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The War Scare over Pankisi Gorge: Threat Perceptions in the Age of the War on Terrorism

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Reading international media on Russia as the dog days of August 2002 began would have suggested that all was in order. The tenor was one associated with the slow season when everyone is off on vacation. *The Moscow Times* contained a brief report from Vladikavkaz in Northern Osetia on 2 August that called attention to tensions between Russia and Georgia over Chechen rebels in Pankisi Gorge but downplayed their importance. Well behind stories about the peat fires in Moscow, Tokhtakhunov's arrest in Italy, and Energy Secretary Abraham's concerns over the new Russo-Iranian nuclear deal, the Pankisi Gorge story came in just ahead of an account of a police officer's shooting of a rottweiler and its owner in Moscow. However, a close look at the local press and mass media reveals anything but a slow season. The crisis over Chechen fighters infiltrating into Chechnya from Pankisi Gorge received extensive coverage in Moscow and Tbilisi, with each capital exchanging charges and counter-charges. The crisis had almost boiled over into Russian military intervention into Georgia on 1 August. A minute-by-minute account of the mounting crisis in the Caucasus leaves one with reverberations closer to 1914 or 1939 than to an ordinary summer holiday. In the age of the War on Terrorism local issues can have international ramifications. A key issue at the core of this war scare was Russia's changing definition of threats and the mutual inter-relationship of various threats.

The crisis in the Caucasus has been long in the making. Its origins are in Russo-Chechen relations, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the two Chechen wars of the last decade. Russian officials repeatedly claim that Georgia continues to serve as a sanctuary to Chechen and international terrorists that cross into Chechnya from bases in Georgia's Pankisi Gorge. With the renewal of fighting between Russian troops and Chechen rebels in Dagestan in August 1999, Pankisi gorge became a point of contention. Georgian officials reported on 13 August that Russian aircraft had violated Georgian airspace and bombed the village of Zemo Omalo on 9 August, wounding three persons. They warned that they would shoot down any future violators of Georgian airspace. At a meeting with the Commander of Georgia's border guards, the Deputy Director of the Russian Border Guards Service proposed that Russian and Georgian border guards be deployed to Pankisi Gorge, a proposal the Georgian side rejected.^[1] Local journalists conjectured that the attacks were linked to Wahhabis in the village and could be part of a Russian strategy to expand the war beyond Dagestan and Chechnya.^[2]

Since then the gorge has been a prominent fixture in the complex tangle of Georgian-Russian relations, internal Georgian politics, and the war in Chechnya. By October 1999 the flow of Chechen refugees to Pankisi Gorge had reached about 1,500. The Georgian government acknowledged the need to control and direct the flow of refugees and raised the issue of terrorist elements among them, specifically 50 'Wahhabis', who were considered a threat to Georgian internal stability because of the possibility of their collaboration with Georgian Wahhabis in drug trafficking in Pankisi Gorge.^[3] For Georgia Pankisi Gorge represented a classic spillover threat from an insurgency in a neighbouring state, i.e., the threat posed by transnational crime and violence, on one hand, and the risk that the powerful neighbouring state would threaten its territorial integrity and

sovereignty. Given the complex role that Russia had played in Georgia's internal conflicts in South Osetia and Abkhazia, Tbilisi had grounds for concern, especially with Russian troops deployed as peacekeepers and border guards within Georgia. The Russian government, which considered the Chechen fighters to be bandits and terrorists, drew attention to Pankisi Gorge as a haven used by Chechen bands to reconstitute their forces during the winter pause in operations. Citing Georgian sources, the Russian media estimated the number of combatants in Pankisi Gorge at 450 fighters.^[4] The same article linked the concepts of a struggle against international Islamic terrorism and the haven in Pankisi Gorge.

The gorge is about 4-5 kilometres wide and about 16 kilometres long with mountains on three sides (west, north and east) and had a pre-war population of about 8,000 (65% Kistins (related to Chechens) and 24% Georgians). With the fighting of the last decade, refugees have entered the gorge and the Kistin population has become radical. Even in the Soviet period the region had a reputation for lawlessness. The presence of Chechen rebels and Arab terrorists, plus the almost routine kidnappings, has confirmed this reputation.^[5]

For the last three years, Russian officials have pointed to the Pankisi Gorge as a terrorist and bandit bastion and in 2001 made it part of their War on Terrorism, charging the government of Georgia with an inability and/or unwillingness to prevent cross-border raids. Their claim coincided with a 'scandal' over the deployment of Chechen fighters from Pankisi Gorge to Kodori Gorge in Abkhazia. Several hundred Chechen fighters under the command of Ruslan Gelayev were moved to Abkhazia by the Georgian Ministry of Internal Affairs where they were involved in fighting with Abkhazian rebels and shot down a United Nations (UN) mission helicopter.^[6] Georgian sources admitted the movement but claimed it was only an attempt to get the Chechen fighters out of Pankisi Gorge and Georgia. Russian and Abkhazian commentators took a darker view, seeing in the transfer an open alliance between the Chechen fighters and the Georgian government. Members of President Shevardnadze's government provided fuel to Russian critics by denying the Chechen commander's presence in Pankisi Gorge and his intent to lead his troops into Abkhazia.^[7] In June 2001 Minister of Defence David Tevzadze stated Gelayev was not there and that while there were over 7,000 Chechens then residing in the Pankisi Gorge, they were refugees who fled the fighting in Chechnya and posed no military threat.^[8] Even later, when Gelayev's move to Abkhazia had become a scandal that cost the Minister of Internal Affairs his job, President Shevardnadze publicly defended the Chechen commander as 'a normal-thinking and educated man who favours Georgia'.^[9]

