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Post-Imperial Peacekeeping

Russia in the CIS

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Post-Imperial Peacekeeping

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Introduction

What do Russian peacekeeping operations look like? Are they comparable to international peacekeeping operations? Has Russia's experience with peacekeeping mirrored that of other countries over the 1990s? How have Russian operations evolved over the last decade? Finally, what role do Russian operations play in promoting or obstructing conflict resolution in the former Soviet Union?

The range of these questions serves to highlight that Russian peacekeeping has been understudied compared to the activities of other states and regional/international organizations.¹ Since the first Russian operations in 1992, sufficient time has passed for an overview of Russia's approach to peacekeeping. Moreover, ten years after these initial deployments, it is possible to assess the impact of Russian peacekeeping on the conflicts themselves. At the outset, it is worth noting that Russia also played an important role in international operations in the Balkans throughout the 1990s, notably in IFOR/SFOR and KFOR. Despite serious political disagreements prior to the deployment of these operations, in all, Russia's participation has been positive for all parties. However, the focus of this paper will carry on the former Soviet Union where most Russian operations have occurred. Russian peacekeeping in the post-Soviet space also draws out the particular nature of operations deployed in a self-declared sphere of vital

interests and without significant monitoring by the international community.

The paper will start with a brief outline of Russian peacekeeping operations to date. Secondly, the argument will examine how Russian operations fit with traditional and contemporary international practice, both in terms of the debate on peacekeeping that emerged in the 1990s as a result of difficulties encountered on the ground and in terms of actual practice in conflict zones. Thirdly, the paper will discuss the evolution of Russia's peacekeeping policy towards the former Soviet Union. At the wider level, Russian policy has shifted away from its initial active, even coercive, engagement in post-Soviet conflicts towards a more reactive approach to peacekeeping. This evolution has run in parallel with wider changes in Russian policy towards more pragmatic engagement in the former Soviet Union, both in terms of the objectives pursued and the tools used in their pursuit. Finally, the paper will examine the impact of Russia's operations on conflict resolution in the region.

Outline of operations

Russia has deployed peacekeeping operations in four conflicts outside its borders in the former Soviet Union since 1992. In June and July 1992, Russia deployed peacekeeping forces in the internal conflicts in Moldova and Georgia with their respective separatist regions of the self-declared Pridnestrovskaya Moldovaskaya Respublika (PMR, hereafter

referred to by the Moldovan name of Transnistria) and South Ossetia. These operations were deployed on the basis of agreements on a cease-fire and the creation of security zones between the parties to the conflicts. Subsequently, Russia deployed troops within the framework of operations that received an official mandate from the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). The peacekeeping operation in Tajikistan was approved by the CIS in September 1993. This operation drew on Russian armed forces already deployed in Tajikistan, specifically units from the 201st motor-rifle division based in Dushanbe, and was initially complemented by limited contingents from Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. The Russian-led operation deployed between Georgia and the separatist region of Abkhazia in 1994 also falls within the purview of the CIS.

In Georgia and Moldova, peacekeeping operations were deployed after a cease-fire agreement between the warring sides and with their consent and cooperation. Russia's presence in Tajikistan, however, comes under the CIS Collective Security Treaty of May 1992. The May 1992 treaty provides for mutual support in case of external aggression against one of its signatories. This throws interesting light on how Moscow defined the conflict in Tajikistan in the early 1990s – less as a civil war and more as aggression against Tajikistan by forces based in Afghanistan. In fact, there was a proposal in the run-up to the decision to create the CIS peacekeeping operation to call it a “defence force” with no reference to peacekeeping. In any case, the mandate of the Tajik operation has drawn on a collective security treaty, imparting to it from the start a non-consensual nature, as a bulwark to the regime in Dushanbe.

No matter the mandate, each post-Soviet operation has been dominated by Russian troops, led by Russian commanders,

organized on Russian military principles and directed by the Russian Ministry of Defence (MOD). The participation of reduced battalions from Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan in the initial stages of the CIS operation in Tajikistan did not dilute Russia's operational dominance.

The size of these peacekeeping operations has been quite limited and decreased with time. The operation in Abkhazia stands now at about 1600 strong (with 140 APCs and four helicopters).² This is about half the size of its initial deployment of three thousand troops.³ In 2002, Russian troops were based at twenty-six observation posts in the security zone on either side of the Inguri River, as well as at three command posts. The Russian contingent in Moldova is composed of two battalions (800), reduced from an initial level of 1800. In South Ossetia, Russia has about 500 troops deployed, again half the size of the initial deployment. Russia's 201st Motorized Infantry Division (in total around 7,500 troops based in Tajikistan) provides the core to the CIS peacekeeping operation in Tajikistan. The division has a thousand troops deployed in eleven strategic directions on the Tajik-Afghan border and guarding vital objects inside the country. In addition, a rapid reaction battalion has been created within the division to provide support for Russian border troops (which stand at around 11,000 strong) in case of incursions from Afghanistan.⁴

Russian operations are not constrained by clear withdrawal timetables, rules of engagement or operationally defined mandates, principally due to the military's insistence on maintaining control without intrusive civilian oversight. This lack also reflects the *ad hoc* nature of Russian operations, in particular of those initiated in 1992, deployed in crisis moments, using

troops already in and around the conflict zones and drawing on already established chains of command. As much as possible, Russian operations have been manned by specially trained troops. In the early 1990s, the MOD designated two divisions for peacekeeping purposes – the 27th and the 45th. Moreover, a peacekeeping training center was created at Totskoye. In practice, however, training and troop composition has been haphazard and scrambled. Until 2001, the airborne forces played a lead role in Russian operations, often acting independently from other troops on the ground, with different chains of command and control, such as in Abkhazia.

With pressing internal needs in the second Chechen war, Vladimir Putin has changed this. In mid-2001, peacekeeping responsibilities were transferred to the Ground Forces.⁵ The 45th division has been transformed into the 138th motorized infantry brigade to fight in the North Caucasus. In September 2001, the 27th division was brought under the Volga-Urals Military District. New command arrangements for peacekeeping and a training center are reported to be in the making. As a result, the future of the Airborne 245th training center for peacekeeping operations at Ryazan is uncertain. In all of this flux, Russian peacekeeping has lost its most well trained troops, as well as momentum and continuity in its operations.

