



# Russian Policies and Views Related to Afghanistan

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## **Abstract**

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This Technical Memorandum aims to present and assess Russian policies and views related to Afghanistan, while paying particular attention to Russian attitudes towards the ongoing NATO mission. An understanding of Russian involvement in and motives behind Moscow's current policy towards Afghanistan might assist policy-makers and military planners in their responses to this regional conflict.

## **Résumé**

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Cette note technique vise à présenter et à évaluer les politiques et le point de vue russes à l'égard de l'Afghanistan, en portant une attention particulière à l'attitude russe envers la mission en cours de l'OTAN. Une compréhension à la fois de l'implication de la Russie en Afghanistan et des motifs de sa politique actuelle pourrait bénéficier à ceux qui élaborent des politiques et des plans militaires relativement à ce conflit régional.

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## Executive Summary

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Russian policies and attitudes related to Afghanistan, and in particular Moscow's engagement with the Western allies in operation *Enduring Freedom* and the subsequent ISAF (International Security Assistance Force) mission, have been primarily motivated by four elements: security implications for Russia proper; impact on the stability of Central Asian states; impact on Moscow's relations with NATO; and impact on Moscow's relations with the US. Moscow regards this engagement with the West as having been generally beneficial for Russia, but it frequently reassesses the policy in light of the country's great power aspirations and its desire to maintain a dominant role in Central Asia.

The 2001 US intervention in Afghanistan resulted in an apparent paradox: Moscow gained globally by becoming one of the key US partners in the war on terrorism, while at the same time it witnessed an American intrusion in Russia's sphere of influence. Moscow's ability to influence Afghan domestic developments significantly declined, while Russia's dominance over the Central Asian space has been challenged by the US and NATO insertion into the region. The Kremlin considers these developments as injurious to regional security and detrimental to Moscow's great power aspirations. In response, Russia has pursued what it considers a pragmatic great power policy: partnering with the US globally while at the same time balancing against it on regional issues. This has been one of the trademarks of Putin's realism and it is not significantly different from Russian foreign policy approaches to the issues of Iran, North Korea or Kosovo.

The Kremlin's parallel pursuit of two seemingly contradictory approaches, of having generally negative attitudes towards NATO and cooperating with the alliance in Afghanistan, is likely to continue because Moscow could not neutralize the main regional destabilizer – jihadism in Afghanistan – without Western participation.

However, Moscow has been vocally opposed to some aspects of the NATO mission in Afghanistan, such as its "soft approach" to drug cultivation and trafficking, the offer of amnesty to "moderate Taliban," and the alliance's increased cooperation and training with Central Asian states. This criticism is likely to continue yet it is unlikely to result in cessation of Moscow's overall support for the ISAF mission.

Parallel to its partnership with the West in fighting global jihadism, Russia regards it as vital that it continue to protect its sphere of interest in Central Asia. Since 2001, Russia has been active in solidifying its military presence in the region by transforming the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) from confidence-building into collective security bodies, giving the Kremlin more effective tools to influence the regional order. Potentially, these groupings could represent Moscow-led "coalitions of the willing" in dealing with regional threats, especially as a contingency to a hypothetical NATO withdrawal from Afghanistan. However, given Russia's limited resources, the scope

of Moscow's influence in Central Asia is not likely to dramatically increase or to physically go beyond the area of the former USSR.

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## Sommaire

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Les politiques et l'attitude de la Russie à l'égard de l'Afghanistan, et en particulier sa participation avec les alliés occidentaux à l'opération *Enduring Freedom* et à la mission subséquente de la FIAS (Force internationale d'assistance à la sécurité), sont fondées essentiellement sur quatre éléments : les implications pour la sécurité de la Russie comme telles, l'incidence sur la stabilité des États d'Asie centrale, l'incidence sur les relations de Moscou avec l'OTAN et l'incidence sur les relations de Moscou avec les États-Unis. De façon générale, Moscou estime que cette collaboration avec l'Occident lui a été profitable. Cependant, elle réévalue fréquemment ses politiques à la lumière de ses aspirations de grande puissance et de son désir de continuer à jouer un rôle dominant en Asie centrale.

L'intervention américaine en Afghanistan en 2001 a créé un paradoxe apparent : Moscou en a bénéficié à l'échelle mondiale en devenant un partenaire clé dans la guerre américaine au terrorisme, tout en étant témoin d'une intrusion américaine dans la sphère d'influence russe. La capacité de la Russie d'influencer les événements à l'intérieur de l'Afghanistan a diminué considérablement, alors même que sa domination en Asie centrale était mise au défi par la présence américaine et de l'OTAN dans la région. Moscou estime que ces développements portent atteinte à la sécurité régionale et à ses aspirations de grande puissance. Pour y répondre, la Russie a adopté l'approche pragmatique d'une grande puissance : un partenariat avec les États-Unis à l'échelle mondiale tout en maintenant un équilibre à l'échelle régionale en s'opposant aux Américains. Il s'agit d'une des caractéristiques du réalisme de Poutine, ce qui ne diffère pas de façon importante de la politique russe à l'égard de l'Iran, de la Corée du Nord ou du Kosovo.