President Putin himself linked the global war against terrorism with the war Russia was fighting in Chechnya.^[10] Russian hawks were much more explicit about what opportunities the War on Terrorism offered Russia in pursuit of its own interests in the Caucasus. Mikhail Leontyev asserted that Russia should take the opportunity to strike immediately at Pankisi Gorge. 'If Russia now wipes out the Chechen militants in the Pankisi Gorge, not a single soul in the world will be able to reproach us.'^[11] The explicit linkage of the Pankisi Gorge to the War on Terrorism has given an international importance to the charges and counter-charges between Russia and Georgia and raises the question of Georgia's ability to protect its own sovereignty and territorial integrity - which is already under question in two secessionist regions, Abkhazia and South Osetia.

In winter 2001 a detachment of US Special Forces arrived in Tbilisi with the task of preparing Georgian Special Forces to operate in the Pankisi Gorge. While the Russian government had welcomed the training mission as evidence of the US commitment to assist in the battle against international terrorism, it repeatedly warned that the situation in the gorge was becoming more and more dangerous. Chairman of the State Duma's Committee on International Affairs, Dmitri Rogozin, noted the difficulties that the US mission had faced in recruiting and training Georgian troops and questioned whether, after six months, any progress had been made in closing down terrorist bases.^[12] The mission's time ran out in early August, coincidentally as the Russian government reported the infiltration of a major Chechen force from Pankisi Gorge into Chechnya.

Through August and September 2002 the Russian government kept up a steady stream of pressure on the government of Georgia. The Russian media presented Pankisi as a staging area for terrorist attacks upon Chechnya and spoke of links between Chechen fighters and Islamic militants, including al Qaeda. While

sympathetic to the terrorist threat facing Moscow, the Bush administration warned Russia not to act unilaterally at the expense of Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity, while at the same time prodding Tbilisi to take its own measures to pacify Pankisi and assert effective control. Aircraft bombed the gorge; Georgia and the OSCE said they were Russian aircraft. Russian officials denied responsibility, proposed a joint commission to investigate the bombing and leaked a story about advanced Georgian aircraft carrying out the attack. In the end Georgia did arrest Arab fighters in the gorge and agreed to joint Russian-Georgian border patrols to seal the common frontier and the war scare subsided. However, the pace of terrorist actions in Chechen did not abate and terrorists under the command of Shamil Basayev were able to bring their acts to Moscow in a bold hostage incident in a theatre that ended with the death of the terrorists and around 120 hostages. Basayev responded to the events in Moscow by threatening more suicide attacks that would result in the mass killing of Russian citizens. The terrorist threat continues to dominate Russian domestic and international politics.

Charting Changing Threat Perceptions

The recent war scare provides clues to the recent evolution of Russian threat assessments. This is important because threat perceptions are a key factor in force requirements and provide one cardinal axis of military reform. Threats define force requirements because they identify possible enemies, likely theatres of war, and the nature of the projected conflict. In the post-Cold War era they have come to include non-state actors and transnational threats like organized crime, narcotic trafficking and terrorism. The general direction of these changes has been from an ideologically-conditioned threat, the political content of which was set by the ruling party toward a threat derived from an evolving, complex and conflicting assessment of national interests by new institutions and actors. The ideologically-derived threat of the Soviet period had a global cast befitting the Soviet Union's role as a superpower committed to an inevitable struggle against capitalism and imperialism. The core threat throughout the Cold War was the United States and its allies and the focus was the military balance in Europe and the strategic nuclear competition between the superpowers. By the 1970s deteriorating relations with the People's Republic of China had added another dimension to Soviet threat calculations. Finally, support for surrogate powers in the Third World added another layer, especially after the Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan. Relations between the Soviet Union and the West might turn warm or cold, but the prism of threat perception kept the focus on the United States in the context of a global competition for power and influence.

Soviet Threat Perceptions and Perestroika

In the Soviet Union threats were about the intentions and capabilities of others to act against the Party-State. Down to 1991 there was a rather stable relationship in the mechanisms for threat forecasting, even if Gorbachev's reform concept - *perestroika* - introduced some radical changes in the content. The political-military aspects of such forecasts were within the purview of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union under the leadership of the Politburo, supported by the apparatus of the Central Committee. The KGB provided political intelligence in support of Party-State leadership. Military-technical aspects of threat were the purview of the Soviet General Staff, which was supposed to serve as an 'unblinking eye on the future'. These agencies could, as they did in the early 1980s, have quite different assessments of the intensity and imminence of the threat before the Soviet Union. Under Yuri Andropov, the KGB instituted an intensive collection programme, code-named RYAN, in search of evidence for a preemptive nuclear strike by the new Reagan administration against the Soviet Union. The war scare of the early 1980s gave a particular coloration to the 'Second Cold War' of that period, especially the conjunction of renewed ideological struggle and the growing awareness of the decline of Soviet military-technological and industrial capabilities under mature socialism in the face of the evolving and dynamic military-technical threat posed by the United States.^[13] Party Congresses, major addresses by General Secretaries, and other documents provided periodic public statements regarding the threats before the USSR. By the early 1980s the military-technological threat had become a prominent part of Cold War psychological warfare for both sides. The Communist Party and Soviet state regularly sought to mobilize international opinion against US defence programmes from the neutron bomb through the deployment of

Pershing II missiles and Ground Launched Cruise Missiles. In answer to the Reagan administration's annual publication *Soviet Military Power*, the Soviet leadership began publishing its own annual, *Otkuda Izhodit Ugroza Miru* (Whence the Threat to Peace) devoted to US military-technical capabilities.^[14] This was an exercise in information/psychological warfare before the term became a buzzword.

Threat assessment was and remained a major part of the preparatory work for each five year plan from the 1920s to the end of the Soviet Union.^[15] It was directly tied to economic development because of the emphasis upon mobilization planning for the entire national economy and the requirement for national economic autarky in the face of capitalist encirclement. The threat assessment drove the war economy (*voyennaya ekonomika*) ultimately into the ground. Key features of every threat assessment were the ideological context of the struggle between capitalism and communism and assessments of both the scale of a future conflict and its imminence.^[16]

Even in the nuclear era Soviet preparations embraced the requirements for mass industrial war. Ideological rigidity and institutional biases associated with the planning process led to serious distortions in threat perceptions and perpetuated mobilization planning requirements for a general war that included massive tank production in the first year of a general war with the West.^[17] Colonel-General A. A. Danilevich later recalled that certain factors drove threat assessment and combined to push the USSR into a costly arms race. He identified the 'militant ideology of the CPSU and the nature of the command economy,' underscoring the special role of the 'specific interests of the Soviet military-industrial complex'.^[18] While disagreeing on many aspects of Soviet military experience, Russian military experts share the perception that Soviet military science lost the ability to forecast future conflicts and that Soviet policy distorted military requirements. General Gareyev noted the lack of independent non-state inputs into policy discussions.^[19] Colonel Vitaly Shlykov declared that the United States won the Cold War not on the number of its tanks but on the number of its 'think tanks'.^[20] By the late Soviet period, China had joined the list of major potential opponents and preparing for war in the Far East had become a major defence burden. In the final analysis the Soviet General Staff considered 23 nations as likely opponents in a future war, imposing a huge burden upon the state, the economy and society. The nature of possible future war in the late Soviet period involved 'a clash of two social systems on a global scale'.^[21]

With the achievement of strategic nuclear parity by the Soviet Union, the image of future began to change. By the 1980s the General Staff's reading on the military-technical characteristics of such a conflict came to embrace the possibility of a protracted conventional war but based on the fruits of the Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA) involving a qualitatively different set of armaments.^[22] Reconnaissance-strike and -fire complexes became topics of active discussion, as did the challenge of non-linear combat and the use of operational manoeuvre groups.^[23] General Gareyev, the author of the operational manoeuvre group concept, had noted this asymmetric response to the military-technological threat posed by the West. Speaking about the impact of the Six Day War in the Middle East on Soviet weapons acquisition, Major-General V. V. Larionov observed that experience confirmed both the utility of precision anti-tank missiles and tanks in battle. 'In comparison with the West, our armaments developed asymmetrically. Initially there was a gamble on missiles, we had to develop ones that would reach another continent and therefore we emphasized range. But that left us behind in command and control and communications. Regarding precision weapons, work in this area is ongoing and largely successfully. Here we did not permit a large gap.'^[24] General Gareyev saw the key gap in the Soviet development of weapons systems for the RMA to be in the area of micro-electronics, which permitted the integration of reconnaissance, observation, automated aiming and automated control systems for precision fires and strikes. Micro-electronics are at the heart of 'thinking precision weapons of the future and the technological basis of information war,'^[25] he said.

Beyond this debate over threat forecasting there stood the looming issue of a crisis in the mechanism for threat articulation. *Perestroika*, with its attempt to disengage internationally in order to reform internally, put great strain on that mechanism. Within the Soviet elite there were fundamental disputes about a shift toward a benign image of the external world. Some, like Aleksandr Yakovlev, one of Gorbachev's closest advisors, spoke of robbing the West of its threat by de-militarizing the confrontation in Europe as the Soviet Union also

disengaged in the Third World. Disengagement was supposed to provide a window for domestic reform that would lead to a revival of a more benign and democratic form of Soviet power. Between 1987 and 1991, a series of agreements put an end to the Cold War but provided no final detailed settlement. These included the International Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty, the agreements covering German unification, the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) Charter of Paris, and the Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty. The pace of change quickly got beyond the means of Gorbachev and his supporters to control.

