9/11, as argued by Wilhelmsen and Flikke.³²⁷ This view is compounded by a finding here, that the reassertion was not motivated directly by the views of the political elite, although the elite's scepticism towards US intentions in Central Asia gradually may have influenced it. A considerable part of the reassertive activity appeared shortly after 9/11, and it was consciously placed within the framework of the war on terrorism. Russian policy in Central Asia was conducted under the cloak of an international campaign shared with the United States. The policy had an emphasis on military and strategic ties, although it was complemented by a growing engagement in energy. The establishment of Russian-controlled bases in the region was explicitly, especially in the case of Tajikistan, tied to economic agreements. In contrast to the rhetoric of Russian-American cooperation in the war on terrorism, the Russian-sponsored structures in the region did not include the West.

Accordingly, Russia's ambitions in Central Asia were clearly present in Russian policy in Central Asia a few weeks after 9/11. In addition, there was a correspondence between the dominance of military and security-related ties in Russia's Central Asia policy and the emphasis on security and strategic

327 Wilhelmsen and Flikke, "Copy That...", p. 25.

considerations in the domestic political debate. Russia's relations with the Central Asian states were also comprehensive, with day-to-day contact.

Again, there was a contrast to how relations with the US were conducted. Russian ambitions in Central Asia appeared only gradually in the bilateral relationship with the United States. This was accompanied by a discrepancy between the Russian domestic political debate and official policy towards the West: the policy towards the West did not reflect the debate in Russia at all. There was also an absence of everyday, comprehensive contact at several levels between Russia and the United States.

Reassertion motivated by strategic interests

The findings in this study support the view that strategic interests were an important motivation for Russia's policy in Central Asia after 9/11. This was accompanied by the observation that the lack of support in the political elite for the strategic alignment with the West, as well as the demand from Central Asian leaders for a Russian engagement in the region contributed to the development of the policy. Strategic interests were defined as maintaining a Russian-oriented stability in Central Asia, securing the unrestricted use of the Central Asian transit potential to maintain partner relations with China, India and Iran, maintaining a common economic expanse with Central Asia, using the region's geostrategic potential to preserve Russia's status as a world and regional power and gaining international recognition of Russia's leading role in the region.

It was argued that Russia's military presence in Central Asia is essential to support a Russian-oriented stability, although neither military bases, nor an engagement in energy unequivocally secures this stability. On the contrary, it was suggested that there is also a danger of great power rivalry in the region. However, for Russian policymakers, this is not necessarily an argument against Russia's engagement in the

region. One can expect that should great power rivalry develop, it may be used in Moscow to argue for strengthened Russian engagement.

Central Asia's transit potential is first and foremost secured through Russia's energy engagements, especially if access to China, India and Iran is controlled by Russian, not Western, companies. The common economic expanse with Central Asia is also promoted by a Russian energy engagement. The engagement is further strengthened by a political connection to the establishment of the Russian-controlled bases in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan and likewise to the establishment of a strategic partnership between Russia and Uzbekistan. It is significant in this respect that the establishment of the bases, especially the one in Tajikistan, was accompanied by a set of energy and economic agreements.

The region's strategic potential for Russia was enhanced by the increased military engagement as well as by Russia's comprehensive energy engagement. This includes both the strategic relevance of the military and energy engagement to Russia, i.e., through the location and capabilities of the new bases and the size of the energy engagement, as well as the importance of these types of engagement as a signal to other powers and to contestants for dominance inside the region on Russia's central position in Central Asia.

When it comes to Russia's status as a regional and global power and the aim of achieving international recognition for its leading role a military and an energy engagement are necessary. But they are not in themselves sufficient. Russia's position as a security guarantor in the region is strong. The region's instability in 2005 has strengthened this position. However, Russia's position is also dependent on other powers' actions. As long as the United States refrains from expanding its presence in the region, and China restricts itself mainly to economic ties with the Central Asian states, Russia remains a regional power. There are no guarantees that this situation will last.

The events of 2005 have given us a glimpse into the future development of the strategic balance in Central Asia. The increasing instability in the region, with a change of regime in Kyrgyzstan and unrest in Uzbekistan, especially in the Ferghana Valley, has been followed by even closer cooperation between the Central Asian states and Russia. The Kant Base in Kyrgyzstan is being expanded, and before the Kyrgyz elections in March, Moscow tried to exchange support for Akaev's regime in return for Kyrgyzstan's rejection of American plans for a regional security organisation without Russia, China or Iran, and of US plans to station aircraft with the Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) at Manas.³²⁸ Russia, unlike the United States, met the Uzbek authorities' violent crack down on protests in Andijan with considerable understanding. The cooperation between Russia, China and the Central Asian states most notably led to a Russian-initiated call from the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) in July 2005 for the coalition forces to set a date for withdrawal from the bases in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, notably supported by both Uzbekistan's president Islam Karimov as well as the newly elected Kyrgyz president Kurmanbek Bakiev.³²⁹ Russian Defence Minister Sergei Ivanov also aired the idea of establishing a Russian military base in Uzbekistan with President Karimov. The initial response was negative, but Karimov opened up for Russian use of ten Uzbek airbases in the case of an emergency.³³⁰ The US, on the other hand, faced a decision in June 2005 by the Uzbek government to restrict flights by heavy aircraft and ban nighttime flights from the Khanabad Base, in what seemed to be a move motivated by Russian concerns.³³¹ Also in June, the US House of Representatives excluded Uzbekistan from the list of countries which receive American military aid. In