Legally, Russian peacekeeping operations must be composed of professional forces. This is not the case in practice in Moldova or Abkhazia.⁶ The 201st division in Tajikistan is in theory a fully professional force. In practice, as admitted by the 201st commander, Major-General Valentin Orlov, the quality of officers and soldiers in the division varies greatly.⁷ The support and provision to all Russian troops has been

deplorable – they receive irregular and limited supplies in fuel or food. Moreover, command and control over these forces from Moscow is loose (except for the airborne troops which had a parallel chain of command for their forces), most often delegated to the lowest level but by default. The lack of central support and guidance to peacekeeping troops has led to a range of problems that will be discussed later.

As noted already, Russian operations have reflected two patterns. First, Russian operations in Moldova and Georgia have consisted of quite traditional inter-position exercises deployed on clearly defined geographic lines (as will be seen, these operations also contain important differences). The level of force used by Russian and other troops in these operations has been very limited, with the peacekeeping troops acting as a deterrent to any serious violation of the cease-fire regime. This deterrent role is far from successful with regard to less serious and daily violations. It has also failed to prevent large-scale violations, as witnessed in the so-called “six day war” that occurred in the Abkhaz security zone in the May 1998 when skirmishes between Abkhaz security forces and Georgian “partisan” groups led to the displacement of some thirty thousand ethnic Georgians from the Gali region. In general, these operations perform very basic traditional tasks, maintaining static posts in the security zone without engaging in mobile patrols.⁸

The CIS operation in Tajikistan is different. This operation represents a collective security measure in support of a pro-Russian government in Dushanbe. As such, the peacekeeping troops played an active role in the civil war between 1992–1997, supporting the government and bolstering the defence of the Tajik-Afghan border. Since the peace

treaty struck in 1997, the operation has continued in its primary role of bolstering the border and supporting the government in Dushanbe.

Peacekeeping is a dangerous activity for Russia, with over 400 killed and more wounded as a result of these operations. The most dangerous operations remain those in Abkhazia and Tajikistan. In March 2002, for example, peacekeeping forces in Abkhazia skirmished with Georgian "partisan" groups, which are active in the security zone, and four peacekeepers were kidnapped.⁹ Moreover, peacekeeping does not come free for Russia, especially as Moscow has shouldered the main burden of these operations, whether CIS or trilateral. Total peacekeeping costs in 2001 reportedly stood at around 80 million dollars, only one fourth of which was devoted to post-Soviet operations.¹⁰ However, salary arrears to Russian troops have built up in every operation, with some estimates of millions of dollars owed to Russian peacekeepers in Abkhazia alone, so the estimated overall costs are probably too low.¹¹

This outline highlights the *ad hoc* nature of Russian peacekeeping operations. These operations have had different kinds of mandate provided by different sources and types of organization. They are composed of a variety of troops with differing levels of training, as well as different chains of command. In all, Russian operations do not reflect an organized programme following clear mandates and peacekeeping doctrines, instead varying according to the nature of the conflict, the requirements perceived by the Russian government and the resources available to Russia at the time of deployment.

Russian and international experience

There are similarities between Russian and international peacekeeping practice, in particular with regard to the operations in Moldova and Georgia. Peacekeeping in Transnistria, Abkhazia and South Ossetia resembles traditional United Nations peacekeeping operations, with troops deployed in observation posts on a clear separation line between the warring parties, after a cease-fire agreement and with the consent and cooperation of the parties.¹² At a stretch, even the CIS operation in Tajikistan may be compared to the wider and more comprehensive operations undertaken by the international community in the 1990s that included a heavy peace-enforcement dimension. However, fundamental differences obscure such similarities.

First, it is important to note that Russia has barely participated in the series of debates that occurred at the international level throughout the 1990s about the nature of peacekeeping.¹³ An internal Russian debate did take place. However, its lines differed from wider international discussions, leaving Russian operations sitting largely on the sidelines of the wider European/international experience.

Soviet experience in Afghanistan and the military interventions that occurred in Baku, Tbilisi and Vilnius are the starting point to Russian discussions.¹⁴ The conclusions drawn from these experiences varied. Much of the debate in Russia occurred between 1992 and 1995. While a distinction must be made between civilian and military views, the debate crossed institutional lines.¹⁵ An important, if minority, section of the Russian High Command portrayed peacekeeping as a form of combat activity, drawing upon Soviet experience during the war in Afghanistan and Russian counter-insurgency in the civil war in Tajikistan. For example, in 1993, Lt.-

Colonel G. Zhilin praised the forceful military intervention of Alexander Lebed, as commander of the Russian 14th Army, in halting the fighting between Moldovan and Transnistrian forces.¹⁶ Zhilin concluded his discussion by stating that “the military strength of the peacekeeping forces and their preparation for decisive action must be such that the opposing sides immediately lose their desire to continue war”, with any group breaching the cease-fire to suffer a “devastating strike”.

However, more moderate voices in the military leadership and the government dominated the debate. While recognizing the role of force in peacekeeping, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) presented peacekeeping as the legal *via media* between unilateral coercion and genuine non-intervention in the newly independent states.¹⁷ The MFA argued that peacekeeping had to be integrated into a coherent strategy that, Russia’s first Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev argued, had to “combine firmness with restraint and subtlety in its approach”.¹⁸ In his view, Russian policy had to juxtapose political and diplomatic measures with the “carefully considered application of economic and military force [...] within the framework of the law”.¹⁹ Russia’s second Foreign Minister, and subsequent Prime Minister, Yevgeny Primakov, also understood peacekeeping as mainly a political activity, where the use of force was allowable when combined with a range of other policies, specifically diplomatic and economic. At the same time, Primakov was more outspoken than Kozyrev on the degree of force that could be undertaken in peacekeeping. In the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict zone, Primakov called more than once for a more forceful and active role for Russian forces, and not only in cases of self-defense. Certainly, Primakov was able to act on the MFA’s

understanding of peacekeeping where Kozyrev was never able. Primakov restored the MFA as the leading agency in policy towards the conflicts beyond Russia’s borders. Under his tutelage, a peace treaty was agreed in June 1997 to end the civil war in Tajikistan, significant progress occurred in the negotiations in Moldova and an increased Russian role was visible in the Georgia-Abkhazia conflict. This has continued under Igor Ivanov, *albeit* with less governmental attention than Primakov had brought to bear.