The three key power institutions of the Soviet state: the Party, the KGB and the military, proved resistant to reform. Many within the Soviet elite saw disengagement and domestic reforms as threatening the very foundations of Soviet power. For the conservatives within the Party, KGB and military, it became increasingly clear that *perestroika* and *glasnost* (openness) were creating conditions for the loss of the Soviet sphere of influence in the Third World, and the collapse of the satellite system in Eastern Europe and the end of the Warsaw Treaty Organization. In the aftermath of the Velvet Revolution in the autumn of 1989, these critics could see signs of the collapse of what Andrei Kokoshin has called 'the third empire', i.e., the Soviet Marxist-Leninist, multi-national state, awash in a rising tide of nationalism, especially Russian nationalism. 'The end of the 80s and beginning of the 90s marked the simultaneous collapse of all three "empires"'. Kokoshin has written of the 'burden' of three empires and their impact upon Russia's rebirth as a great power.^[26]

The Evolution of Russian Threat Perceptions, 1991-1999

The coup of August 1991 was a belated and ineffective effort by the disgruntled elite to reverse these trends. Their failure accelerated but did not call the collapse of the old edifice. Andrei Kokoshin has compared the end of the Soviet Union as a superpower with the collapse of the Tsarist Empire as a major actor in the European balance of power. In both cases the seeds of discord were sown by issues associated with cultural and nationalist struggles on the periphery of the Empire. Behind the ideological posture of the Communist state and its internationalist struggle were a set of threats created by the very nature of the multinational empire. The Yeltsin government in Russia posed the most serious threat to the Soviet state by advocating Russian national interests and promoting national autonomy within the fellow union republics and within Russia's own ethnic-territorial subdivisions. Against this national consciousness there were divisions in Moscow that robbed the state of the ability to act against these new internal threats.

Over the next decade the Yeltsin government undertook the dismemberment of the Soviet system and embarked upon sweeping reforms to privatize and marketize the economy and to create a democratic state. The post-Soviet era proved far more chaotic and destabilizing than the original architects of reforms had envisioned. The gross domestic product continued to decline sharply. Crime and corruption became major threats to both the economy and the polity. Ethnic, religious and regional tensions brought new conflicts on Russia's periphery. Russia was no longer a superpower, and these problems raised questions as to Russia's status as a great power. General Anatoly Kulikov, then Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Internal Affairs, described this situation as a 'geopolitical catastrophe'.^[27] In contrast with the Soviet period, threats to state sovereignty and territorial integrity took on an internal focus that often became linked to the possibility of external intervention into Russia's domestic affairs. Military reform and threat assessment took place in a 'Time of Troubles'.^[28]

In this context, the Russian state had no effective institutions for studying and articulating the challenges and threats to itself. The Yeltsin administration created a presidential agency to coordinate defence and security policy, the Security Council, in 1992. The Security Council had a chequered life over the 1990s. It did develop an extensive apparatus in support of its policy formulation functions, serving as the final clearing house for major security documents, including military doctrine and national security strategy. By 1998 its staff had developed a complex methodology for the formulation of Russian national interests and the assessment and classification of threats to those interests in a wide range of internal and external areas. These included political, economic, defence, ethnonational, technogenic and natural disasters, ecological, informational, law enforcement, and social protection of the population.^[29] Some have criticized the Council's ineffectiveness in

coordinating the policies of Russia's power ministries. Others have described it as 'a new Politburo'. At times it has been a battle ground for power contenders, especially when General Aleksandr Lebed headed it briefly after the 1996 presidential elections and used it as a vehicle to negotiate a cease fire in Chechnya. Lebed's interlude was, however, brief. The Security Council has always been a creature of the presidency, and under Boris Yeltsin that relationship waxed and waned. In the midst of the financial meltdown of August 1998 and the ensuing governmental crisis, Andrei Kokoshin occupied the post of Secretary of the Security Council and took on the task of finding a way to create a government of public confidence. That effort failed when his recommendations ran counter to the interests of President Yeltsin and 'the family', a cohort of oligarchs and family members committed to retaining the power of the president over the government.^[30]

The Security Council was one step for Vladimir Putin on his way to power. His tenure coincided with a marked deterioration of Russia's relations with the United States and NATO as a result of the military intervention against Milosevic's Yugoslavia. When Putin became president, the Security Council achieved significant influence under a new secretary, Sergei Ivanov. Ivanov enjoyed the confidence of the president and during his tenure the Security Council became a focus of security policy formulation. It continues to be dependent on the president for influence and when Ivanov moved to the Ministry of Defence in March 2001, the future role of the Security Council was again open to question. As the events of September 2001 proved, President Putin could set a new line for Russian security policy in response to the terrorist attacks in the United States and Washington's declaration of a war on terrorism.