328 Mikhail Zygar, "Kirgiziiu poprosili byt poostorozhnee s Amerikoi" [Kyrgyzstan asked to be somewhat more careful with America], *Kommersant*, 12 February 2005.

329 RFE/RL *Newsline*, 7 July 2005.

330 Viktoriia Panfilova and Vladimir Mukhin, "Meniaiu Vashington na Moskvu" [I change Washington for Moscow], *Nezavisimaa gazeta*, 30 June 2005.

late July, the Uzbek government gave the US 180 days to leave the Khanabad Base. Though Andijan led to condemnation of Karimov's regime in the West, for Russia, new opportunities for regional influence opened.

A temporary strategic alignment

The Russian-American bilateral relationship is characterised by an emphasis on security and strategic issues, and it is dependent on top-level, even presidential level, contact. One of the conclusions in this study is that the shock of 9/11 and the war on terrorism reinforced the existing mechanisms and priorities in the bilateral relationship. In the campaign, security and strategic considerations dominated, and this fitted well with the existing bias in the bilateral relationship towards security and strategic issues.

The war on terrorism also overshadowed the lack of shared values and everyday contact in the bilateral relationship. The campaign was a framework for the Russian-American relationship, and added direction and emphasis to it. However, as the shock of 9/11 wore off, so did the impulse to the Russian-American relationship. At the end of 2003, the bilateral relationship was at a standstill. This was due especially to the disagreement over Iraq. The period of standstill is not over yet, and with both Vladimir Putin and George W. Bush in their second periods, and with plenty of other issues on their agendas, it is doubtful whether the situation will improve in the next few years.

The Russian reassertion in Central Asia only appeared gradually in the bilateral relationship with the United States. A few critical Russian comments on the Western bases in Central Asia emerged at the level of the bilateral relationship in January-February 2002. The first occasion on which Central Asia was referred to as a sphere of Russian interests in statements directed towards the international community was

331 *RFE/RL Newsline*, 16 June 2005. Kyrgyzstan immediately opened its airspace for such flights. See Vladimir Mukhin, "Shagrenevaia kozha oboronnogo prostranstva" [The shrinking hide of the common defence space], *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 23 June 2005.

in June 2002. Russia's strategic reassertion in Central Asia, and especially Russia's ambitions in the region, were only mentioned at the level of the Russian relationship with the West in October 2003. Between June 2002 and October 2003, the bilateral relationship became increasingly hollow. This hollowness was connected to the gap that appeared between the American and Russian policies in Central Asia, where their relationship was competitive, and the rhetoric of cooperation in the war on terrorism that was emphasised on the top political level in the bilateral relationship. The competitive aspects of the relationship gradually moved into the overall bilateral relationship, and it is difficult to see how this can be overcome in the relationship at present.

In the wider strategic context, the US military presence in Central Asia gave an example of how Western interest in the former Soviet space entailed a diversification of the security choices for the affected states. To parts of the Russian political elite, this diversification meant a loss of influence, a setback in a competition for spheres of influence, as well as a realisation that the impact of neighbouring states' policies on Russian security was less controllable than had previously been believed. American unilateralism in Central Asia exacerbated this impression. Unilateralism also confirmed Moscow's fears that security structures and organisations not firmly controlled by Russia were of an adversarial nature, and that a competition for influence did indeed exist. As the temporary Western deployment in Central Asia turned into permanent bases, Russia's reassertion in the region also became a long-term policy. There was also a certain modernisation, an evolution in the approach. In Central Asia, policy after 9/11 has included an emphasis on security and strategic aims, military and energy engagement, and a combination of multilateral and bilateral arenas. This has been a success. The reassertion seems likely to continue.

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“A Crucial Sphere for Our Security”.

Russia in Central Asia after 9/11

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“A Crucial Sphere for Our Security”. Russia in Central Asia after 9/11

After 11 September 2001, Russia entered into a strategic alignment with the United States and the West in the war against terrorism, and the alignment included Russian support for a Western military presence in Central Asia.

At the same time, Russian policy in Central Asia focused on military and security cooperation, and Russian or Russian-led military bases were established in the region.

This study investigates the Russian response to the appearance of Western bases in Central Asia. What has influenced Russia's policy in Central Asia after 9/11? In addition the author considers the implications of Russia's policy for the Russian-American bilateral relationship.



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