Cette poursuite parallèle par le Kremlin de deux approches apparemment contradictoires – une attitude généralement négative à l'égard de l'OTAN combinée à une collaboration avec l'Alliance en Afghanistan – continuera sans doute parce que Moscou ne peut neutraliser l'élément déstabilisateur clé de la région – le jihadisme en Afghanistan – sans la participation de l'Occident.

Cependant, Moscou s'est ouvertement opposée à certains aspects de la mission de l'OTAN en Afghanistan, tels « l'approche douce » vis-à-vis la culture et le trafic de la drogue, l'offre d'amnistie pour les « Talibans modérés » et la collaboration et l'entraînement accrus de l'Alliance avec des États d'Asie centrale. Cette critique persistera sans doute, mais il est peu probable qu'elle amène Moscou à cesser son soutien général à la mission de la FIAS.

En parallèle à son combat contre le jihadisme mondial en partenariat avec l'Occident, Moscou estime qu'il est essentiel de continuer à protéger sa sphère d'influence en Asie centrale. Depuis 2001, la Russie travaille activement à solidifier sa présence militaire dans la région en transformant l'Organisation du Traité de sécurité collective (OTSC) et l'Organisation de coopération de Shanghai (OTS). Ceux-ci passent

d'organismes visant à rehausser la confiance à des organismes de sécurité collective, donnant ainsi à Moscou des outils plus efficaces pour influencer l'ordre régional.

Potentiellement, ces regroupements pourraient constituer des « coalitions de volontaires » dirigées par Moscou pour contrer ces menaces régionales, surtout dans l'éventualité d'un retrait de l'OTAN de l'Afghanistan. Cependant, compte tenu des ressources limitées de la Russie, l'influence de Moscou en Asie centrale est peu susceptible de croître de façon importante ou de s'étendre au-delà du territoire de l'ancienne URSS.

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# Introduction

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The events of 9/11 have significantly changed the relationship between the Western allies and Russia, two former Cold War rivals, resulting in a strategic partnership in the global war on terrorism. Much to Moscow's relief, the 1999 war in Chechnya is being decreasingly perceived in Western capitals as an inappropriate military operation plagued with human rights abuses, but rather as just another flashpoint in the joint struggle against global terrorism. The subsequent US intervention in Afghanistan, however, has brought Western military forces not only to the doorstep, but also in the hallway, of what Russia has traditionally considered to be its own geopolitical sphere of interest. The prolonged stay, and the enlarged scope, of the US's and Western allies' military presence in Afghanistan has raised concerns in Moscow about the benefits of this strategic partnership. During the 2001-2006 period, Moscow's initial enthusiasm about being joined by the US and its Western allies in the fight against global jihadism has been gradually replaced with worries that the post-war developments in and around Afghanistan are not advancing Russia's regional security interests.

Russian analysts and policy-makers approach Afghanistan-related issues as one holistic subject matter despite their multidimensional character. For Moscow, the Afghanistan issue is not only about the US military operation, *Enduring Freedom*, or the subsequent NATO mission (International Security Assistance Force—ISAF), and it is not only about the war on terrorism or about security in Central Asia. Rather, it is all of that together. For these reasons the main goal of this paper will be to follow Russian views and policies related to Afghanistan as a whole, while paying particular attention to Russian attitudes towards the ongoing NATO mission.

This paper will chronologically present Russian perceptions and policies related to Afghanistan. Russian area scholars, such as Andrei Tsygankov, Ted Hopf, and Celeste Wallander have demonstrated the usefulness of the discourse analysis method in researching Russian foreign policy formation as well as the relationship between change and continuity in the assessment of national interest, and the methodology of this report will be based on that approach.<sup>1</sup> The aim is to understand Russian foreign policy behaviour by describing the views of the Russian government, Russian analysts and the Russian public. This will demonstrate that the Russian policy towards Afghanistan represents continuity in Moscow's global security policy – pragmatic cooperation with the West in order to regain/maintain great power status while at the same time preserving geopolitical influence in particular spheres of interest, such as Central Asia and the Caucasus. Where warranted, and for greater clarity, a distinction will be made between official views and the opinions of Russian

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<sup>1</sup> Andrei P. Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy: Change and Continuity in National Identity* (Lanham, Maryland, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2006); Ted Hopf, ed., *Understandings of Russian Foreign Policy* (University Park, Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999); and Celeste Wallander, ed., *The Sources of Russian Foreign Policy after the Cold War* (Boulder, Colorado, Westview Press, 1996).

analysts, while noting where the perceptions of the Kremlin and Russia's pundits converge.

The paper will be structured into several sections: overview of Russia's policies towards Afghanistan (1991-2001); motives behind Russia's current policy towards Afghanistan; recent Russian involvement in Afghanistan (2001-2006); Russian public opinion regarding Afghanistan; and current perceptions. The paper will be based on a review of open and unclassified sources in English and in Russian.

## Background

Russia has a long history of political and military involvement with Afghanistan.<sup>2</sup> During the 19<sup>th</sup> century this involvement was part of what was called the "great game," a strategic rivalry between the Russian and British Empires with the aim of solidifying their spheres of influence in Asia.<sup>3</sup> The Russian Empire's expansion into Central Asia, especially after the defeat in the Crimean War (1853-1856), brought the two empires into such close proximity as to lead to their jointly deciding Afghanistan's northern border in 1907.<sup>4</sup> Afghanistan was essentially created as a buffer state between these two empires, with the aim of protecting British India from any Russian interference. During the Cold War Afghanistan had the same role as a buffer state, a non-aligned country, neither belonging to the Soviet sphere of influence nor to the regional anti-communist alliance Central Treaty Organization (created in 1955 and also known as the Baghdad Pact).

The end of the 1970s brought significant geopolitical changes to the broader Middle East region, causing serious security concerns in Moscow. In 1978, Egyptian President Sadat finally turned against the USSR and moved towards rapprochement with the US, while a year later the revolution in Iran overthrew Shah Reza Pahlavi, effectively ending the country's pro-American foreign and security policy.<sup>5</sup> At the same time Moscow-friendly Hafizullah Amin's regime in Afghanistan was facing many domestic challenges with signs of an approaching coup. Soviet-era archives indicate that the regime in Moscow perceived these events as injurious to Soviet national security and in a hasty manner decided to solidify its regional presence by militarily intervention in Afghanistan.<sup>6</sup> The December 1979 Soviet military

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<sup>2</sup> Wayne S. Vucinich, ed. *Russia and Asia; Essays on the influence of Russia on the Asian peoples* (Stanford, California, Hoover Institution Press, 1972).

<sup>3</sup> Sir W. K. Fraser-Tytler, *Afghanistan: a Study of Political Developments in Central and Southern Asia* (London, Oxford University Press, 1967).

<sup>4</sup> Dave Mather, "Afghanistan: Foreign Intervention and Social Transformation," *Critique Journal*, No. 34, 2006, p 95. <http://www.critiquejournal.net/dmather34.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> While the Egyptian government started expelling Soviet military personnel, totalling around 15,000, in 1972 it was Sadat's sudden 1978 trip to Israel that represented the end of Moscow's political influence over Egypt. See Mohrez Mahmoud El Hussini, *Soviet-Egyptian Relations, 1945-85* (London, MacMillan Press, 1987).

<sup>6</sup> The National Security Archive, Volume II: Afghanistan: Lessons from the Last War; The Soviet Experience in Afghanistan: Russian Documents and Memoirs, ed. by Svetlana Savranskaya, October 9, 2001,

intervention, planned to be a short-term mission intended to consolidate the palace coup led by pro-Moscow forces, ended up in a long and costly guerrilla-type conflict.<sup>7</sup> After fighting the mujahedeen-led insurgency for a decade, and losing 15,000 troops, Soviet forces completely withdrew from Afghanistan in 1989.<sup>8</sup> Moscow left behind a proxy regime led by Mohammad Najibullah that finally collapsed to mujahedeen forces in 1992.

The break up of the Soviet Union in 1991, and the consequent physical withdrawal - measured in thousands of kilometres - of the Russian state from the Afghanistan border had put aside, at least temporarily, the security relevance of this country for Moscow. Yet, because the mujahedeen reign in Afghanistan pushed the entire country into further chaos, while, at the same time, in neighbouring Tajikistan a full-scale civil war (1992-1997) was taking place, a genuine concern emerged in Russia that these two conflicts could unite and inflame even bigger areas of Central Asia.<sup>9</sup> Moscow's military participation in the Tajik conflict was intended to mitigate both threats.

The mujahedeen sway ended in 1996 with the ascent to power of the Taliban movement. From Moscow's perspective Taliban represented an even bigger security threat than the mujahedeen because it sheltered terrorist groups with global power projection capability. By the end of the 1990s the Kremlin perceived this threat as being not only harmful to Russia, through the promotion of jihadist activities in Chechnya and the Caucasus region, but also to international security. The fact that Taliban recognized Chechnya in January 2000, making "Afghanistan the only country to do so," further strengthened Russian resolve.<sup>10</sup> On numerous occasions before 9/11 Putin blamed Afghanistan, and Taliban in particular, of being a source of regional instability and the "nucleus of extremism."<sup>11</sup>

Putin's assessment reflected the basic perception of the Russian government about the nature and the scope of threats coming from Afghanistan. Furthermore, Russian officials situated this threat into a more coherent worldview, with Afghanistan

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<http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB57/soviet.html>. For the US perspective see, Douglas J. MacEachin, *Predicting the Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan: The Intelligence Community's Record* (Washington, D.C.: Central Intelligence Agency, Center for the Study of Intelligence, April 2002).

<sup>7</sup> For a military analysis of the conflict, from the Russian perspective, see The Russian General Staff, *The Soviet-Afghan war: How a Superpower Fought and Lost*, translated and edited by Lester W. Grau and Michael A. Gress (Lawrence, Kansas, University Press of Kansas, 2002).

<sup>8</sup> Col Gen G.F. Krivosheev, ed. *Soviet Casualties and Combat Losses in the Twentieth Century*, translated by Christine Barnard (London, Greenhill Books, 1997).

<sup>9</sup> Irina Zviagelskaia, Samiy iuzhnii I ochen vazhni [The most Southern and very important], *Mezhdunarodnie procesy*, No. 2 (11), 2006. The fear was strengthened by the perception that the majority of the Afghanistan mujahedeen, on occasions up to 90%, were ethnic Tajiks, see Farruh Salimov, Tadzikistan v regionalnoi politike [Tajikistan in regional politics] *Mezhdunarodnie procesy*, No. 2 (11), 2006.

<sup>10</sup> N.A. Kellett, *External Involvement in Afghanistan*, Project Report No. 2016 (Ottawa: Directorate of Strategic Analysis, Department of National Defence, July 2000), p 28.

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.fas.org/irp/news/2000/10/irp-001010-taleban.htm>

representing only a regional piece of the global jihadist puzzle. In October 2000, during a visit to Pakistan, Putin's adviser Sergei Yastrzhembsky was on record as saying: "We believe there is an arc of instability starting from the Philippines, Indonesia, through Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, the North Caucuses, Chechnya, and also the Middle East. Afghanistan is the new nucleus of extremism. They support and harbour terrorists like Osama bin Laden. Drug trafficking is flourishing there. It creates a financial cushion used by terrorists to spread their expansion into neighbouring states. These people have no national frontiers, no limits. They are the true mercenaries of Jihad, Holy War."<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> <http://www.fas.org/irp/news/2000/10/irp-001010-taleban.htm>

## Overview of Russia's Policies Towards Afghanistan: 1991-2001

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Since 1991 Russia applied various policies when dealing with the Afghanistan security threat, namely containment, indirect intervention, threatening direct military action in the form of pre-emptive strikes, and multilateral partnerships. The policy of containment was applied in regard to control of Afghanistan's borders. Russia either persuaded regimes in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan to strengthen border controls, or directly participated in enforcement operations. The latter has been the case in Tajikistan, where Moscow has maintained its own troops along, or in close proximity to, the border with Afghanistan.<sup>13</sup>

Russia also resorted to indirect intervention in Afghanistan by supporting proxies in the 1996-2001 fighting between the mujahedeen and Taliban. Moscow supported many non-Pashtun warlords from Northern Afghanistan with military equipment and training. It also assisted their efforts at creating the Northern Alliance, a coalition intended to overthrow the Taliban regime. These efforts on their own were not sufficient to eliminate Al Qaida's presence in Afghanistan and its cooperation with Chechen warlords.

On several occasions in 2000 Russia threatened that it would strike the terrorist bases in Afghanistan. In April 2000, Sergey Ivanov, at the time the Secretary of the Security Council, and currently the Minister of Defence, reportedly raised the possibility of direct air strikes against Taliban targets in Afghanistan "in the event of intensification of Taliban activities."<sup>14</sup> Some Russian analysts questioned Moscow's actual capability to perform such attacks, though they acknowledged that it might be an action intended to prevent Taliban from massing its forces in the ongoing fight against the Northern Alliance.<sup>15</sup>

Finally, Russia also partnered with other concerned nations, under UN auspices, to discuss and facilitate the end of the Afghan civil war. This group, created in 1998, was known as 6+2 and it consisted of Afghanistan's neighbours, namely Pakistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Iran, China and two "external powers," Russia and the US. The relative ineffectiveness of this forum and the increasing power

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<sup>13</sup> However, the majority of border guards were Tajik conscripts, in accordance with an agreement with the Dushanbe authorities.

<sup>14</sup> Michael Jasinski, "Russian Policy Toward Afghanistan" (Monterey: Center for Nonproliferation Studies, September 15, 2001) <http://cns.miis.edu/research/wtc01/rusafg.htm>

<sup>15</sup> Pavel Felgenhauer, "Long-Range and Pointless," *Moscow Times*, December 21, 2004, and Kellett, *External Involvement in Afghanistan*.

projection capability of Al Qaida to strike at US interests worldwide facilitated the emergence of the US-Russia bilateral working group on Afghanistan in 2000.

The impetus for the creation of this working group originated at the June 2000 Russia-US Moscow Summit, between Presidents Clinton and Putin, with both countries agreeing that “the situation in and around Afghanistan continues to threaten regional and international security.”<sup>16</sup> This working group, at the level of undersecretaries of state, was aimed at “efforts to persuade the Taliban to cease their support for terrorism and close terrorist training camps; comply with UN Security Council resolution 1267; render Osama bin Ladin to justice; commit to a peaceful resolution to the conflict in Afghanistan; end their support of illegal narcotics production and trafficking; and accept international standards on human rights, including with regard to the status and treatment of women and girls.”<sup>17</sup> Due to the 2001 US intervention in Afghanistan this cooperative effort was transformed into direct military assistance. Yet this led to an apparent paradox: Moscow gained globally by becoming one of the key US partners in the war on terrorism, but at the same time lost much of its tactical ability at influencing domestic developments in Afghanistan.

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<sup>16</sup> “U.S., Russia agree on Afghanistan anti-terrorism measures,” (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of State, Office of the Spokesman, October 18, 2000).

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

# Motives Behind Russia's Current Policy Towards Afghanistan

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The current Russian policy toward Afghanistan has been primarily driven by the following factors: security implications for Russia proper; impact on the stability of Central Asian states; impact on Moscow's relations with NATO; and impact on Moscow's relations with the US.

## Security Implications for Russia Proper

Russia believes that Afghanistan represents a key ground for terrorists' indoctrination, training, funding and infiltration into Russia proper, in particular into Chechnya and the Northern Caucasus.<sup>18</sup> Moscow does not believe that a single nation-state poses a threat to Russia, but it believes that Taliban and Al Qaida have both the intent and the capability - proven by historical examples - of undermining Russian national security through the spread of terrorism.<sup>19</sup>

The protracted violence in Afghanistan creates another destabilizing effect for Russia - arms and drugs trafficking. Russian analysts have warned that terrorist fund-raising has experienced a qualitative shift from being dependent on foreign donations to being financially self-sustained, primarily through narco-trafficking and arms smuggling.<sup>20</sup> Several smuggling routes pass through Russia on their way to Europe. This trafficking not only provides jihadists in the former USSR with material and financial resources but also solidifies a trans-national crime network connecting Afghanistan and Western Europe. These criminal networks have been able to corrupt and penetrate the state border services and the law enforcement agencies of many regional countries and have developed direct, and sometimes quite intimate, links with business and political elites in the post-Soviet states, further undermining regional stability.

## Impact on the Stability of Central Asia: Democratization, Islam, and Regional Security

Russia considers the spread of radical Islam as the major threat to regional stability. Moscow views Central Asian states, overwhelmingly Muslim but internally

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<sup>18</sup> Even though Taliban was ousted in 2001 Moscow still maintains this view.

<sup>19</sup> A long list of presumed terrorist attacks has been posted at the public relations site of the KGB successor, the FSB [http://antiterror.ru/in\\_russia/81051648](http://antiterror.ru/in_russia/81051648)

<sup>20</sup> Otkuda teroristy berut dengi [Where do terrorists get their money], Radio Goloss Rossii, March 25, 2004, [http://www.vor.ru/World/index\\_1251.html](http://www.vor.ru/World/index_1251.html)

fragmented along ethnic and tribal lines, as particularly vulnerable to such a threat.<sup>21</sup> Russia perceives the authoritarian nature of the current Central Asian regimes as being instrumental in guaranteeing regional stability. Any radical political changes, including democratization, have been perceived by Russian analysts and policy-makers as too risky and, given the fragmented nature of Central Asian societies, injurious to regional stability.<sup>22</sup> Some of the negative aspects of democratization in post-2001 Afghanistan have reinforced these Russian views.

Furthermore, Russian commentators argue that promoting democracy in Central Asian countries, where there is no civil society and where the only political alternative to the authoritarian regimes is a myriad of religious groups, could actually bring to power Taliban-like movements.<sup>23</sup> Russian analysts also believe that “Central Asian states appear more comfortable in dealing with Russia, secure in the knowledge that Russia will not leave the region and place democratizing pressures on host governments in return for assistance.”<sup>24</sup>

Some Western security analysts are doubtful whether Russia’s regional policy is able to offer an enduring security framework for Central Asia.<sup>25</sup> The main reasons are Moscow’s limited resources and its fear that the democratic opening up of the Central Asian regimes would bring instability. They argue that in order to solidify this status quo approach, Russia’s primary diplomatic efforts are directed toward the cultivation of special relations with the ruling elites and the promotion of economic relations between state-run industries, especially those related to armaments and energy.<sup>26</sup> This interpretation, though accurate when interpreting Moscow’s motivations and behaviour, fails to account for the Central Asian perspective because it underestimates the relevance of two critical factors. First, Russia is the historical and institutional West to Central Asia. Second, there is compatibility between the political culture of both Czarist and Communist Russia and of the oriental autocracy of Central Asia.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> This view is actually shared by many Western scholars. See Kathleen Collins, *Clan Politics and Regime Transition in Central Asia* (Cambridge and New York, Cambridge University Press, 2006) and Sally N. Cummings, ed. *Oil, Transition and Security in Central Asia* (London and New York, RoutledgeCurzon), 2003.

<sup>22</sup> Lavrov underlined the link between “democracy export and instability” in *Izvestia*, December 11, 2006.

<sup>23</sup> Kto otkryvate dveri islamistam I ekstremistam [Who is opening the door for islamists and extremists?], Radio Goloss Rossii, April 22, 2005, [http://www.vor.ru/World/index\\_1251.html](http://www.vor.ru/World/index_1251.html)

<sup>24</sup> Central Asia Cautious about Western Military and Strategic Interests, *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Volume 1, Issue 120, November 4, 2004. <http://www.cdi.org/russia/329-19.cfm>

<sup>25</sup> Stephen J. Blank, *The NATO-Russia partnership: A Marriage of convenience or a troubled relationship?* (Carlisle Barracks: US Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, November 2006) <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/display.cfm?pubID=734>

<sup>26</sup> Russia has nurtured with the same intent intimate relations with the regional intelligence services. See Stéphane Lefebvre and Roger N. McDermott, “Russia and the Intelligence Services of Central Asia,” forthcoming in *International Journal of Intelligence and CounterIntelligence*.

<sup>27</sup> The cultural symbiosis between the Russian Empire and Central Asia was described in Daniel Brower and Edward J. Lazzarini, eds., *Russia’s Orient: Imperial Borderlands and Peoples, 1700-1917* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1997).

For a landlocked Central Asia, Russia was and remains the main promoter of modernity, and the key actor in developing its economy, education, transportation and security. The pace of post-Communist diversification of Central Asian states from Russia was very slow and they remain very interdependent with Moscow.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, Putin-style democracy, with its restrictions, represents for Central Asian capitals a more reliable and compatible political system than would competing democratic models.

The difference between Russian and American approaches to the democratization issue was visible after the violent clashes in the Uzbek city of Andijan in May 2005. While Washington, at the cost of later losing its basing rights in Uzbekistan, criticized the Uzbek authorities for the methods used in handling this crisis, Moscow maintained that the Tashkent authorities were right to use deadly force in suppressing the “Afghan trained terrorists.”<sup>29</sup> The worsening of relations between the US and Uzbekistan continued, with Washington accusing Tashkent of gross violations of human rights, among other things for closing the offices of over 100 NGOs. Tashkent responded by accusing Washington of hypocrisy and “double standards” because of its alleged use of torture and other violations of human rights in Guantanamo, Iraq, and Afghanistan.<sup>30</sup>

The issue of “double standards” has been resurfacing frequently in the Russian discourse on the war on terrorism. Moscow believes that Western countries, especially when dealing with the Chechen issue, are often prone to apply a different yardstick and to label Chechen warlords as “freedom fighters” instead of as terrorists.<sup>31</sup> Russians argue that such a policy has been undermining the unity of the anti-terrorist front and that any flirting with terrorists will end up being very costly for global security. To further strengthen their claim Russians like to remind their Western partners that the CIA initially backed the mujahedeen and Bin Ladin forces in Afghanistan during the Soviet intervention, only to be viciously attacked by those same groups less than a decade later.

## Impact on Moscow’s Relations with NATO

Russia-NATO cooperation dates back to 1991 when Moscow joined the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (later renamed the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council). In 1994 Russia joined the Partnership for Peace program, while in 1997 cooperation was upgraded through a bilateral Russia-NATO arrangement, the NATO-Russia

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<sup>28</sup> Lena Jonson, *Russia and Central Asia: A New Web of Relations* (London: The Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1998).

<sup>29</sup> Podgotovka teroristov prodolzhaetsia [Terrorists’ training continues], Radio Golos Rossii, May 14, 2005, [http://www.vor.ru/World/index\\_1251.html](http://www.vor.ru/World/index_1251.html)

<sup>30</sup> Tashkent otvetil Gosdeprtmetnu SshA [Tashkent responded to the US State Department], *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, November 29, 2006.

<sup>31</sup> “Dvoinie stadarty” v otsenke teroristov dolzhny byt’ isklucheny [“Double standards” in judging terrorists should be avoided], Radio Goloss Rossii, October 21, 2004, [http://www.vor.ru/World/index\\_1251.html](http://www.vor.ru/World/index_1251.html)

Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security.<sup>32</sup> Progress in NATO-Russia relations stalled after Yevgenii Primakov became Russian Foreign Minister in 1996, and failed to meet Kremlin expectations. Russian opposition to NATO enlargement, and in particular to NATO's military interventions in the Balkans in 1995 and 1999, were the key points of discontent. The experience of Russian military participation in NATO operations in Bosnia and Kosovo, even though both operations were UN-mandated, further disappointed Moscow. Russia pulled out of these missions realizing that troops on the ground do not necessarily guarantee a prominent seat at the decision-making table.<sup>33</sup>

Putin's assumption of the Presidency in 1999 initiated a period of renewal in Russia-NATO relations with Moscow approaching them "in a spirit of pragmatism."<sup>34</sup> Despite this, suspicion and distrust towards NATO persists, in particular with regard to NATO enlargement.<sup>35</sup> On numerous occasions the current Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergei Lavrov has referred to enlargement as a "strategic mistake with grave consequences."<sup>36</sup>

The alliance's Afghanistan mission, and Russia's support for such an operation have affected relations with NATO more than Moscow's longer-standing participation in Partnership for Peace programs. The Russia-US partnership in the war on terrorism was instrumental in the creation of the NATO-Russia Council in Summer 2002. The council was created with the goal of cooperation in "counterterrorism efforts, prevention of the spread of WMD, emergency planning, and maritime search and rescue."<sup>37</sup>

Moscow has offered a cooperative hand to NATO in Afghanistan from the beginning of that operation. The reasons for such behaviour are twofold. First, the NATO mission in Afghanistan started as a UN-mandated mission, giving Russia some say during the UN Security Council deliberations. Second, NATO has been militarily trying to solve a security problem that was harmful to Russia, but that Moscow could not solve on its own. Some prominent Russian analysts, including Sergei Rogov, argued along the same line by indicating that "NATO protects Russia's underbelly"

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<sup>32</sup> Evolution of NATO-Russia Relations, <http://www.nato.int/issues/nato-russia/evolution.html>

<sup>33</sup> Richard Weitz, *Revitalising US-Russian Security Cooperation: Practical Measures*, Adelphi Paper 377 (London: Taylor & Francis, November 2005), p 65.

<sup>34</sup> Evolution of NATO-Russia Relations, <http://www.nato.int/issues/nato-russia/evolution.html>

<sup>35</sup> This distrust has been often intertwined with negative views of the US foreign policy. See Putin's speech at the 2007 Munich Conference, <http://www.securityconference.de/konferenzen/rede.php?sprache=en&id=179&>

<sup>36</sup> Interviu ministra inostranyh del Rossii S.V. Lavrova [Interview with Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs, S.V. Lavrov] Krasnaia Zvezda, December 12, 2006, [http://www.mid.ru/brp\\_4.nsf/sps/FC557EB56E869A13C32572420026D6D7](http://www.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/sps/FC557EB56E869A13C32572420026D6D7)

<sup>37</sup> Matthew A. Cordova, "The Transformation of U.S.-Russian Relations" (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of State, July 2002) <http://usinfo.state.gov/journals/itps/0702/ijpe/cordova.htm>

and that "NATO's defeat in Afghanistan will definitely have negative consequences for our country."<sup>38</sup>

The Kremlin's parallel pursuit of two seemingly contradictory approaches, of having generally negative attitudes towards NATO and closely cooperating with the alliance in Afghanistan, occasionally makes Russian analysts wonder about the compatibility of these two policies. Some pundits question the utility of Russian diplomacy's "ritual" complaints about NATO enlargement while the country at the same time actively cooperates with the alliance in Afghanistan (see below) and on other security issues through the NATO-Russia Council. Some analysts argue that the NATO threat to Russia is more imagined than real. They note that the transformation of most NATO militaries into all-volunteer forces will effectively reduce NATO troop strength, and they point to the difficulty experienced in creating a 20,000-strong NATO rapid reaction force.<sup>39</sup>

Even though the Russian side praises Russia-NATO cooperation in the fight against international terrorism, it appears that Moscow has been hoping that, on the basis of such an engagement, it could influence NATO to halt its further enlargement in Eastern Europe.<sup>40</sup> A deepening of the alliance's relations with countries that Moscow considers part of its own geopolitical backyard, such as Ukraine or Georgia, has probably been instrumental in shattering this unrealistic hope. It could be argued that these developments have contributed to more vocal complaints about NATO actions in Afghanistan.

### ***Three Vocal Disagreements with NATO on Afghanistan***

Russian criticism over developments in Afghanistan started emerging during 2004. On several occasions throughout 2004 Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergei Lavrov voiced his displeasure with the policy of the Afghan government, backed by NATO, of extending the hand of reconciliation to moderate Taliban warlords.<sup>41</sup> Lavrov has argued that such an approach is injurious to the anti-terrorist efforts because it represents a general amnesty for terrorists. Furthermore, he has alleged that this could lead to a forcible "Pashtunization" of Afghan politics. In return, Afghan authorities have accused Lavrov of deepening internal divisions in Afghanistan and of

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<sup>38</sup> Martin Walker, "Commentary: Russia – A gangster state?" UPI, November 28, 2006, <http://www.metimes.com/storyview.php?StoryID=20061128-071745-5014r>

<sup>39</sup> Alexander Golts, "Why Putin Refused an Invitation to Istanbul," *Moscow Times*, June 9, 2004.

<sup>40</sup> Russia I NATO ukrepliaut svoe sotrudnichestvo v borbe s novoi serioznoi ugrozoi – international terrorism, Radio Golos Rossii, February 14, 2006, [http://www.vor.ru/World/index\\_1251.html](http://www.vor.ru/World/index_1251.html)

<sup>41</sup> Russia I Afganistan segodnia [Russia and Afghanistan Today], RIA Novosti, November 14, 2006, <http://www.rian.ru/analytics/20061114/55622863.html>

spurring tribal-based rivalries in the country in the same way the Soviet authorities did during the 1980s.<sup>42</sup>

There is an evident contradiction in Russian regional security policy on the issues of democracy and amnesty. While the promotion of democracy by the US is criticized in Moscow as a naïve and adventurous policy that actually adds to regional instability, Moscow claims that its emphasis in post-war reconstruction in Chechnya is on the promotion of democracy and institution building. It is unlikely that any of the recent elections in Chechnya were free and fair, or that the individuals elected were anything more than local strongmen endorsed by the Kremlin, but the point is that Moscow insists on democratic procedures as a long term strategy of rooting out jihadism in Russia, including in Chechnya. This apparent contradiction has been justified by the following perception: in Moscow's view Russia is a democracy while the Central Asian countries are not, which makes them unsuitable to combat jihadism with anything else but brute force.

Similarly, Moscow's criticism of Kabul's efforts at reconciliation with moderate Taliban is harder to understand when compared with the situation in the Caucasus where Moscow actually promotes a very similar policy of general amnesty in Chechnya.<sup>43</sup> Extending a hand of reconciliation to less radical elements is an action recommended by any counter-insurgency military manual, and was tested and proven by Russians in fighting Chechen rebels since 1999.

A second line of Russian criticism was directed at how NATO conducts its operations in Afghanistan. In 2004 Moscow noted the significant increase in poppy seed cultivation in Afghanistan, which coincided with Taliban's intensified military activities. Russian Minister of Defence Sergei Ivanov has been critical of NATO for allegedly "turning a blind eye to the flourishing opium trade in Afghanistan to ensure the support of warlords in the struggle to maintain security in the country."<sup>44</sup> Instead, Moscow urges a "truly" international approach on this issue in the form of a coordinated multilateral effort that would include all Afghanistan's neighbours.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Afghanistan: Was Taliban involved in Uzbek Violence, May 19, 2005, <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/pp051905a.shtml> Kabul's perspective is not only historical as there were some reports in 2003 that Russia continued sending supplies to General Mohammed Qasim Fahim, a former Northern Alliance leader. See "Jockeying for influence, neighbours undermine Afghan Pact," January 15, 2003, <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav011503.shtml>

<sup>43</sup> Pavel K. Baev, "Putin protects Islam and praises Democracy in Grozny," December 14, 2005 [http://www.jamestown.org/edm/article.php?article\\_id=2370597](http://www.jamestown.org/edm/article.php?article_id=2370597)

<sup>44</sup> "NATO Happy to Ignore Explosion in Afghan Opium Output, says Russia," *The Guardian*, February 9, 2004, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/afghanistan/story/0,1284,1143881,00.html>

<sup>45</sup> Glava FSKN ne dovolen antinarkotichesкими usiliami v Afganistane [The Head of Federal Anti-narcotic Service unhappy with anti-drug efforts in Afghanistan] RIA Novosti, December 5, 2006, [http://rian.ru/defense\\_safety/military/20061205/56485343.html](http://rian.ru/defense_safety/military/20061205/56485343.html) and Budet li sozdan poias bezopasnosti vokrug Afganistana [Would there be built a security cordon around Afghanistan], *Rossiskie Vesti*, No. 1807, February 2006, <http://rosvesty.ru/1807/interes/?id=664>

The third vocal disagreement with NATO was related to the Tajikistan-Afghanistan border. Based on the 1993 agreements with Russia, Tajik border troops were scheduled to take control of the entire Tajik-Afghan border in 2004.<sup>46</sup> This agreement pre-dated the events of 9/11 and the subsequent US intervention in Afghanistan. Under these new circumstances, the agreement has apparently lost some of its appeal for Moscow. NATO has taken practical steps to provide resources and training for the Tajikistan military's border guards, further augmenting Russian perceptions of a loss of regional sway. Simultaneously, Russia, concerned with expanded NATO influence in Tajikistan, has signalled that it rejects the idea of passing the control of the border with Afghanistan solely to the Tajik authorities.<sup>47</sup> In the aftermath of this dispute, the Russian 201st Motorized Division, which has been stationed in Tajikistan for years, became part of the force protection for Tajik border units (with Tajik conscripts).<sup>48</sup> NATO's offers of training, despite Dushanbe's initial interest, remained largely unused leaving Russian analysts largely satisfied with Moscow's power of persuasion.

## Impact on Moscow's Relations with the US

The 9/11 events have significantly changed the nature and dynamic of US and Russian efforts related to Afghanistan. While there was an increase in security cooperation related to war efforts in Afghanistan there were also noticeable disagreements about broader regional agendas. