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The Strange Case of Russian Peacekeeping Operations in the Near Abroad 1992-1994

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Introduction

In mid-February 1994, with the NATO deadline for the removal of heavy weaponry around the besieged Bosnian city of Sarajevo drawing nearer, peacekeeping took a new turn, as General Sir Michael Rose, the chief of the UN Protection Forces (UNPROFOR) in Bosnia, sought to use the interpositioning of UN peacekeepers to break the siege of Sarajevo. At that point, the Russian government ordered the redeployment of some 400 Russian peacekeepers from Croatia to the Serbian-held territory around the city of Sarajevo, thus protecting their Serbian Slavic brothers from possible UN-NATO air strikes. The Serbs and various Russian mercenaries who have been volunteering their services greeted the Russian soldiers with songs, bread, salt and moonshine.¹ The Russian government explained the initiative by claiming that it was concerned that the NATO threat of air strikes would escalate the Bosnian crisis, and that the UN and NATO had not exhausted all of the "peaceful" options.² This ambiguous action and what it suggests for future Russian peacekeeping operations (PKO) needs to be understood in the context of earlier and ongoing Russian peacekeeping initiatives. Therefore, it is instructive to examine how the Russians, to date, have conducted peacekeeping operations outside the borders of Russia.³

More specifically, since the collapse of the USSR and the formation of a Russian national army, the Russian military has participated in four peacekeeping operations beyond Russia's borders but within the confines of the former Soviet Union (FSU): Tadjikistan, Moldova, and two separate peacekeeping operations in the republic of Georgia (Southern Ossetia and Abkhazia). This article will briefly examine the background of these conflicts, the Russian peacekeeping approach in each case, and suggest which strategy the Russian government is likely to adopt in future peacekeeping operations in the "near abroad" (the non-Russian republics of the FSU).

These conflicts and the Russian military response are important for U.S. national security. Though distant, the fighting in the streets of Dushanbe or Sukhumi affects U.S. foreign policy. The continued fighting in former Yugoslavia attests to the truth that minor conflict has the potential to spread and affect the well-being of the most distant neighbor. Consider the Caucasus; Iran, Turkey and Russia are each attempting to exercise their influence in this region, each with their own agenda. There are serious implications for the United States if our NATO partner, Turkey, were to become militarily involved against a Russian sponsored proxy. The issue is

complicated by possible U.S. security guarantees stemming from the entry of Georgia and Russia into the Partnership for Peace program.⁴ The United States military needs to be aware of the conflicts brewing along Russia's borders.

Before describing these conflicts and the role which the Russian military has played as peacemakers, it is important to understand that for the Russian, just as in the U.S. military, there is no accepted doctrine for peace operations. Because of changes in geo-political status, terminology from Cold War peace-keeping experience is no longer applicable. Recent UN experience has shown that first generation PKO's no longer provide an adequate frame of reference for second or third generation PKOs.⁵ The Russians have been unable to develop a practical peacemaking doctrine which complies with the current guidelines set forth by the United Nations:

1. consent and invitation of the conflicting parties;
2. impartiality of the peacekeeping force;
3. use of force only in self-defense.⁶

Having experienced the often unpeaceful nature of PKO's, the Russians would be more likely to follow the more realistic criteria put forth by UN Secretary General Boutros-Ghali in his recently delivered speech, entitled: "Agenda for Peace":

1. that the peacekeeping force may intervene without the consent of all parties;
2. that the peace force does not necessarily seek to be impartial;
3. that the offensive use of weapons may be required.⁷

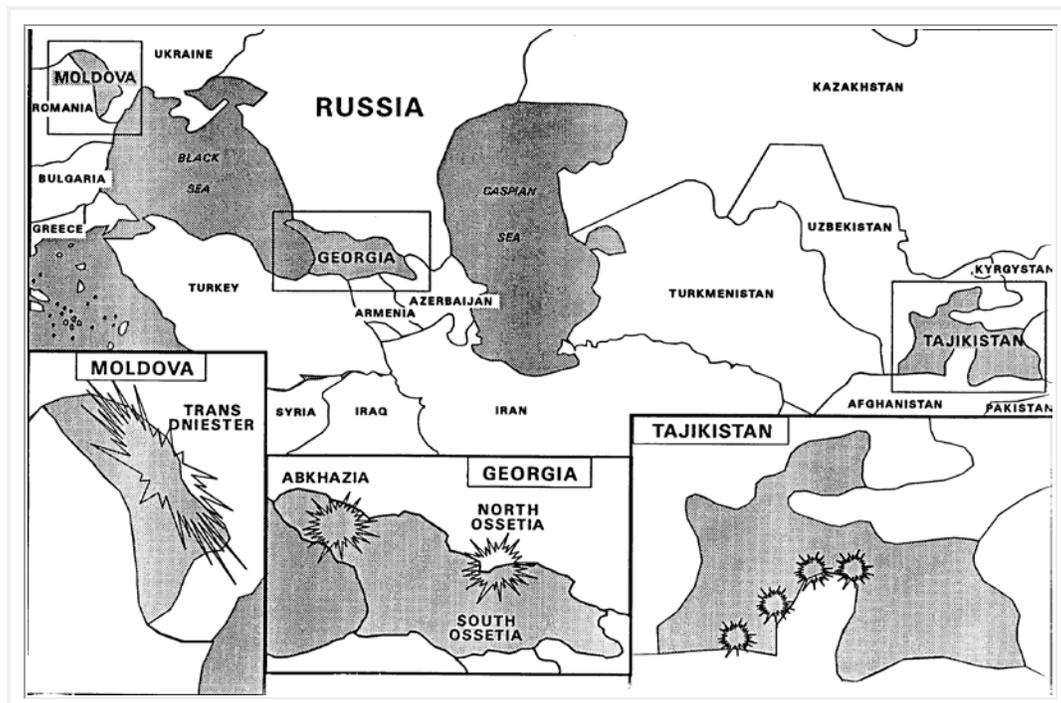


Figure 1 - Russian Peacekeeping Operations/Area of Conflicts

Just like every other regional power, Russia is concerned with maintaining and keeping the peace along and near her borders. This desire is reflected in their new constitution, military doctrine and national security concept. Russia asserts that it is her responsibility to maintain order within the confines of the FSU. What is missing, not surprisingly, is a detailed explanation of "how" they intend to maintain, or in some cases, restore the peace. Not that it really matters. History is replete with an untold number of peaceful declarations which were used as a pretext for armed, and often one-sided, use of force. In the ambiguous area of peacekeeping operations (where cease-fires are sometimes measured in minutes and safe havens are often anything but safe), it is probably more prudent to examine actions than official policies and statements.