Russian peacekeeping doctrinal concepts may be compared with the international spectrum approach to peace support that emerged in the second half of the 1990s.²⁰ Indeed, the Russian Defence Ministry has developed concepts to guide training and operations that follow similar lines.²¹ However, in practice, Russia has not applied a spectrum peace support approach, limiting operations to traditional inter-position exercises. Even in Tajikistan, Russia has sought to retain a limited operational profile.

Secondly, there are major operational differences between Russian and international peacekeeping. Some of these have been noted already – their *ad hoc* nature, the lack of standard rules of engagement and withdrawal timetables (although admittedly some UN operations during the 1990s also lacked these attributes). In addition, Russian operations have integrated the warring parties into the operations themselves. This solved a number of potential problems for Russia. First, Russia would have faced difficulty filling the ranks of the peacekeeping operations without the participation of the conflicting parties. Given the degree of animosity in this conflict, which ruled out their participation in joint peacekeeping, Russia was forced to take full material responsibility for the operation. Second, Russia sought to build local

cooperation and consent into the operation by including the parties in it. The Russian government has even presented this method as a model to be emulated by the international community to solve the dilemma of ensuring ongoing cooperation to an operation in difficult circumstances.

Thus, in South Ossetia and Moldova, there are reduced battalions of South Ossetian/Georgian troops and Moldovan/Transnistrian troops acting under Russian command in the peacekeeping operation. This arrangement is overseen by a Joint Control Commission that also brings together the parties to the conflict and Russia, the commanders of the peacekeeping forces and other observers in weekly meetings to review activities and recommend actions.

Another important difference with international practice has been Russia's use of troops already deployed in or around a conflict zone as peacekeeping forces. In Moldova, the former Soviet 14th Army (now a much-reduced Russian Operational Group) has adopted a peacekeeping role, despite its past history as a base of support to Transnistrian separatist forces. In Abkhazia, the Russian Airborne regiment deployed in Gudauta before the war lay at the heart of the peacekeeping operation set up in 1994. Similarly, the operation in Tajikistan has drawn on parts of the Russian 201st division deployed there by the Soviet Union. These arrangements mark the post-colonial nature of Russian peacekeeping, with troop compositions reflecting the legacy of the Soviet armed forces scattered throughout the former Soviet Union.

Certainly, the presence of forces already near conflict zones allowed Russia to react quickly to crisis and conflict situations. The proximity of Russian troops, combined with their past experience in the Soviet Union, has also meant that some of the problems

associated with foreign troops being deployed in conflicts where they hardly speak the local language and have very little experience have been attenuated in the Russian case. However, this proximity has also created problems, as Russian forward deployments are deeply tied to their local communities by residence and family links. In the case of the former 14th Army, this may explain some of the support provided to Transnistria by the Russian military as many officers' and soldiers' families live on the left bank of the Dnestr. The problems in Abkhazia were different. Russia's initial peacekeeping force was drawn from the Airborne regiment deployed in Abkhazia and Russian troops in Georgia proper, which were part of the Group of Russian Forces in the Transcaucasus. The different geographical origin of these forces was reflected in different perceptions by them of the parties on the ground, with contrasting sympathies to the Abkhaz and Georgian causes from different parts of the Russian operation.

Most fundamentally, Russian operations are not UN or OSCE mandated operations. The legitimacy of Russian operations flows from the CIS imprimatur provided in the Tajik and Abkhaz cases, and from the consent of the parties in South Ossetia and Moldova. Alongside Russian/CIS operations, the UN and OSCE have deployed observer missions to oversee developments in the conflicts, promote dialogue and also to monitor the activities of the Russian/CIS peacekeepers. At the formal level, mechanisms of cooperation have been set up between Russian/CIS operations and international missions that include international oversight. In practice, the interaction between Russian troops and international observers on the ground has varied from slight in Moldova to more

significant in Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

In Moldova, an agreement on 'Principles of Cooperation between the OSCE Mission and the Joint Control Commission in the Security Zone' was reached on July 20, 1994 and updated on January 16, 1996. These agreements allow the few OSCE Military Observers to patrol the security zone and participate in the weekly Joint Control Commissions. However, free movement in the security zone is allowed only with prior notice to the local authorities and peacekeeping command. Full participation in the JCC also relies on the invitation of the parties. In practice, the OSCE has been limited by the reluctance of Transnistria to allow for significant oversight.²² Russia-OSCE cooperation has been much more positive in South Ossetia, with the OSCE integrated more deeply and actively in monitoring activities and the Joint Control Commission.²³ In Abkhazia, the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG) has played an active role in monitoring Russian peacekeeping activities in the security zone. UN Observers have developed a good working relationship with Russian peacekeepers on the ground.²⁴

The greatest difference between Russian and international practice resides in the fact that Russian operations are not deployed to advance "international peace and security", although this may be one of their declared secondary goals. According to Russia's first Military Doctrine of November 1993, and reiterated ever since, Russian operations are deployed to advance Russian state interests – this is their primary objective. Troop deployments by a former imperial power in its ex-empire are altogether different to international peacekeeping. Russian operations have sought consistently to alter the prevailing distribution of power in these conflicts in a way that would advance

Russian state interests. As such, Russian peacekeepers are more "players" than "referees".

Evolution of Russian peacekeeping

Most fundamentally, therefore, the policy context has distinguished Russian operations from international practice.²⁵ Between 1992-1994, Russian peacekeeping forces were deployed after the direct involvement of Russian troops already present in these conflict zones. Russian troops based in Moldova and Abkhazia provided support to the separatist forces, a support that reflected the local ties of Russian soldiers as well as weaknesses in Russian command and control. At the wider level, Russian operations were deployed as part of a policy that sought to re-establish various levels of hegemony over the new states that emerged on Russia's borders after the collapse of the Soviet Union. In these first years, Russian policy juxtaposed peacekeeping with other tools of pressure to advance Russian interests in Moldova and Georgia, two states bent on striking independent paths from Moscow, and in Tajikistan, where a pro-Russian government was fighting a civil war with opposition forces based in Afghanistan.

After a few years of policy debate and inconsistency, a consensus had emerged in Moscow by 1994 on the use of peacekeeping as a means to advance Russian security in a post-Soviet space that was threatening to Russian interests, whether in the shape of a Russian population living in the conflict zones or because of the fear of conflict spill-over into the Russian Federation itself. The Russian leadership claimed special responsibility for maintaining peace and stability in the region. In Moscow's view, Russian operations were also justified by the UN Charter as occurring through a CIS regional arrangement. The Russian

government indeed has referred to Chapter VIII of the Charter on the rights and responsibilities of regional arrangements for the maintenance of international peace and security through such non-enforcement activities as peacekeeping operations. Moreover, there was a broad agreement on the role of these operations to promote stability on Russia's borders and to prevent the emergence of a security vacuum in the region. Peacekeeping was tied to Russia's pursuit of its interests throughout its self-declared "special zone of responsibility".

This consensus was reinforced by the emergence of an informal division of labor between the Foreign and Defence Ministries. In practice, the MOD assumed responsibility for all military and operational aspects of Russian approaches towards these conflicts, with a Deputy Defence Minister, Georgy Kondratiyev, assigned to lead in these responsibilities, while the Foreign Ministry was increasingly sidelined to a role of conveying rather than formulating policy. In addition, during this period, Russian operations developed difficult relations with the UN and the OSCE on the ground. Any extensive involvement by the international community was viewed as a threat to Russian influence. In the Autumn of 1993, Andrei Kozyrev made Russia's position clear:

It would be a mistake to ignore the role of the UN and the CSCE, but abandoning this sphere to the organizations exclusively would constitute the other extreme. This is a zone of Russian interests and all the parties understand this and turn to Russia.²⁶

A combination of four factors from late 1994 onwards led to changes in Russian peacekeeping by 1996. First, the Chechen war, launched in December 1994, depleted the level of resources available for peacekeeping, placing pressure on Moscow

to cut back on forward deployments beyond its borders in the former Soviet Union. Second, the difficult experience of using military force to quell Chechen separatism reinforced the more moderate views of peacekeeping held by the Russian leadership, as opposed to the hard-line views held by some parts of the military High Command, and strengthened Russia's emphasis on latent and passive peacekeeping. Thirdly, in 1996, Boris Yeltsin replaced Andrei Kozyrev with Yevgeny Primakov as Foreign Minister and dismissed Pavel Grachev as Defence Minister. The appointment of Primakov, a respected "centrist", bolstered the weight of the Foreign Ministry in decision-making in Moscow at a time when the Defence Ministry was devoting all of its energies to the war in Chechnya. Finally, Russian security policy thinking came increasingly to recognize that the main threats to Russian security were internal.²⁷ Especially after 1998, a combination of economic dislocation and financial collapse led the Russian government to seek to secure a predictable international environment conducive for Russia's internal revitalization.

Under Primakov's leadership, the Russian government sought to redress the balance between political and military strands of peacekeeping to emphasize political conflict resolution. This was most successful in Tajikistan, where Primakov secured a peace agreement in June 1997 between the main parties to the conflict on the basis of a power-sharing arrangement. Moreover, Russia was more willing to work with international peacekeeping efforts on the ground in the CIS, in order to share the political and material burden of responsibility.

All of these trends accelerated under the leadership of Vladimir Putin. At the broad level, Russian peacekeeping policy has become less exclusive and less coercive. First,

under Putin, decision-making on foreign and security policy has become more firmly centralized, making Russian policy almost as presidential as the 1993 Constitution would allow. The president himself has taken a lead in making key shifts in Russian policy towards the former Soviet Union, such as during his visit to Azerbaijan in January 2001 and subsequent relations with President G. Aliyev.²⁸ Putin has led from the front in Russia's alignment with the United States in the "war on terror" since September 11. Greater coordination has lent a concentration to Russian foreign policy that was lacking throughout the Yeltsin period of leadership.²⁹

Secondly, Putin's government has reiterated the priority dangers posed by internal threats to Russian security. As Secretary of the Security Council and then Defense Minister, Sergei Ivanov has stressed the wide range of internal threats, which act to weaken the state and the Russian constitution.³⁰ Much more than Yeltsin, however, Putin has shown himself determined to act on this priority. The second Chechen war reflects if anything Putin's resolve to restore Russia's internal situation to some degree of order, even at great cost (and short term disorder). Beyond Russia's borders, this has translated into a foreign policy that has sought to reduce Russia's international presence while preserving as much as possible its influence and the status quo.

In the former Soviet Union, Russian policy has eschewed the coercive use of force as a tool of policy and moved to reduce Russia's forward basing. In a review conducted in 2001 shortly after his appointment as Defense Minister, Sergei Ivanov announced the start of large-scale reductions of Russia's military basing abroad.³¹ Some of these cuts fall in line with Russian obligations incurred at the 1999 OSCE summit in Istanbul to

withdraw the Operational Group from Moldova and withdraw from the bases in Vaziani and Gudauta in Georgia. Other reductions have included Russia's withdrawal from Cam Ranh Bay and Cuba, as well as the withdrawal of airborne troops from the Balkans and cuts in Russia's overall participation there. More broadly, Putin's government has made better use of economic and political ties of interdependence with the newly independent states to advance Russian interests, decreasing the role played by the military. Russia retains an interest in the separatist areas as means of pressure, against Moldova and Georgia. However, the tools employed by Moscow are less exclusively military now. For example, in both Transnistria and Abkhazia, the Russian government has launched a programme of providing certain separatist citizens with Russian passports, much to the dismay of Moldova and Georgia.

In addition, Russia has been more willing to work with international organizations acting in the former Soviet Union. Interaction has increased with the OSCE in Moldova and South Ossetia, and the United Nations in Abkhazia. Russia under Putin has been an active player in the Minsk Group talks over Nagorno-Karabakh. More dramatically, Putin accepted (with gritted teeth) the deployment of US forces in the Central Asian states. On a subject that is much closer to the Russian border, Putin stated about that the US announcement of a Train and Equip programme to support the development of the Georgian armed forces: "This is no tragedy, and no can there be. Why is it permissible in Central Asia and not in Georgia?"³²

These wider shifts have also affected Russian peacekeeping in the former Soviet Union. The start of a withdrawal of the Operational Group in Moldova and the

airborne regiment in Gudauta, Georgia, has reduced the overall number of troops Russia has available in and around the conflict zones.³³ These forces acted as powerful deterrent for the poorly armed peacekeepers, leaving them now bereft of this “last resort” support. These cuts also mean that Russia depends on an enduring peacekeeping presence in order to retain a military foothold in these two states – in this sense, peacekeeping has retained strategic importance. At the same time, serious pressures are building on Russian operations, in particular in Abkhazia and Tajikistan. The cost of these operations is not insignificant at a time when the government has launched a large-scale military reform programme. Moreover, these troops have remained under constant threat from “partisan” groups in Abkhazia and instability in Tajikistan. It is unlikely that Russia will withdraw from peacekeeping in the former Soviet Union. However, further rationalization of Russia’s presence may be expected, as might also a far greater role for the international community.

Impact on conflict resolution

CIS peacekeeping in Tajikistan played an important role in creating a climate that was conducive to the peace agreement signed in 1997 between the United Tajik Opposition leader, Said Abdullo Nuri, and the Tajik President Emomali Rakhmonov. The presence of the operation stabilized the relation of forces between the two parties so much that, combined with the inherent geographic difficulties of the mountainous country, by 1996 both parties recognized that their objectives could not be achieved fully by force. Moreover, Russian policy shifted at the diplomatic level to place pressure on the government in Dushanbe to compromise with the Tajik opposition. The positive role of

Russian mediation in Tajikistan must be recognized, where, in contrast to the conflicts in Moldova, Georgia and Azerbaijan, a fragile peace has been built.

However, Russian peacekeeping was not the primary reason leading to a peace agreement in Tajikistan – the nature of the civil war itself matters more. By 1996, it was clear that the civil war was a struggle not over the basic idea of the new state that emerged in 1992, but over the distribution of power in it.³⁴ The civil war did not raise fundamental or long-standing questions about Tajik “stateness”. The basic common ground on the idea of Tajikness between all the parties has been founded, however weakly, on a sense of shared history and destiny among the Tajik people. This shared idea – less Russian peacekeeping – allowed power sharing to emerge as a feasible option in 1997 for the main elites on both sides of the civil war.³⁵ Certainly, Russian pressure for a settlement was vital in securing the agreement, as was the push from Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan on Rakhmonov to agree to a compromise. The rise of civilian protests against the Dushanbe government’s failure to decrease poverty was an important factor in Rakhmonov’s thinking. Moreover, both parties had reached something of stalemate on the battlefield by 1997, neither having a real prospect of winning by force of arms. In the end, however, despite all of these conditioning factors, a power-sharing solution would not even have been conceivable if some prior common ground had not existed on the notion of a Tajik identity and state.

In contrast, the conflicts in Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Transnistria, Chechnya and Nagorno-Karabakh reflect conflicting perceptions of the domain and territory of Georgia, Moldova, Russia and Azerbaijan. The aim of the separatist groups is not to

capture power in the metropolitan states or to renegotiate the division of powers within them. Their objective is to exit. At the least, the aim is to build new relations with it on an inter-state level as equal units. The linkage of ethnicity with territory has made the objectives of these separatist areas state-orientated. Disagreement over the "idea" behind the states that emerged from the Soviet collapse has made conflict resolution very difficult. In contrast to Tajikistan, the conflicting parties have no shared notion of identity or statehood.

In Moldova and Georgia, Russian peacekeeping forces remain deployed on separation lines between the self-declared separatist states of Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Transnistria with the metropolitan states of Georgia and Moldova. Most scholarly discussions of these conflicts have focused on external factors as key obstacles. External factors have been, and continue to be, important inhibitors to conflict settlement. However, the balance of analysis needs to be redressed. The focus here will carry first on internal factors driving these conflicts.³⁶ Once the dynamic driving these conflicts, and in particular the separatist states, has been clarified, it will be possible to discuss what role Russian peacekeeping has played in reinforcing or weakening the status quo.

Internal inhibitors

The amalgam of territory, population and government in Transnistria, Abkhazia and South Ossetia has produced something that is greater than the sum of these parts – a deeply felt belief in internal sovereignty. The insistence on sovereignty has meant that settlement will be difficult to be reached through federal power-sharing arrangements. It is often assumed that the 'statehood' of these entities is a resource that they will be willing to bargain away once the

circumstances are propitious. In fact, their sovereignty is seen as non-negotiable by the separatist authorities.

The separatist states draw on three sources of legitimacy for this belief. First, these authorities maintain that they fulfill all the empirical conditions for being considered to have positive sovereignty. They claim to have, and indeed do, a system of political leadership that has received popular support and provides basic services to a given population over a specific territory, over which effective control is maintained for a significant period of time. Second, the separatist authorities draw on what they interpret as the broad and unrestricted right of self-determination of all peoples. All of them have based their claims on popular election/referenda that seek to substantiate this right – they claim to exist based on popular will. The separatist authorities also insist on their inherent moral entitlement to self-determination when faced with "alien" rule from Moldova or Georgia. Finally, the state-building projects in these areas are founded on the position that the current independent states represent but the latest phase in a long historical tradition of statehood.

Insecurity represents another internal inhibitor to conflict settlement. Fear was the factor that gave rise to the conflicts at the outset, and it has remained a defining condition since. Historically, these separatist regions have rarely won wars by themselves and for themselves. The cease-fires that were reached in the first half of the 1990s froze victories that the separatists secured on the battlefield. For the moment at least, the self-declared states have won. However, victory has left them bewildered.

They profoundly distrust victory. All are aware that they have won a battle and *not the war*. The example of renewed conflict in

Chechnya since 1999 has been edifying. This distrust has led these states to elevate self-defence over all other policy areas. None of the de facto states are military-run states. However, all of them are devoted to the military. They are racketeer states. As defined by the historian Charles Tilly, "someone who produces the danger and, at a price the shield against it, is a racketeer".³⁷ In some sense, all states are "racketeers", as in an anarchic international system the very existence of a state, unwittingly most of the time, produces a danger from other states which the first state then proposes to defend itself against – an Escher drawing of spiraling insecurity. In this sense, the separatist states are not that different from the world of recognized states living with the security dilemma. However, the dilemma is exacerbated with the separatist states, whose very existence is driven by the threat posed by the state from which they are separating. Here lies the dilemma: these regions have separated from their metropolitan states because of a perceived/actual threat posed to them; their continuing existence as non-recognized states means that the danger of their elimination by force is never ruled out. In this sense, the separatist regions themselves are both the producers of the threat to themselves and the shield against it – the essence of racketeering.

In Transnistria, the result of this condition is almost absurd. The separatist authorities in the Tiraspol base their claim to independence on the threat posed to them by Moldova, which is presented in the local media and political speeches as a revanchist and fascist Romania. In fact, the Moldovan military threat to the Transnistria is now basically non-existent. Nonetheless, this "danger" has led to the creation of numerous paramilitary forces in Transnistria, as well as an outsized security ministry, most of which are deeply

engaged in criminal activities, thus profiting from the "danger" they produce.

Moreover, fear and insecurity have meant that these states have little faith in the rule of law as a means to guarantee their security. Military power is seen as the only means by which to deter Georgia and Moldova from seeking to resolve the conflicts by force, even if in the case of Moldova there is no intention or capability of doing so. This has significant consequences on possible settlement options. In particular, power-sharing solutions, as in Tajikistan, do not seem feasible, as they are based on all parties trusting that potential conflicts will be resolved by legal mechanisms and working constitutional arrangements. The separatist authorities have no such trust in the protection of the law.

These separatist states are failing states. They all have the institutional fixtures of statehood but have not been able to provide for its substance. The wars they fought in the 1990s devastated their economies and exacerbated the difficulties that resulted from the collapse of the Soviet economic system. Most of them survive despite living under blockade. However, the severe economic difficulties that are common to all of them have only served to strengthen subsistence syndromes, which work to strengthen the status quo. These states are driven first and foremost by political and not economic imperatives. Economic difficulties, massive poverty and widespread social dislocation are prices they are willing to pay in order to attain the political goal of independence. Moreover, the status quo provides benefits to many of the separatist leaders, which strengthen their resistance. In Abkhazia, the president's family is involved in the timber trade with Turkish groups. A similar mingling of political and commercial structures exists in the other separatist states. This

intermingling has become so deeply entrenched over the ten years that these areas look like vast shadowy enterprises. Indeed, many groups inside and outside the separatist states now profit from their existence: enough people profit enough to make the status quo durable. A perverted but workable incentive structure has emerged over the last decade that sustains the separatist authorities and their political objectives.

External Inhibitors

First, the metropolitan states from which these areas have broken away, Moldova and Georgia, have played an indirect and direct role in sustaining the status quo. Indirectly, they are not magnets for their separatist regions. Indeed, they emit no force of attraction, either of economic prosperity or political stability that might lead the separatist regions to compromise with them in order to benefit from the restoration of political and economic relations. Economic difficulties, political instability and poor human rights records of the metropolitan states are disincentives for the separatists to compromise.

Georgia and Moldova also play a direct role in sustaining the status quo. The existence of non-recognized separatist areas within their borders means that they are not forced to recognize the defeat they suffered on the battlefield in the 1990s, a recognition that would challenge political stability and threaten the current leadership. For the present, they do not have the armed forces capable of enforcing their sovereignty over the separatist areas. At the same time, they are not ready for political reasons to compromise with the separatist demands, as this would represent accepting defeat. The status quo is costly for Moldova and

Georgia, but it has the advantage of allowing them to avoid grasping the nettle of defeat.

Kinship groups are important sources of external support to the separatist areas. In Abkhazia, assistance from related peoples in the North Caucasus was crucial in the war. The Armenian diaspora has been vital in reconstructing Nagorno-Karabakh since the cease-fire of 1994. International humanitarian organizations also strengthen the status quo. At the most extreme, in Abkhazia, the UN and a variety of non-governmental humanitarian organizations have become pillars of the separatist state, providing key services to its society and economy. This situation reflects a classic dilemma international organizations face in balancing human needs in conflicts with consideration of the political implications of providing support.

Finally, Russian peacekeeping operations contribute to entrenching the status quo. Russia's use of peacekeeping as a means to advance its own interests has weakened its operations' ability to present themselves as neutral forces that might ensure security in the conflict zones. The fact that Russian forces played a role in the conflict, supporting either one or the other side, remains at the forefront of the security calculations of the conflicting parties. As a result, these operations have not promoted trust between the parties, but only reinforced a prevailing sense of distrust. The Moldovan government's trust in the security guarantee provided by the peacekeeping forces has been undermined by Russia's previous support to the Transnistrian forces and their permissive attitude towards the construction of border posts in the security zone in violation of the peacekeeping agreement. In Georgia, any trust that Tbilisi might have had in the Russian peacekeeping operation was

destroyed by Russia's passive role in providing for the security of IDPs returning to Abkhazia and their inaction in May 1998.

It is common for parties to conflicts to view peacekeeping either as a potential tool or an obstacle to their ends. This problem is exacerbated in the case of Russian peacekeeping by its previous explicit use as a tool to advance its interests. The logic of war in the Abkhaz conflict has been maintained by the creation of a *de facto* border between Abkhazia and Georgia, which is monitored by Russian troops. In Moldova, Russian peacekeeping troops also maintain a division separating the parties. Russia's previous support to the Transnistrian authorities has entrenched the separatist state, which has created its own armed forces, border troops and state institutions. As a result of this experience, the Moldovan and Georgian governments have come to view peacekeeping itself as an obstacle.

The recognition by each contesting party of the legitimacy of the other party can be a critical factor for conflict resolution. Official or unofficial Russian support to the separatist forces between 1992-1994 reinforced Chisinau's and Tbilisi's propensity to reject attributing any legitimacy to the separatist cause. The separatists are seen as the "fifth column" of an aggressive external power – Russia – bent on recreating its empire. This perception has rendered serious negotiations on settlement all the more difficult. Moreover, these circumstances have reinforced the propensity of Georgia and Moldova to seek an external mediator – UN, NATO, US, EU – that will support their view, as a "savior", which will allow them to fulfil their maximal aims.

Russian peacekeeping operations also have built-in operational problems that tend to strengthen the status quo. In Moldova and Georgia, the integration of the conflicting

parties into the peacekeeping operation has led to the lax implementation of the cease-fire and security regime. In Moldova, there are far too many separatist troops in the security zone. In addition, the weekly Joint Control Commissions are regulated by consensus decision-making. This situation replicates the freezing of the UN Security Council during the Cold War, as neither party has an interest in approving a decision that might favor the other. In practice, this has meant that the separatist forces have been able to hold off more significant international monitoring of the security zone and to block the weekly agenda of the commission.

In addition, chronically under-supplied and made up of different types of troops with different command structures, Russian operations are made up of a poorly and disorganized bunch. In each conflict, Russian troops have become entwined with local criminal rackets. On the one hand, these troops are responding rationally to a dire situation and pursuing atomized survival tactics. Clearly though, their involvement in smuggling does nothing to enhance conflict resolution.

Finally, the Russian government under Putin has not abandoned its perceived strategic interests in these conflicts and states. The Russian government remains intent on maintaining a reduced military presence in Moldova and Georgia, even in the form of peacekeeping forces. As a result, the conflicting parties still tend to adopt positions that either seek to block Russian interests or to benefit most from a coincidence of their own interests with Russian strategy, games that have diverted energy away from serious negotiations with the other party.

Conclusions

Russia's role as a regional stabilizer in the former Soviet Union must be recognized. Cease-fires have held for close to a decade in Moldova and Georgia. A fragile peace has been reached in Tajikistan.

However, despite years of exhaustion, conflict resolution has not advanced far in the former Soviet Union. Russian peacekeeping bears some responsibility for these circumstances. Peace is far off in Moldova and Georgia, precisely because it will be difficult now to rein in the separatist states that emerged partly with Russian support. Russia cannot be blamed for the non-resolution of these conflicts, as they are driven by their own inherent logic. However, Russian peacekeeping has strengthened the status quo. At a wider level, peacekeeping has been largely de-legitimized in the former Soviet Union. The experience of the last ten years has reinforced conflicting parties' perceptions of the nature of peacekeeping that are not in keeping with traditional UN operations developed during the Cold War. The self-declared states view peacekeeping as border troops to deter a rankling Moldova and Georgia. On numerous occasions, the Georgian leadership has called for 'peacekeeping' operations on the lines of the Croatian offensive in mid-1995 against Serbian-held Krajina – military measures that have nothing to do with peacekeeping. In its traditional Cold War form, peacekeeping assumed a secondary role with regard to the more important peace process. In Georgia and Moldova, Russian peacekeeping operations are primary issues in the peace talks.

Russia has become a major peacekeeper with a rich and varied peacekeeping experience, running the gamut from traditional inter-position to coercive peace support. However, Russia has stood largely

buffered from international experience since the end of the Cold War. Russia's involvement in the operations in the Balkans has not been fed into a learning loop in the High Command and political leadership about the nature of peacekeeping. Moreover, there has been little Russian involvement in the international debate about peacekeeping. Russia's internal debate has lacked in relative depth, with little discussion of civil-military relations or the balance between consent and force. Peacekeeping experience and doctrine figured importantly in discussions between NATO and Russia in the Permanent Joint Council after 1997. It is clear that far more efforts could be devoted to bridging Russian and international peacekeeping practice. These may occur within the 2002 NATO-Russia Council as well as in the framework of the political and security dialogue that has developed between the European Union and Russia.

Finally, the experience of the last ten years calls into question the division of labor that emerged between international and regional organizations in providing for peace and security. The observer missions set up by the OSCE and the UN to monitor Russian/CIS operations have been hampered by deep constraints. Most fundamentally, the observer missions have been unable to uproot the enduring role peacekeeping plays in Russian policy in pursuit of its interests.

Notes

¹ See, for example, Roy Allison: *Peacekeeping in the Soviet Successor States*, Paris, 1994. Lena Jonson and Clive Archer (eds): *Peacekeeping and the Role of Russia in Eurasia*, Boulder 1996; and Hans-Georg Ehrhart, Anna Kreikmeyer and Andrei Zagorski (eds): *Crisis Management in the CIS: Whither Russia?*, 1995; Lena Jonson: *Keeping the Peace in the CIS: The Evolution of Russian Policy*, London 1999; as well as N. A. Kellett: *Russian Peacekeeping: Russian Goals and Methods in the Context of International Peacekeeping Practice*, Department of National Defence Canada, Directorate of Strategic Analysis, Research Note 98/04, March 1998. See also the author's *Russian Peacekeeping Strategies towards the CIS*, London 2000.

² For an account of the size of Russian operations, see Sergei Morozov, General Staff Officer: "Russia May Decide to Reduce its Peacekeeping Contingents Abroad", in *FSU Fifteen Nations: Policy and Security*, March 2000, pp. 2–3, and also the interview with General Alexander Arinakhin in *Vek*, No. 6, February 8–14, 2002, reprinted in *FSU Fifteen Nations: Policy and Security*, February 2002, p. 103.

³ For an overview of troop deployment figures as they have evolved, see Jonson: *Keeping the Peace in the CIS*, p. 45.

⁴ Interview with Major-General Valentin Orlov, in *Krasnaya Zvezda*, September 20, 2001, p. 1.

⁵ See account by Isai Maksimov, in *Novye Izvestiya*, September 5, 2001, p. 4.

⁶ A significant proportion of these operations consists of contract troops. However, field research in both conflict zones by the author in July and August 2000 made it clear that the numbers of conscripts remained important.

⁷ Interview with Major-General Valentin Orlov, *Krasnaya Zvezda*, September 20, 2001, p. 1.

⁸ Conclusion drawn by author after interviews with Russian peacekeepers in Moldova and Georgia in May 1998 and July–August 2000.

⁹ See accounts by Georgy Dvali and Gennady Sysoyev in *Kommersant*, March 21, 2002, p. 3; and *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, March 20, 2002.

¹⁰ For costs of the Balkans operations, see Dmitry

Safonov, in *Izvestiya*, March 18, 2002, p. 2.

¹¹ See report by Vadim Saranov, in *Versiya*, No. 7, February 19–25, 2002, reprinted in *FSU Fifteen Nations: Policy and Security*, No. 2, February 2002, pp. 77–78.

¹² For a discussion of traditional peacekeeping practice, see Marrack Goulding: "The Evolution of UN Peacekeeping", in *International Affairs*, No. 3 1993, pp. 432–65.

¹³ On these debates, see, for example, John Mackinlay: "Defining a Role Beyond Peacekeeping", in W. E. Lewis (ed.): *Military Implications of UN Peacekeeping Operations*, MacNair Paper 17, National Defense University, June 1993, pp. 26–40; James Gow and Christopher Dandeker: "Peace Support Operations: The Problem of Legitimation", in *The World Today*, August/September 1995, pp. 171–4; Adam Roberts: "The Crisis in UN Peacekeeping", in C.A. Chester and F. Osler (eds) with Pamela Aall: *Managing Global Chaos, Sources of and Responses to International Conflict*, Washington DC 1996, pp. 297–319, as well as the author's "New Thinking in Conflict Management: Prevention and Intervention", chapter in Derek Averre and Andrew Cottey (eds): *Ten Years after 1989, New Security Challenges in Central and Eastern Europe*, Manchester 2002.

¹⁴ A point raised in discussion with Pavel Baev at the Norwegian Institute for Defence Studies, May 27, 2002.

¹⁵ See author's detailed discussion of these debates in *Russian Peacekeeping Strategies towards the CIS*, 2000, and also *The Conflict in Abkhazia: The Dilemmas in Russian Peacekeeping Policy*, London 1998.

¹⁶ Lt.-Colonel G. Zhilin, in *Voennii vestnik*, September 1993, reported in JPRS-UMA-94-005, pp. 32–34.

¹⁷ See for example the former Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev on "Russia" TV, Moscow, April 12, 1992 in SU/1355, B/3-4.

¹⁸ Andrei Kozyrev, in *Izvestiya*, June 30, 1992.

¹⁹ Andrei Kozyrev, in *Rossiskie vesti*, December 3, 2002.

²⁰ See Lena Jonson: "In Search of a Doctrine: Russian Interventionism in Conflicts in its Near

Abroad", in *Low Intensity Conflicts and Law Enforcement*, Vol. 5, No. 3, Winter 1996, pp. 440–65.

²¹ See *The Programme for the Training of Peacekeeping Units*, prepared by the Russian Federation Ministry of Defence, 1992; and *The Temporary Instructions for the Training of Military Contingents for the Formation of Groups of Military Observers and Collective Forces for Peacekeeping of the Member States of the CIS*, prepared by the Russian Federation Ministry of Defence, 1993.

²² Interviews with members of the Mission in Moldova by the author in May 1998 and July 2000.

²³ A point highlighted to the author by members of the Mission in June 1997. See also S. N. MacFarlane, Larry Minear and S. D. Shenfield: *Armed Conflict in Georgia: A Case Study in Humanitarian Action and Peacekeeping*, Thomas J. Watson Jr. Institute for International Studies, Occasional Paper, No. 21.

²⁴ Interviews with UN Observers and Russian peacekeepers by the author in Abkhazia in July–August 2000.

²⁵ For a detailed examination of the evolution of Russian peacekeeping, see the author's *Russian Peacekeeping Strategies*, 2000.

²⁶ *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, November 24, 1993, pp. 1–3; see also *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, September 22, 1993, p. 1.

²⁷ See, for example, the National Security Concept reproduced in *Rossiskaya gazeta*, December 26, 1997.

²⁸ See, for example, discussion of I. Aviazorsky, in *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, January 28, 2002, p. 4.

²⁹ Increased coordination has not of course prevented examples of inconsistency, as witnessed in differing reactions from inside the Russian government about the presence of US forces in Central Asia immediately after September 11 and in Georgia in February 2002.

³⁰ See, for example, comments made by Ivanov when he was still Secretary of the Security Council, reported by Valeria Sycheva, in *Segodnya*, March 19, 2000, p. 1; and interview by Valery Aleksin, in *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, March 31, 2000, pp. 1–3.

³¹ See report by Andrei Korbuto: *Nezavisimoye voyennoye obozreniye*, reprinted in *Former Soviet Union, Fifteen Nations: Policy and Security*, July, 2001, pp. 2–3.

³² Putin reported on Russian MFA Information and Press Department, Daily News Bulletin, March 4, 2002, from the CIS Summit, Almaty, March 1, 2002.

³³ Note that the base in Gudauta has been transferred to the peacekeeping force and the Operational Group has shifted to undertake peacekeeping in the PMR.

³⁴ See author's discussion of this difference in "De Facto States and Security in the Former Soviet Union", paper presented to the ASN Convention 2001, Columbia University, April 7, 2001; and exploration in "The Tajik Civil War: Peace and Prospects", in *Civil Wars*, Winter, 2001.

³⁵ Shirin Akiner noted the stress placed on the Tajik identity in a talk to the War Studies, Eurasian Security Seminar, at King's College London, on February 28, 2001, called "Central Asia and the Tajik Civil War".

³⁶ The following discussion draws on the author's *Managing Separatist States: A Eurasian Case Study*, Paris, 2001.

³⁷ From Peter Evans, D. Rueschemeyer and T. Skocpol (eds): "War-making and State-Making as Organized Crime", in *Bringing the State Back In*, New York 1985, cited by Hugh Griffiths: "A political Economy of Ethnic Conflict: Ethno-Nationalism and Organized Crime", in *Civil Wars*, Vol. 2, no. 2, Summer 1999, pp. 56–73.

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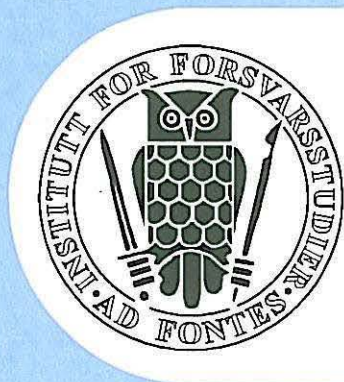
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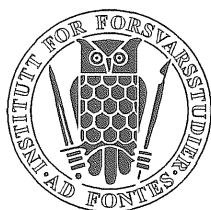
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