The Yeltsin government in Russia, which inherited the international position of the USSR, began with a strikingly benign and almost utopian view of the international system and an utter absence of any established mechanisms for dealing with threat analysis. Andrei Kozyrev, Yeltsin's first Foreign Minister, spoke of the integration of Russia into the West. One of the liberal reformers close to Yeltsin, Kozyrev represented the apogee of pro-US and pro-Western sentiment in Moscow. For Russia as an emerging market democracy, there were no threats in the conventional sense of the term. But this benign view of Russia's threat environment proved short-lived. In December 1992, only a year after the collapse of the USSR, Kozyrev shocked a CSCE ministerial meeting when he accused NATO of pursuing goals that were 'essentially unchanged' and seeking military advantage in eastern Europe. He pledged Russian support for Serbia and stated that Russia would defend its national interests by military and economic means. Less than an hour after giving the speech Kozyrev returned to the podium to say that his remarks had been intended as a 'rhetorical device' to demonstrate what could happen if nationalists and communists came to power in Moscow.^[31] Janus like, Kozyrev had pointed towards NATO expansion as a threat to Russia and then warned the West that Russia's own internal instability was the chief threat to a democratic Russia. For the Yeltsin administration mobilizing Western support in its domestic battle with parliamentary opposition became part of the politics of threat perception for a weak and chaotic Russia. While he would remain foreign minister for another four years, Kozyrev's domestic and international credibility had been undermined.

At the same time the Russian Ministry of Defence under General Pavel Grachev took on the task of writing a military doctrine for Russia. What was noteworthy about this process was the circumscribed role of the General Staff and the willingness of active duty and retired military officers to address both military-political and military-technical aspects of threat perceptions. Beginning with a special issue of *Military Thought* in June 1992 devoted to the debate on military doctrine and concluding with the publication of the military doctrine as approved by Security Council in November 1993, the debate over doctrine and threat perceptions became linked. The debate raised such issues as the use of the armed forces to protect Russian minorities in the near abroad and addressed the need to turn the Commonwealth of Independent States into a unified security system under Russian leadership by building upon the mutual security treaty of 15 May 1992 signed by Russia, Kazakhstan, Armenia, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. The promulgation of the military doctrine only one month after the storming of the Moscow White House provided a specific context to this document of the transition period. The doctrine addressed both military-political and military-technical aspects of the threat. It contained a brief introduction, sections on the political, military, military-technical and economic bases of doctrine, and a brief concluding section. This division into sections marked a break with the Soviet bifurcation

into military-political and military-technical parts by recasting the second section to include a discussion of economic factors associated with marketization and privatization. The introduction made three salient points. First it presented the doctrine as 'a component part of the Conception of security of the Russian Federation ... and a document of the transition period'. Moreover, it defined the transition period as one marked by three mutually-interdependent processes: the establishment of the Russian state structure, the execution of democratic reforms in Russia, and the coming together of a new system of international relations. Second, it defined the content of military doctrine in a manner that stressed war prevention and defence of vital national interests:

This is a system of officially adopted state views on the prevention of wars and armed conflicts, on military construction, on the preparation of the country for defence, on the organization of counter-actions to threats to the military security of the state, on the use of the armed forces and other troops of the Russian Federation for the protection of the vital interests of the Russian Federation.^[32]

Third, the introduction asserted that Russian vital interests posed no threat to other states and spoke of the need for 'coordinating measures of a political, economic, legal and military nature with the participation of all organs of state power and administration, of social formations and citizens of the Russian Federation'.^[33]

Minister Grachev noted changes in the threat environment confronting Russia, i.e., the reduced risk of world war, and said that the chief danger for the stability of peace now came from local wars and armed conflicts.^[34] The Russian armed forces would conduct both defensive and offensive operations depending on the nature of the conflict unleashed. Grachev outlined plans to increase the effectiveness of the armed forces through a two-stage plan of development during which Russia would build mobile forces. The first stage of the plan, to be completed by 1996, involved the redeployment of all forces back within Russia's borders and the reduction of the overall size of the force. Then a second stage, the re-equipping of the force, would begin. This would include a mixed system of force generation (conscript and voluntary service).^[35] The doctrine also addressed the stationing of Russian troops abroad.^[36] On the internal role of the Russian armed forces, Grachev noted the new tasks associated with maintaining internal order and pictured the new doctrine as an *ex post facto* justification for the use of troops in support of President Yeltsin's government in Moscow on October 3-5 against his opponents.^[37] The transition period outlined in the doctrine, however, proved both longer and more chaotic than Grachev predicted. Military reform remained a dead letter during his tenure and by late 1994 the armed forces were once again being used to restore internal order and to quash Chechen separatism. Grachev's own star began to set with the military setbacks in Chechnya that began in January 1995 and continued into the summer of 1996.

Grachev's successor, General Igor Rodionov, made very clear what he saw as the linkage between the threat environment and military reform. In the debate over Grachev's draft military doctrine, Rodionov had spoken of the new threats facing Russia. In addressing both the military-political and military-technical sides of military doctrine, while not dismissing the need to prepare for nuclear war, he spoke of the special relevance of the Gulf War. On the one hand, he used it to make the case for a willingness of the US and its NATO allies to use force in pursuit of foreign policy goals and identified the threat posed by high-tech, conventional weapons, because of the military-political, military-strategic, and military-technical situation confronting Russia and the Commonwealth had become a possible variant for 'major aggression against Russia'.^[38] In addition, Rodionov argued that Russia had to prepare for local wars near to the borders of Russia and other members of the Commonwealth, as well as in more distant regions, where Russian national interests could be affected. Finally, Rodionov spoke of internal conflicts, arising out of national or religious antagonisms, which could lead to civil war and foreign intervention.^[39] During his brief tenure Rodionov found himself engaged in a losing fight with the civilian leadership of the national security apparatus over the proper course of military reform. In the face of pressure to confine reform to the armed forces and focus upon personnel reductions, Rodionov had warned that NATO expansion could mean the appearance of a non-strategic nuclear threat directly on Russia's western frontiers. 'We might objectively face the task of increasing tactical nuclear weapons at our border.'^[40]

With the break-up of the KGB, the function of external collection and analysis fell to the External Intelligence Service (SVR), which came under the direction of Yevgeny Primakov in September 1991. Primakov, a journalist and academic specialist on the Middle East with close ties to the Soviet intelligence services, viewed the situation in the early 1990s to be analogous to that facing Russia after the Crimean War when the balance of power in Europe had isolated a defeated Russia. For Primakov and the SVR there was no shortage of threats in the new international situation, especially in the case of the emergence of a US global hegemony and unipolar international system. Such a system would marginalize Russia's position and could preclude the consolidation of its position as a great power. It fell to the SVR to provide the most complete articulation of threats facing Russia during Yeltsin's first term in office. Primakov spoke of Russia as a great power and promoted the reintegration of the successor states into a Russian dominated security system. In early 1995 Yeltsin appointed Primakov to replace Kozyrev as Minister of Foreign Affairs, a post he would hold until the autumn of 1998, when he became Prime Minister.

To compensate for Russia's weak position in Europe, Primakov explored cooperation with China and renewed ties with radical regimes in the Middle East. Primakov did not resort to intractable confrontation in Europe, rather he sought to use Russia's limited leverage to extract concessions that would enhance Russia's engagement and limit the impact of Western inroads, especially the expansion of NATO and the employment of NATO as an agent of peace enforcement in the Balkans. It was Primakov who gave Russian security policy its Eurasian vocabulary and its commitment to oppose monopolarism, shorthand for US global hegemony. Primakov sought to revive Russia's place in a new balance of power and took as his model the policies of Prince Gorchakov, Russian Foreign Minister under Alexander II. Gorchakov's foreign policy provided the external environment for domestic reform and transformation during the epoch of the Great Reforms. It sought to keep Russia engaged in Europe while the empire carried out the reforms necessary to restore its place in the balance of power. That this policy of gathering strength (*sosredotocheniye*) allowed Russia to shift sides in the rivalries in Europe while her soldiers acquired a colonial empire in Central Asia might seem out of keeping with the post-Cold War international system did not bother Primakov. He took the long view of international power-politics, favoured pragmatism, and sought time for domestic reform to restore Russia's status as a great power.^[41]

The pragmatism was manifest in the negotiations that led to Russia's decision to join IFOR in the execution of the Dayton Accords for Bosnia-Herzegovina.^[42] It was also manifest in the NATO-Russia Charter of 1997. Derek Averre in his analysis of Russian attitudes towards NATO expansion pointed to two trends, one of which was the legacy of Soviet power and the attempt to reconcile diverging interests and come to terms with new internal and external threats. He categorized the Russian response as realism in the face of the emerging post-Cold War security system in Europe.^[43]

In December 1997 the Security Council published Russia's first national security concept, which stressed the internal threats to Russian security and treated NATO expansion as a political but not military threat. The Yeltsin administration emphasized the social, economic, and ethnic problems that could undermine Russia's integration into the global economy. Organized crime and corruption and not military threats were given top priority. Reformers spoke of a 'window of security' that Russia might exploit to bring about transformation. Russia's defence leadership, especially Marshal Sergeyev, emphasized the limited modernization of strategic nuclear systems as one way to sustain her great power status and largely ignored the continued decay of her conventional forces.^[44] Limited reforms were undertaken to increase cooperation of Russian conventional forces facing an increasingly unstable situation in the Caucasus as Chechnya drifted into lawlessness. In 1998 the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Ministry of Defence ran a joint command post exercise to test the ability of all Russian forces in the North Caucasus to cooperate in a crisis contingency. Minister of Internal Affairs Sergei Stepashin commented on the imminent need for such cooperation: 'The situation in the North Caucasus makes it imperative that narrow departmental interests do not impede practical work'.^[45]

The Impact of NATO's Kosovo Campaign and Chechnya, 1999-2001

The assumptions behind such realism were called into question by the events of 1998-1999. Russia's financial meltdown in the late summer of 1998 called into question any hope for rapid economic recovery and raised the prospect of growing internal instability. Executive leadership under Yeltsin appeared increasingly chaotic and unpopular. Russia became an even more of a marginal player in the post-Cold War security system. The crisis began with NATO's pressure against Milosevic's Yugoslavia and reached a peak when NATO embarked upon an air campaign to force Milosevic to submit. Russian public opinion of all shadings turned strongly anti-Western during the bombing campaign.^[46] At the same time the Yeltsin government found itself isolated internationally and without any effective course of action to counter NATO or protect the interests of its ally, Milosevic's Yugoslavia. In a set of domestic and international manoeuvres, Yeltsin avoided impeachment and set Viktor Chernomyrdin to help negotiate an end to the conflict. NATO's unilateral use of force without the endorsement of the UN Security Council heightened Russian fears that a local conflict on Russia's own periphery could serve as the basis for NATO actions to impose a settlement at the expense of Russian sovereignty and territorial integrity.

The response was a review of the use of nuclear forces to 'de-escalate' a future conflict, if conventional forces could not mount a sustained defence of Russia's national interests.^[47] In June the Russian Ministry of Defence executed its first large-scale military exercise of the post-Cold War era and included in it simulated limited nuclear attacks against aggressor forces threatening Kaliningrad and Belarus. In *Zapad-99* the Russian forces responded to precision strikes on Russian and allied territory with limited nuclear strikes 'against the countries from whose territories the offensive was launched'.^[48] The exercise came on the heels of the unilateral deployment of 200 Russian paratroopers from its SFOR brigade to Kosovo in order to preempt NATO deployments.^[49] Russian media treated the 'march' as a symbolic reassertion of Russia's influence in the face of the reality of NATO's power. The Ministry of Defence related the timing of *Zapad-99* to the Russian national psyche by initiating the exercise on the eve of 21 June, the anniversary of the German invasion in 1941. In a visit to the Ministry of Defence immediately after the exercise President Boris Yeltsin in the presence of senior officials of the government and the leadership of the Ministry of Defence congratulated those present on the success of the exercise, but then declared that the threat of large-scale military aggression against Russia 'is something for sci-fi books'.^[50]

The military came away from NATO's Yugoslav campaign with some specific priorities informed by the manner in which NATO had conducted its air and information operations. Minister of Defence Sergeyev explicitly linked the study of past military experience, Russian and foreign, to the task of formulating new concepts of military art. Sergeyev stressed the imperative of studying NATO's campaign against Yugoslavia. 'We also need to deeply and comprehensively analyze the forms and means of use of armed forces of the USA and NATO against independent Yugoslavia'.^[51] This was particularly relevant because the Minister had observed specific shortcomings in operational and combat training during the recently-concluded strategic command-staff exercise *Zapad-99*.^[52] The fact that this exercise included the employment of Russian nuclear forces in a preemptive strike against an aggressor using advanced conventional forces underscored a major point made by General Gareyev. Nuclear forces would retain their deterrence capabilities and preclude their massed employment, but they could not exclude the use of advanced conventional weapons in a local armed conflict. Gareyev noted:

Considering the new nature of armed conflict, in recent years a number of countries have been laying their main emphasis in military development on qualitative improvement of conventional arms, and primarily high-precision weapons, increasing the fighting power and mobility of troops (forces), and preparing armed forces for military activities based on the use of conventional weapons, but with regard for the constant threat of use of nuclear weapons. The system of strategic actions of armed forces and other troops is changing.^[53]

Thus, there emerged an explicit linkage between the 'strategy of indirect actions' and waging 'contact-less' armed struggle and the risks of horizontal and vertical escalation to regional, general and nuclear war. Russian analysts associated with the Academy of Military Sciences have developed a coherent interpretation of the RMA and managed to relate it to the immediate and future military threats before Russia. Russia could not pose

a symmetric response to the US challenge in the RMA, but it could respond asymmetrically to the threat of foreign intervention in local conflicts on the periphery of Russia.

This response was particularly important by the late summer of 1999 given deteriorating situations in the Caucasus. Chechen fighters and Islamic militants had carried their cause into Dagestan and brought a Russian military response, initially confined to destroying the enemy forces in Dagestan or their expulsion. However, after a series of murky bombing incidents inside Russia itself, the Russian government under a new Prime Minister, Vladimir Putin, declared its intention to take the war into Chechnya proper. He found strong support for such an effort within the Russian General Staff. General Anatoly Kvashnin, appointed Chief of the General Staff in June 1997, was the former commander of the North Caucasus Military District during the First Chechen War. Kvashnin favoured the reform of the Russian armed forces along lines that would enhance conventional military power and modernize the force to fight local wars. Putin staked his own rise to power on military success in Chechnya, and between his appointment as acting president and his election, Russian forces captured the flattened Chechen capital, Grozny. The uneven struggle, however, continues, pitting regular Russian troops and Putin paramilitary formations against Chechen Mujahadeen. The Chechens cannot expel the Russians and the Russians cannot prevent Chechen raids and terrorist actions. A significant portion of the Chechen population has been displaced. Human rights activists have pointed to systematic abuses of the civilian population by the Russian occupation forces and the Moscow-sponsored government in Grozny. This struggle is the military manifestation of what Samuel Huntington has described as a ‘clash of civilizations’.^[54]

Over the next two years the discussion of threats to Russia’s security underwent a subtle shift. Initial public documents on military doctrine and the national security concept stressed the primacy of the threat from monopolarity and US global hegemony.^[55] The on-going war for the reconquest of Chechnya provided the context for the draft military doctrine published in October 1999, for the draft made very explicit the link between restoring Russian sovereignty in this region and the struggle against monopolarism. As a declaratory statement of Russian intentions, the draft justified the prosecution of that war as an exercise in restoring national sovereignty and territorial integrity and carried with it an implicit domestic agenda that put a premium on the restoration of order. The draft military doctrine placed the *presupposition* of war at the very centre of Russian politics with the most profound ramifications for the Russian state and society and for Russia’s place in the international system. As Prime Minister Vladimir Putin told officers at a naval base in Russia’s Far East in October, ‘The government has undertaken to rebuild and strengthen the military might of the state to respond to new geopolitical realities, both external and internal threats’. Putin pointed to events in the Caucasus, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan creating new threats for Russia and stated that ‘developments in Europe, in Yugoslavia, also prompt a lot of thought’.^[56]

While most commentators on the draft military doctrine stressed the risk posed by NATO’s capacity to intervene on Russia’s periphery, others faulted the doctrine for its failure to make a realistic assessment of Russia’s domestic situation and international position a decade after the end of the Cold War. In some of the sharpest criticism of the project, Rear Admiral Vasiliy Gulin, Russian Navy (retired), called into question some of the document’s most basic assumptions about Russia’s role in the world, pointing to Russia’s economic and demographic decline, its international isolation, and its reduced influence in world affairs. Gulin simply doubted the ability of Russia to oppose the emerging post-Cold War order and suggested that Russia should seek an orientation toward Europe and prepare for ‘serious demographic threats from the East and South’.^[57]

Putin and the War on Terrorism

From his assumption of the presidency, Putin put his own stamp on Russian domestic and international policy. His domestic agenda involved the restoration of state power in order to provide order and stability. He placed a high premium on Russia’s economic development and integration into the global economy. Chechnya became the point where domestic order, economic recovery and national security joined. Successful prosecution of the Chechen war, beginning with the deliberate assault on the Chechen capital in 2000 and continuing as counter-

insurgency operations, became the most vital issue for Russian national security. In 1999-2000 the primary threat concern associated with the conduct of that war was the possibility of Russia's international isolation and even foreign intervention as a result of the brutal conduct of Russian forces in Chechnya. The Putin administration persistently treated the Chechen resistance as bandits and terrorists, enacted harsh measures against the Chechen civilian population, and linked the continued resistance to external support from Islamic radicals and terrorists. The conflict in Chechnya was explicitly linked to increasing instability across Russia's southern periphery from the Caucasus through Central Asia, where hostilities were on-going or imminent.^[58] In July 2000 the Shanghai Five (Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan) reiterated their commitment to cooperate militarily in combating national separatism, international terrorism, religious extremism, as well as weapons trafficking, drug trafficking, and illegal migration.^[59]

While Russian-American relations remained frozen during the last year of the Clinton administration and the first few months of the Bush administration, there was strong evidence that Putin was willing to come to agreements on Cold War legacy issues - NATO expansion, strategic arms control and national missile defence - if Russia could be sure of some understanding regarding Chechnya and cooperation in the struggle against international terrorism.^[60] The opportunity for the recasting of Russian-American relations came on the US homeland of September 11, 2001. Putin moved rapidly to join the global war on terrorism, and Russia rendered immediate assistance to US forces in their operations against the Taliban and al Qaeda in Afghanistan, including support for the deployment of US forces in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. Putin stated his price for such support as the explicit linkage of Russia's counter-insurgency operations in Chechnya with the war on terrorism, thereby providing international legitimacy to Russian actions and radically reducing the risk of international isolation and Western intervention.^[61] Putin demonstrated his good faith in the new arrangement by both symbolic and tangible actions. On 12 September the Russian envoy voted for the unanimous resolution of the UN Security Council, which expressed its readiness to take all necessary steps to respond to the attacks - and any acts of terrorism - which it called 'criminal and unjustifiable'.^[62] At the meeting of the NATO-Russia Permanent Joint Council on 13 September 2001 Russia joined in NATO's condemnation of terrorism and pledge for action. 'NATO and Russia are united in their resolve not to let those responsible for such an inhuman act go unpunished, NATO and Russia call on the entire international community to unite in the struggle against terrorism'.^[63] Putin announced Russian withdrawal from the naval base at Cam Ranh Bay, Vietnam and the intelligence station in Lourdes, Cuba. Russia accepted US withdrawal from the ABM Treaty, concluded negotiations on a START III Treaty for radical reductions in strategic nuclear arms, and muted its criticism of NATO expansion in exchange for a '19+1' arrangement for consultations. In short, in a few months the issues that had dominated Cold War threat analysis were radically transformed in the context of the war on terrorism.

Conclusion

Thus, we return to the war scare over Pankisi Gorge in the summer and autumn of 2002. That crisis, with its threat of the use of Russian forces within Georgia, was resolved in large measure because it not only did not bring into play a US-Russian strategic rivalry but actually benefited from US presence and mediation between Moscow and Tbilisi in the context of the war on terrorism. The present circumstances highlight how far threat perceptions have evolved since the early 1980s, when a war scare was about strategic nuclear exchange. At the same time, the war on terrorism has brought to an end the post-Cold War decade of transition. Putin bears much of the responsibility for recasting Russia's international posture and threat perceptions. His policy has been pragmatic, set by domestic requirements and the realities of Russia's limited power. Such an assessment places distinct limits on military reform and puts a high priority on developing the means to deal with the threats of insurgency on Russia's periphery.

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