Southern Ossetia

The Russian Army conducted its first peacekeeping operation in Southern Ossetia, an autonomous region in the Republic of Georgia. The conflict originated in early 1991, when the Georgian national government refused to respect the autonomy of the Ossetian region. The newly-elected, ultra-nationalist, president of Georgia, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, began to enact legislation designed to create an ethnically-pure Georgian state. These actions prompted fear and an even greater demand for Ossetian autonomy, or possible union with their kin in the adjoining Northern Ossetian region of Russia.

Serious fighting began in the spring of 1991, when elements of the Georgian Mkhedrioni (an undisciplined national guard of dubious legal status) attempted to crush the Ossetian independence movement. For over a year, guerrilla battles raged throughout Southern Ossetia. Georgian forces blockaded and shelled the main Ossetian city of Tskhinvali, with casualties mounting into the thousands. The situation began to improve when Georgian armed warlords forced the removal of the democratically elected (but increasingly authoritarian) President Gamsakhurdia and upon the return, in March 1992, of the former Georgian communist party leader, Eduard Shevardnadze. Meeting in June 1992, President Yeltsin and Chairman of the Georgian State Council Shevardnadze agreed on the introduction of a Russian-led peacekeeping operation into Southern Ossetia.

The Russians took this step for a number of reasons. One of Moscow's concerns was the safety of Russian military units still stationed in Southern Ossetia. Moreover, the continuing flow of refugees (approximately 100,000 during 1990-1992) from Southern Ossetia only worsened the already bleak housing and employment situation in Northern Ossetia (Russia). Unless extinguished quickly, many Russian leaders believed that this conflict could enflame ethnic mistrust throughout the entire Caucasus region, engulfing Russia's southern border in combat.

Russia has good reasons to fear the volatility of this region. The ethno-political situation in the Middle East is simple compared to the tangled, ethnically-charged conditions of the Caucasus. The political boundaries in no way correspond to the ethnic reality of this region, where clan ties intersect political boundaries. The Caucasus region comprises a mountainous patchwork of more than 150 different ethnic cultures. A large percentage of them suffered grievously under

communism, with entire peoples exiled to Siberia or murdered. Soviet power used ethnic rivalries as part of their strategy of divide and rule in this region, often playing ethnic groups against each other. Only after 1989 did the Russian government attempt to peacefully address past injustices. The slightest perceived discrimination or population imbalance (caused by refugees) could have strategic consequences for Russian leaders.

In mid-July 1992, a 1500 man, combined peacekeeping force was deployed in and around the besieged city of Tskhinvali. In contrast to accepted peacekeeping practice, soldiers from the conflicting sides were included in the peacekeeping force. The force was comprised of Russian, Georgian, and Ossetian soldiers, with a smattering of other nationalities. The peacekeepers established the command post at the Russian 292d Helicopter Regiment base in Tskhinvali. It was clear from the beginning that the Russians were in charge. For example, when the Georgian Defense Minister, Tengiz Kitovani, suggested that 1500 peace-keepers was perhaps too large, and that the Russian contingent was proportionately too great (60%), his concerns were ignored.⁸

It is important to note that the warring sides had not agreed upon a political solution to this conflict before the introduction of peacekeepers.⁹ The agreement between President Yeltsin and Shevardnadze merely stipulated that they would use a combined peacekeeping force to restore order. The political status of South Ossetia remained undetermined. Accordingly, peacekeepers moved in and began to restore a semblance of order. Their mission was to separate the warring sides, disarm the many roving guerrilla bands, clear access routes, remove mines, break the siege of Tskhinvali, and assist in the repatriation of refugees. While sporadic shooting and random terrorist acts continued, peacekeeping forces were able to halt most large scale fighting. Nevertheless, in the first month of peacekeeping operations, 20 soldiers from the peacekeeping contingent were killed in action.¹⁰ The original peacekeeping "mandate" was for two months, but because political leaders were unable to reach an agreement concerning Southern Ossetia's status, they extended it indefinitely. The situation today remains very tense, and despite claims of a "Russian peacekeeping success", the warring sides are no closer to a political settlement.¹¹ As a consequence, Russian, Georgian and Ossetian soldiers continue to serve as a stabilizing force in this area. The lack of a political resolution has placed the peacekeepers in a precarious situation. The commander of the Russian battalion claimed that combat duty in Afghanistan was easier than peacekeeping duty in Southern Ossetia. (Not an unnatural claim for a soldier used to fighting an enemy.)

There [Afghanistan] everything was clear; on the one side Afghanis, and we were on the other side. Here on both sides our people, both Georgians and Ossetians; as if everyone were friends. But both Georgian and Ossetian blood is shed, and we are unable to stop it. This is very difficult on morale.¹²

The Russian Deputy Defense Minister, Col-General Kondratyev, expressed the dilemma facing Russian peacekeepers: "No matter how much we value peace, it cannot be maintained forever by the bayonets of Russian soldiers."¹³ Yet a political settlement in Southern Ossetia could not be realized until the political situation in Georgia was clarified. What began as a civil war within Georgia became progressively more complex. Chaos in Georgia led other ethnic groups within its borders to expand their political claims.

Abkhazia

An even more adamant Abkhazian demand for sovereignty distracted Georgian paramilitary units from disrupting the situation in Southern Ossetia, and explains part of the Russian success there. The Abkhazian minority (some 17% of the population in Abkhazia), not content with mere preferential treatment in local government, began in early 1992 to lobby for complete independence from Georgia or for union with Russia.¹⁴ Again, the nationalistic rhetoric of former Georgian president, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, compelled the Abkhazians to seek a greater degree of autonomy. In July 1992, under the pretext of having to restore order in the region, Georgian paramilitary forces moved into Abkhazia and stormed the capital city of Sukhumi, forcing the local Abkhazian government to flee to the neighboring town of Gudauta. Fighting broke out in earnest between Georgian and Abkhazian units in August 1992.

The scenario was similar to that in Ossetia, except that in this conflict, a host of various representatives from Russia aided the Abkhazians in their fight against Georgian nationalists. There were units of the Russian Army, quartered in Abkhazia, providing equipment and expertise to the Abkhazians. It is not clear whether they were acting independently or following orders from Moscow. Russian veterans living in Abkhazia also provided their services. Members of the Confederation of Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus (CMPC), which is a recently formed organization representing a number of different ethnic groups living in the Caucasus area, volunteered their fighting expertise. Russian Cossacks and mercenaries also aided the Abkhazians.¹⁵

The Ukrainian National Self-Defense Organization (UNSO), a paramilitary group fighting for Ukrainian independence and against "Russian imperial aggression" assisted the Georgians. They believed that it would be better to stop Russian aggression in Georgia than in Ukraine.¹⁶ And the Georgian side needed help. The Georgian army resembled a well-armed renegade band, subordinate not to any central authority but to local clan leaders. Unable to concentrate their forces, the Georgians (population 4.5 million; could not defeat the much smaller Abkhazian people (population 93,000)).¹⁷

During the course of the serious fighting, which lasted from August 1992 until October 1993, there were three separate cease-fire agreements, with each one broken in turn. The fourth cease-fire now in effect has held largely because the Russian supported Abkhazians were successful in defeating the Georgian military and driving most of the Georgian population from Abkhazia. The Russian military helped to broker each of the separate cease-fire agreements, while the unofficial Russian military presence helped to undercut these accords. The events surrounding the third broken cease-fire is a good example of the dual and amorphous policy of Russian peacekeeping.

Prompted by continuing reports of escalating combat, and concerned for the welfare of the many Russians living in Abkhazia, the Russian political leadership encouraged the warring sides to sign a cease-fire. Russia, Georgia and Abkhazia signed the agreement in Sochi on 27 July 1993. The cease-fire agreement provided for "disarmament by both sides, to be accompanied by a prompt withdrawal of Georgian troops from Abkhazia and the return of the legitimate government to the capital city of Sukhumi."¹⁸ It established a tripartite commission made up of Russian, Georgian and Abkhazian authorities to monitor the cease-fire and the removal of military armaments.

Since they had not agreed upon the political status of Abkhazia, however, neither of the warring sides wanted to disarm. Both sides began to accuse each other of violating the agreement, and the tripartite commission was powerless to enforce the cease-fire. Sensing weakness in the Georgian defense, which was split because of still another threat in western Georgia, the Abkhazians began to attack the Georgian stronghold in Sukhumi on 16 Sep 1993.¹⁹ Recall that the situation in Russia at this time was one of deep constitutional conflict, moving rapidly toward confrontation and coup. Who fired the first shot is difficult to determine. The Abkhazians immediately went on the offensive, using military equipment which the Russian peacekeeping force had supposedly rendered useless. Why didn't the Russians demand that Abkhazian forces halt their attack? Granted, there was only a small Russian contingent in Abkhazia, but the silence from the Russian Defense and Foreign Ministries was deafening (even considering the turmoil in Moscow at this time) and raises questions concerning Russian intentions. In a little more than a week (27 Sep 1993), the Abkhazians seized the city of Sukhumi, forcing Georgian leader Shevardnadze and the remnants of his army to retreat in disgrace (a most grievous affront to a Georgian). At least by tacit assent, the Russian peacekeepers had actively aided the Abkhazians.

During the latest offensive against Sukhumi, the Abkhaz side used armored equipment and artillery that, under the agreement, had been rendered unusable for combat and given up for safekeeping to Russian units stationed in Abkhazia. This equipment could not have turned up in the possession of the Abkhaz side without the knowledge of the Russian military command²⁰

Only after the Abkhazians were successful in running the Georgian army and most of the Georgian population out of Abkhazia, did the Russian government threaten the Abkhazians with economic sanctions. Abkhazia is almost totally dependent upon Russian energy sources. During a press conference shortly after the cease-fire was broken (18 Sep 93), Russian Defense Minister Pavel Grachev attempted to explain the actions of the Russian military. After the warring sides had broken the third cease-fire, he personally visited the front lines to try and stabilize the situation. Since the Abkhazians were winning the battle, they were not interested in negotiations. According to Grachev, there were insufficient Russian forces on the ground to do anything but watch. Figures range from 500-800 soldiers, to include the 901st Air Assault Battalion stationed in Sukhumi.²¹ The Georgian government refused to allow the Russian Defense Minister to airlift two reinforced divisions to separate the warring sides. The Georgians wanted him to merely reinforce the Russian airborne battalion, located in Sukhumi, thus preventing the Abkhazians from taking this key objective. Using some clever logic, Minister Grachev replied that,

Russian forces temporarily stationed in Abkhazia are to maintain strict neutrality, and international peacekeeping forces are to be used to enforce the cease-fire. A Russian military contingent could be used only after consultations with the UN. And so, I could not take any independent decision under those circumstances.²²

This comment illustrates the ambiguity of Russian peace-keeping policy in Abkhazia, and in general. General Grachev was ready to airlift more than two divisions of Russian soldiers to separate the warring sides without any sort of UN sanction, yet he could not spare a battalion to strengthen the defense of the key Georgian position in Abkhazia. Even the Russian Foreign Minister implied that Russian forces had, at least by neglect, aided the Abkhazians.²³ Their

biased inaction and less than subtle support for the Abkhazians should have tarnished Russia's role as an international peacekeeper.

Unfortunately for President Shevardnadze and the Georgian population living in Abkhazia, the events leading to the broken cease-fire and defeat of the Georgian Army occurred during the constitutional maelstrom in Moscow (21 Sep-4 Oct 93). Although separated by over a thousand miles, the events in Sukhumi certainly had an effect in Moscow and vice versa. Had there been a consistent and unified Russian policy toward the "near abroad" the Russians might have been able to convince the Abkhazians to halt their attack. President Shevardnadze's impassioned pleas from the besieged city of Sukhumi (23-26 Sep 93) might have drawn more of a response from the West if the situation in Moscow had been more stable. President Shevardnadze even went so far as to say, "If the events of the third and fourth of October had happened earlier, then Sukhumi would not have fallen".²⁴ The Russian military might have acted more resolutely had they been certain who was going to be their Commander-in-Chief. And finally, the storming of the Russian White House did much to distract the world's attention from the Russian Army's biased "Peacekeeping" role in Abkhazia.

The situation between the Georgians and the Abkhazians remains volatile. Small scale fighting continues along the border between Georgia and Abkhazia. Russian and U.N. representatives have made a number of attempts to find a political solution to the dilemma of respecting the territorial integrity of Georgia while at the same time recognizing the independence of Abkhazia. The Georgian government demands the repatriation of the 300,000 Georgians driven out of Abkhazia. The Abkhazian authorities, who have already assumed control of these territories, are reluctant to readmit a potential partisan force. Neither side is ready to compromise, and their inability to find a political solution will most certainly result in renewed conflict, with or without a Russian peacekeeping presence.

Moldova

Perhaps the most controversial Russian peacekeeping mission has been along the eastern boundary of the Republic of Moldova. On a thin sliver of land east of the Dniester River, a portion of the local population (of which 25% are Russian), in response to what they perceived as a push toward Moldovan unification with Romania and loss of Russian cultural identity, proclaimed the "Independent Trans Dniester Republic" in March 1992. Predictably, the Moldovan authorities did not condone this attack on their territorial integrity.

Fortunately for the self-proclaimed republic of Trans Dniester, the Soviet/Russian 14th Army was quartered on their territory, providing military support to the breakaway region. In the spring and early summer of 1992, the Moldovan authorities tried to halt the advance of "Dniester" forces from occupying Moldovan villages on the west side of the Dniester River. The Moldovan police forces, however, were no match for the heavily armed Trans Dniester forces. Since the collapse of the USSR, little had been done to create a Moldovan army. Heavy fighting began in May-June 1992, with casualties on both sides of the Dniester River mounting into the hundreds. Since elements of the 14th Army were assisting the Trans Dniester forces, there was never any question as to the outcome, and the Moldovans began to sue for peace.²⁵

President Snegur of Moldova met with President Yeltsin in July 1992, and a tentative cease-fire was agreed upon. Initially, they decided to form peacekeeping forces from Byelorussian, Ukrainian, Russian and Moldovan units. However, they had to change their decision because the other CIS states did not want to participate. The new Russian proposal now called for the introduction of combined "interested" peacekeeping forces (5 Russian, 3 Moldovan and 2 Trans Dniester battalions) to enforce the cease-fire. Again, there was no prior agreement concerning the political status of the Trans Dniester area. The goal of the Russian initiative was to stop the violence so that political leaders might find a peaceful solution.

The question immediately arises: how could the Russian Army serve "objectively" as peacekeepers when one of the combatants belonged to that same Russian Army? Indeed, except for a blue armband and/or helmet, how could the Moldovans distinguish soldiers belonging to the Russian 14th Army from those of Russian "peacekeeping" forces? Was there more than one Russian Army? To understand how Russian peacekeeping battalions could be neutral in Moldova requires an understanding of the transformation of the Soviet Russian 14th Army.

After the collapse of the USSR, a splintering process occurred in the Soviet military. From December 1991, when the hammer and sickle of the USSR was lowered over the Kremlin, until after the decision was made to form a Russian national military (May 1992), the status and ownership of the 14th Army had not been clear. Although located within Moldovan borders, the 14th Army was comprised mostly of Soviet soldiers. During the period 1989-1991, as Moldovan nationalism continued to grow, there was increasing resistance among the Russian population in Moldova. More and more, the 14th Army became associated with an anti-Moldovan and pro-Soviet Union stance. The Russians living in the Trans Dniester area feared that Moldova would become a unitary Moldovan state and follow a path leading to its unification with Romania, forcing the Russian population to leave or to change their citizenship. The fact that the majority of officers serving in the 14th Army had some form of housing in the Trans Dniester area (and that there was little hope of finding similar accommodations in Russia), was also a key factor.

Overwhelmingly Russian in its personnel staffing, there was never any question that the Moldovans would nationalize the 14th Army. The unit briefly fell under the rubric of the CIS security forces, before the Russian Ministry of Defense claimed it as Russian property. During this period, however, the commander of the 14th Army, General-Major Aleksandr Lebed, spoke and acted as though he was not subordinate to Russian presidential leadership. He did reflect, however, the policies and goals of the more conservative elements in the Russian leadership, and certainly those of the Trans Dniester.²⁶ Although still wearing Soviet/ Russian uniforms, circumstances had transformed the 14th Army, to a large degree, into a local Trans Dniester military force. The Russian General Staff believed, therefore, that "pure" Russian units could serve as impartial peacekeepers between Moldovan and Trans Dniester forces. As in Southern Ossetia, the original peacekeeping mandate was for just a few months. However, due to their inability to reach an agreement concerning the status of Trans Dniester, political leaders extended it indefinitely. The commander of the 14th Russian Army will not even discuss relocating until the Trans Dniester status is determined. And even then, their departure is doubtful.

The commander [General Lebed] believes that even after peace guarantees are furnished, "the Army should stay in the region for some time to make sure that political decisions are being properly implemented".²⁷

Two years ago, the subject of discussion between Russia and Moldova centered upon the schedule of removing the 14th Army from Moldova. Today the negotiations deal with determining the status of this "permanent" Russian military presence in Moldova.²⁸ This would appear to be the likely outcome of the so-called peacekeeping effort in Moldova.

Tajikistan

Russian involvement in the Tajik civil war is the final, and perhaps most difficult, conflict to place under the rubric of 17 peacekeeping operations. Although the Russians have labeled their involvement as a PKO, the Russian military has been anything but impartial toward the ex-communist, conservative and anti-Islamic regimes of Rakhmon Nabiev and Imamali Rakhmonov.²⁹ As in the case of the other PKO's, former Soviet and now Russian military forces (primarily the 201st Motorized Rifle Division, which was recently designated as a "peacekeeping unit") have played a key role in the development and partial outcome of this conflict.

Local Islamic leaders were not satisfied with the 1992 (almost democratic) elections, which had chosen R. Nabiev, the former communist first secretary, as president of Tadjikistan. Even though they succeeded in removing him from power, the opposition's victory was short-lived. In November 1992, using substantial military power (which could have only come from the Russians), the ex-communists attacked the capital city of Dushanbe, forcing the "Islamic fundamentalists into the countryside and touching off a civil war".³⁰ The new Tajik leader, 40 year old I. Rakhmonov, has developed a close relationship with the Russian military forces stationed in Tajikistan. He clearly understands that "without the assistance of these Russian forces, the current leadership would not last two days".³¹

In order to quell the growing dissatisfaction and doubts among Russians (who were beginning to fear another Afghan quagmire and to question the wisdom of maintaining Russian forces in Tadjikistan, while supporting an anti-democratic regime), the Russian government and military began to portray the Tajik situation in its darkest colors. They claimed that Russian military forces have an obligation to protect ethnic Russians living in Tajikistan (approximately 80,000) and the entire southern border of the CIS from the deadly spread of Islamic fundamentalism. As the Tajik defense minister subtly depicted it, "an Islamic fundamentalist victory in Tajikistan would extend to the gates of the Kremlin".³² (This claim may not seem so farfetched when one considers the current chaotic situation in Afghanistan.) Russian military forces, combined with Uzbek and Kazakh troops (although dubbed as peacekeepers), are keeping the ruling clan in power and trying to prevent the opposition from crossing the border from neighboring Afghanistan back into Tajikistan. Not surprisingly, the Islamic opposition and competing clan forces have not accepted the Russian military's peacekeeping mandate. They view the Russians as allies of the current regime, and hence an enemy which must be destroyed. Russian border forces have been subject to constant attack, the most deadly occurring in July 1993, when rebel attackers overran a Russian position, killing 25 border guards.

In abandoning the earlier policy of neutrality for the 201st division, Russian forces are placed squarely on one side of the civil conflict. That, in turn, means that Russian troops will increasingly become targets of attacks, not only along the border, especially if the Russian government fails to put pressure on Tajik officials to make adjustments and compromises in domestic politics that might ease tension.³³

The current situation remains complex. Efforts to convince the current Tajik leadership to meet with members of the opposition have enjoyed only limited success. Talks, which were scheduled to begin in Moscow in early March 1994, were postponed when terrorists murdered the chief of the Tajik delegation. A March 1994 combined military training exercise conducted in Tajikistan among Russian, Uzbek and Tajik soldiers might serve as an apt metaphor for the present situation. Although the Russian military labeled this training as a "peacekeeping exercise", the actual maneuver and expenditure of ammunition was anything but serene. One of the scenarios dealt with "repelling a massive attack from the direction of Afghanistan". In his critique of the operation, General Grachev rebuked the would-be peacekeepers for their "sluggish level of attack".³⁴ His comments would imply that conducting offensive military operations to terminate conflict may be one of the hallmarks of modern peacekeeping practice.

Analysis

In examining the four Russian PKO's conducted within the FSU, a number of critical questions remain: has the FSU become more stable and peaceful as a result of their efforts? Is Russian peacekeeping synonymous with "empire building"? Is a Russian imposed order preferable to continued ethnic conflict? Before answering, one must be careful to avoid the Cold War paradigm (i.e. interpreting every Russian action in a negative light). It is a matter of conjecture how much better or worse these conflicts would have become without official Russian military involvement. Prior Soviet, and current Russian military presence was a key factor both in how these conflicts were handled, as well as to their peacekeeping approach.

Russia has acted without UN sanction and with a heavy hand, but at the same time, in Moldova and Southern Ossetia it has prevented the conflicts from spreading and gathering momentum. In these two conflicts, they were able to halt the bloodshed (the cycle of action-reaction), creating a basis for a peaceful settlement. Diplomats, together with peacekeeping soldiers, have been working to determine the political status of Southern Ossetia and the Trans Dniester area. Their efforts in Abkhazia and Tajikistan are more difficult to label as peacekeeping operations, since the Russian Army clearly sided with one of the combatants. Not surprisingly, these two conflicts continue to rage.

Having analyzed their actions in the "near abroad", we can define Russian peacemaking operations as those actions taken by a third party (or a coalition of forces) to resolve a conflict between two or more opposing sides. A PKO is an attempt to force the conflicting sides to stop the bloodshed and find a diplomatic solution to their problems. Note the word force. As it pertains to the FSU, the Russians have acted as though it is dangerous and perhaps immoral to wait until the combatants agree to the intervention of a third party to help them resolve their differences. It is similar to the approach of a parent toward one's squabbling children. As this

study has shown, however, "mother" Russia has undoubtedly favored some of her children over others.

Russian peacekeeping, or rather peace enforcement, as practiced differs considerably from classical UN peacekeeping....It is not mandated by an international organization, nor is it impartial in the strict meaning of the word. It includes, moreover, as a rule, an enforcement element, which is alien to classical peacekeeping. It reflects Russian claims of a "special responsibility" to maintain "stability" on the territory of the FSU.³⁵

In a recent interview, General A. F. Arinakhin, who is in charge of training Russian peacekeeping forces, spoke of his frustrations surrounding international involvement in the peace-making process. He recounted his experience working with UN observers in Abkhazia. Even though these UN peacekeepers were receiving ten times the amount of pay as their Russian counterparts, their bureaucratic restrictions and "civilian mind frame" rendered them practically useless in the rugged world of Russian PKO's. He commented that if Russia had waited until a cease-fire was established or until it had received approval from the UN before undertaking peacekeeping actions in the FSU, these conflicts would have spread and become uncontrollable.³⁶ Consider the continued conflict between the Azeris and Armenians; for over two years the international community has attempted to resolve this conflict via dialogue and conferences, with no success whatsoever.

Conclusion

Russian peacemaking operations have encompassed a wide spectrum of possible measures, to include economic, diplomatic, military, law enforcement and humanitarian actions. Perhaps the best (and most honest) description of how Russians have handled peacemaking operations within the FSU to date was stated most succinctly by the Deputy Ground Force commander, General Eduard Vorob'ev. In a speech which he gave in Washington in December 1993, General Vorob'ev stated that Russia would act as the "authoritative umpire" in resolving disputes among the former republics of the Soviet Union.

In certain "hot spots" Russia has been and remains the only power capable of separating the hostile sides and convincing them to sit down at a negotiation table. Life itself confirms that no international organization or group of states will replace our peacemaking efforts on the territory of the former Soviet Union... In UN circles, the CSCE has noted several times that Russian peacemaking on the territory of the FSU has its own characteristics as compared to "standard" UN practice elsewhere. In particular, what I have in mind is that the conflicting sides participate in the peacekeeping forces and there is an authoritative umpire, and it is these parties which are most interested in stability in the given region.³⁷

There are several premises which provide the foundation for General Vorob'ev's comments. Russia maintains, and the international community has largely acknowledged, that Russia is the "successor state" to the FSU, and as such, has an obligation to preserve peace and order within the old borders. The fact that 25-30 million Russians reside in the republics of the FSU has also

prompted their decision to intervene. As the Russian Foreign Minister expressed in an article aptly titled "Russian Peacekeeping: There Are No Easy Solutions";

It transpires that Russia is "condemned" to perform a special role in the former USSR, but the role not of a gendarme but of a peacekeeper. Especially since no state of the near or far abroad and no international organization is displaying a desire or is in a position to replace Russia as the peacekeeping force in this region.³⁸

The message is clear: unless the international community is willing to intervene to help maintain stability in the FSU, it has little right to complain how Russia maintains or restores peace in this area. With the UN and the CSCE failing to respond to the increasing hostilities within the FSU, Russia has had little choice but to act with the resources at hand. The Russian political and military leadership maintains that it has legitimate security concerns in the FSU and will use force, if necessary, to protect those interests. After our experience in Somalia and the continuing tragedy in Yugoslavia, perhaps we in the West should reconsider whether or not continued conflict is preferable to a Russian-imposed, "authoritative-umpire", peacekeeping effort.

Endnotes

1. The political-military-diplomatic situation around Sarajevo at this time was incredibly complex. Having "contracted" the use of NATO aircraft, the UN had given the Bosnian Serb forces an ultimatum to remove their heavy weapons by 21 Feb 94, from around Sarajevo or face likely air strikes. Bad weather and Serbian reluctance delayed this removal, and it appeared as late as 17 Feb that NATO air strikes were likely. On 18 Feb, the Russian representative to the UN presented the Russian proposal to move Russian peacekeepers into Sarajevo as "proof" that Russia would protect the Serbs while they completed the withdrawal and not allow them to be bombed. For a blow-by-blow history of this "Russian diplomatic masterpiece", see *FBIS-SOV-94*, for the dates 17-25 Feb 94). For quote, reference initial welcome of Russian peacekeepers into Sarajevo, see Andrei Baturin, "Poyavlenie Rossiyskikh desantnikov snyalo napryazhenie vokrug Saraevo," [The appearance of Russian paratroopers removes the tension from around Sarajevo] *Izvestiya*, 22 Feb 1994, p. 1.[BACK](#)

2. Stanislav Kondrashov, "Litzo Rossii obretionnoe vozle Sarajevo," [The face of Russia is found near Sarejevo] *Izvestiya*, 24 Feb 94, p3.[BACK](#)

3. Just as in English, there is considerable ambiguity surrounding the use of "peacekeeping" terminology in the Russian language. The two most popular terms, "voiska po podderzhaniyu mire" [Forces for the Maintenance of Peace] and "mirotvorcheskie voiska" [peacemaking forces], are used almost interchangeably. As this paper will hopefully demonstrate, the Russian term for peacemaking is rather elastic, and includes a wide spectrum of possible actions. For a deeper understanding of current Russian military thought concerning peacekeeping operations, see Col-Gen Kondratyev, Russian Federation Dep Def Min, "Russia's Blue Helmets," *Krasnaya_Zvezda*, 16 Feb 94, p. 2 as translated in JPRS-94-008, 23 Feb 1994, pp. 37-39; for a thorough western analysis of Russia's early peacekeeping approach, see a series of articles written by Suzanne Crow, RFE/RL Research Report, dated 18 Sep 92 and 9 April 93.[BACK](#)

4. With the ink barely dry on this new program, and many of the details still unclear, it is not possible to accurately assess the full implications for the U.S. regarding the Partnership for Peace Program. With the stated objective of future full membership within the NATO alliance, one can assume that the U.S. could find itself involved in the defense of former Soviet republics. For example, on 14 March 1994, President Shevardnadze met with President Clinton in Washington, and according to Shevardnadze, they "reached an understanding on all major issues, notably the sending of international peacekeeping forces to Abkhazia". *Interfax*, as published in FBIS-SOV-94-049, 14 Mar 1994, p. 62. [BACK](#)

5. A first generation PKO are those which occurred during the height of the Cold War, and could be categorized by the simple fact that neither of the antagonists were superpower clients, or if they were, they both worked for the same side (i.e. conflict in Cyprus between Greece and Turkey). Second generation PKO's are those (unsuccessful?) operations currently taking place which adequately demonstrate the difficulty of solving armed conflict by purely diplomatic/humanitarian means (i.e. Somalia, Bosnia, Cambodia). Third generation PKO's are those operations on the horizon, which despite their title, bear a strikingly similar resemblance to armed intervention or war (i.e. Haiti, North Korea and perhaps the Desert Storm model). For a brief discussion of the current U.S. position concerning PKO's see, William Doll and Steven Metz, *The Army and Multinational Peace Operations: Problems and Solutions*, Strategic Studies Institute, Carlisle Barracks, PA., Nov 1993. [BACK](#)

6. For a good description of the Russian dilemma with creating a peacekeeping doctrine which corresponds to UN guidelines, see Ivan Vorobyov, "Belie pyatna teorii," [The Blank Spot of Theory] *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 22 Feb 1994, p. 2. General Major Arinakhin, Chief of the Russian Peacekeeping Directorate, expresses some of his frustrations with trying to conduct peacekeeping operations IAW UN standards, in an interview entitled; "Rossiyskie mirotvortsy: ogon' na sebye?," [Russian peacekeepers: Firing on Ourselves?] *Armiya*, [Army] No. 7, 1994, pp. 44-48. For a good, brief description of where the U.S. military has placed PKO's, see the article entitled "Peace Operations", LTC Thomas K. Adams, CGSC Text C520 *Operations Other Than War*, 3 Jan 1994, pp. 515-17. [BACK](#)

7. Adam Roberts and Benedict Kingsbury, ea., *United Nations. Divided World*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), pp. 468-98. [BACK](#)

8. "Vesti" television program dated 13 July 1992, translated in FBIS-SOV-92-135, 14 July 1992, pp. 36-37. [BACK](#)

9. This has been true for each of the Russian-led PKO's in the fSU, and illustrates one of the prime differences between the Russian concept of PKO, and that held by the U.N. For example see; "The Separation Forces Have Been Introduced, the Consequences are Unclear," *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* [hereafter cited as NG], 16 July 1992 pp. 1,3, translated in JPRS-UMA-92-032, 26 August 1992, p. 35. [BACK](#)

10. Interestingly enough, the Russian contingent has lost only two personnel since the deployment began in S. Ossetia; see Nikolay Bur'yga, "Rossiyskie mirotvorcheskije sily deystvuyut...," [Russian Peacekeepers are Acting...] *Izvestiya*, 23 March 1994, p. 2. For initial

casualty figures see; *ITAR-TASS*, 15 August 1992, translated in FBIS-SOV-92-160, 18 Aug 92 pp. 53-4. [BACK](#)

11. For comments labeling this PKO as a success, see; Colonel Vladimir I. Krysenko, "Military Aspects of Peacekeeping," Text of Presentation given in speech to the U.S. Department of Defense, December 1993, translated by R. Love, FMSO, Feb 1994, Ft. Leavenworth, KS., p. 15. For problems in reaching an accord between the Georgians and S. Ossetians, see; Vicken Cheterian, "North Ossetia: Under the Volcano," *Swiss Review of World Affairs*, May 1994, pp. 9-10. [BACK](#)

12. Viktor Litovkin, "Mir na stykakh ne mozhet derzhet'sya eskonechno," [Peace Cannot Be Maintained Indefinitely By Force] *Izvestiya*, 19 Jan 1994, pp. 1,3.[BACK](#)

13. Ibid, p. 3. For a thorough explanation of the dilemma facing Russian peacekeeping forces in attempting to maintain a peace via force, see; Dina Malysheva, "Etnicheskie konflikty na yuge SNG i natsionalnaya bezopasnost' Rossii," [Ethnic conflict along the southern border of the CIS and Russia's national security] *Mirovaya ekonomika i mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya* [World economy and international relations], #3, 1994, pp. 30-41. [BACK](#)

14. Depending on the source, the Abkhazian conflict has been brewing for a long time (i.e. for the past thousand years or within the past decade). For an extremely in-depth (and proAbkhazian position) analysis of the historical roots of this conflict, see B.G. Hewitt, "Abkhazia: a problem of identity and ownership," *Central Asian Survey*, 1993, No.# 12, pp. 267-323. For a more objective and concise survey of the conflict, see the series of articles written by Elizabeth Fuller for *RFE/RL Research Reports* during the time period 1991-1994. [BACK](#)

15. There exists a considerable body of evidence that the Abkhazians received considerable support from a number of different Russian groups. For example see, Catherine Dale, "Turmoil in Abkhazia: Russian Responses," *RFE/RL Research Report*, 27 August 1993, pp. 48-57; Dr Tamara Gragadze, "Conflict in the Transcaucasus and the Value of Inventory Control," *Jane's Intelligence Review*, February 1994, pp. 71-73. [BACK](#)

16. Although bearing the title of Ukrainian National Self Defense Organization (UNSO), this "paramilitary" group has not been officially recognized or sanctioned by the current Ukrainian administration. For more information on this group's problematic involvement in Abkhazia, see; Semyen "Deti Bendery," [The Children of Bendery] *Komsomol'skaya Pravda*, 10 Nov 1993, p. 3; and, Guga Lolishvili, "Ukraintsy voevali v Sukhumi na storone Tbilisi" [Ukrainians Fight on Tbilisi's Side in Sukhumi], *NG*, 8 Oct 1993, p. 3.[BACK](#)

17. In 1989, the 93,000 ethnic Abkhaz constituted only 17.8% of the population of Abkhazia, while the Georgians constituted 47.5%, Armenians 14.6% and Russian; 14.3%; but ethnic Abkhaz formed 41% of the Abkhaz Supreme Soviet deputies, 67% of the republican ministers, and 50% of the raion and city communist party first secretaries. See Dale, "Turmoil in Abkhazia," p. 49 There were also reports that portrayed the loyalty of Georgian soldiers as being very weak to the central government (i.e. selling their weapons to Abkhazian units in exchange

for money and drugs. See Mariya Dementyeva, "Abkhazia is Buying Arms From Georgia," *Segodnya*, 27 Apr 93, p.6 as translated in JPRS-UMA-93017, 26 May 93, pp. 31-32O.[BACK](#)

18. For many Georgians, the signed ceasefire agreement was perceived as humiliating and detrimental to their national interests. How could a small, minority Abkhazian population force the Georgians to a ceasefire agreement? By signing this agreement, Shevardnadze was quickly losing whatever support remained among the undisciplined Georgian army. For details on the ceasefire agreement, see; Richard Clogg, "Turmoil in Transcaucasus," *World Today* January, 1994, pp. 3-5.[BACK](#)

19. The threat referred to is the return of former Georgian president Zviad Gamsakhurdia to western Georgia. He timed his return well. Knowing that the majority of ethnic Georgians (Mingrelians), would be upset at the humiliation of signing a ceasefire with the Abkhazians, Gamsakhurdia planned to use this dissatisfaction, and the internal squabbles of the Georgian parliament (which was reluctant to grant Shevardnadze emergency powers) as so much political capital. When the Abkhazians began their attack, forces loyal to Gamsakhurdia initially promised to assist the Georgians. They changed their minds, however, and instead proceeded to confiscate whatever weapons and ammunition they could steal from the retreating Georgian army. By mid-October 1993, Georgia was in the midst of civil war, and it was only Russian military assistance which allowed Shevardnadze to defeat Gamsakhurdia's forces. In return, Georgia granted a host of concessions to the Russian government (ie. permanent stationing of Russian troops on Georgian soil, entry into the CIS).[BACK](#)

20. Emil Pain, "Mozhet li Rossiya byt' mirotvortsem?," [Can Russia be a Peacemaker] *Izvestiya*, 29 Sep 93, p. 4. This is only a mild allegation against the Russian Army in Abkhazia. To reiterate the claim made in note no.#15, there exists a wide body of evidence, in both Russian and Western sources, which directly accuses the Russian army of aiding and abetting the Abkhazians. For an example of a Russian source, see; D. Malysheva, "Etnicheskie konflikty na yuge SNG," [Ethnic conflict in the south of the CIS] *Mirovaya Ekonomika i Mezhdunarodnye Otnosheniya*, #3, 1994, pp. 30-41.[BACK](#)

21. General Grachev would have had a tough mission on his hands, had he tried to convince the Russian soldiers of the 901st Abn Battalion to support the Georgians against the Abkhazians. Prior Georgian attempts to confiscate the unit's equipment, and continued harassment by the Georgian authorities had transformed the unit into an ally of the Abkhazians. For a good example of the Russian soldiers' sentiment stationed in Sukhumi at this time, see; Vladislav Shurygin, "901st," *Zavtra*, March 1994, No. 10, p. 4.[BACK](#)

22. Vladimir Urban, "Tol'ko sanktsii k voyuyushchim storonam smogut ostanovit' konflikt v Abkhazii," [Only sanctions against combatants will stop conflict in Abkhazia], *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 21 Sep 1993, pp. 1, 3. See endnote #21 for reasons why General Grachev was reluctant to reinforce the Russian forces in Sukhumi.[BACK](#)

23. Igor' Rotar', "Voennye dolzhny ovladet' iskycctvom mirotvorchestva," [The military needs to learn the art of peacekeeping] *NG*, 24 Nov 1993 pp. 1, 3. [BACK](#)

24. President Shevardnadze is apparently referring to the strong, pro-Abkhazian lobby which existed in the old (1992-93) Russian parliament. It is doubtful, that even after the dissolution of the Russian parliament, he would have found a sympathetic ear among Russia's political and military leadership. For an excellent first-hand account of the strained relationship between Georgian and Russian political leaders, see; Misha Glenny, "The Bear in the Caucasus," *Harpers*, March 1994, pp. 4553; for Shevardnadze's exact quote, *Ibid.*, p.49.[BACK](#)

25. For an excellent synopsis and chronology of the Moldovan crisis, see LTC Neil V. Lamont, "Territorial Dimensions of Ethnic Conflict: The Moldovan Case," *Foreign Military Studies Office Blue Book*, April, 1993.[BACK](#)

26. The fact that General Lebed was not removed, or even strongly censured, but was in fact promoted, testifies to the contradictory and amorphous nature of Russian foreign and defense policies after the USSR collapsed. For an in-depth analysis of the 14th Army's and other Russian involvement in the Trans Dniester and Moldova, see a series of articles produced by Vladimir Socor, produced for *RFE/RL Research Report*: "Russian Forces in Moldova," 28 Aug 92; "Russia's 14th Army and the Insurgency in E. Moldova," 11 Sept 92; "Moldova's Dniester Ulcer," 1 Jan 93; "Russia's Army in Moldova. There to Stay?," 18 June 93; and "Isolated Moldova Being Pulled into Russian Orbit," 17 Dec 93. Mr. Socor describes the complex relationship between General Lebed and the 14th Army, and also between the Russian, Moldovan and the Dniester leadership. [BACK](#)

27. There are three major problems restricting the relocation of the 14th Army from the Trans Dniester area: 1. Inability of finding a political solution to the status of the Trans Dniester; 2. lack of housing within Russia to accommodate the 14th Army; and 3. problems associated with transferring an incredible amount of ammunition from the Trans Dniester area, across Ukrainian territory and back into Russia. General Lebed has not been reticent in making his views known, and has given a number of candid interviews. For example, see Sergey Knyazkov, "Chvustvovat' za soboy derzhavu," [To Feel the Power Behind You] *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 4 March 1994, p. 2; Vladimir Polushin, "Ne veryushchiy, no veruyu," [I'm Not a Believer, But I Believe] *Literaturnaya Rossiya*, 11 March 1994, pp. 2-3. Quote taken from, Valeriy Demidetskiy, "Russian Troop Commander Demands Peace Guarantees, *INTERFAX*, 7 April 1994, in FBIS-SOV-94-068, 8 April 1994, p. 52. [BACK](#)

28. Yuriy Selivanov, "V Moldove moahet poyavit'sya Rossiyskaya baza," [In Moldova there may appear a Russian base] *Megapolis Express*, 2 March 1994, p. 14. General Lebed continues to insist that it is "abnormal for the army of one state to be on the territory of another". However, the number of stipulations which must be met before the 14th Army will be ready to relocate, makes its presence in Moldova practically permanent.[BACK](#)

29. Keith Martin, "Tajikistan: Civil War without End?," *RFE/RL Research Report*, 20 August 1993, pp. 21, 27. See also, Malysheva, pp. 38-41. [BACK](#)

30. Marcus A. Kuiper, "Keeping the Peace: Reflections on the Rules of the Game for International Intervention in the 1990s," *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 4, December 1993, p. 567. [BACK](#)

31. Aleksandr Bek, "Zhizn' pod avtomatom," [Life under the gun] NG, 16 March 1994, p. 3. [BACK](#)
32. Martin, "Tajikistan: Civil War without End?," p. 27. [BACK](#)
33. Ibid, p. 27. [BACK](#)
34. For a recent example in the elasticity of the Russian concept of peacekeeping see; Igor' Rotar', "Pavel Grachev na linii ognya," [Pavel Grachev on the firing line] NG, 26 March 1994, p. 1. [BACK](#)
35. Rene Nyberg, "Cooperative Peacekeeping in the CSCE," paper presented at a Peacekeeping Seminar, Madrid, Spain 28-30 October 1993, p. 4. The Russians aren't the only ones who are having difficulty abiding by the rules of "classical peacekeeping". For a good synopsis of the dilemma facing American defense policymakers wrestling with peacekeeping concepts, see; John F. Hillen III, "UN Collective Security: Chapter Six and a Half," *Parameters*, Spring 1994, pp. 27-37. [BACK](#)
36. Interview given by General Major Alexander F. Arinakhin, "Rossiyskie mirotvortsy: ogon' na sebya?," [Russian peacekeepers: firing on ourselves?], *Armiya*, [Army] No.7, 1994, pp. 44-48. [BACK](#)
37. Speech given by Col-General Eduard A. Vorob'ev, "On Russia's Conceptual Approach to Peacekeeping," to U.S. Dept. of Defense, December 1993; translated by R. Love, Foreign Military Studies Office, Ft Leavenworth, KS., Feb 94, p. 4. [BACK](#)
38. Andrey Kozyrev, "Russian Peacekeeping: There are no Easy Solutions," *Novoye Vremya*, No.4, Jan 94, pp. 18-20, translated in FBIS-USR-94-014, 16 Feb 1994, p. 32. [BACK](#)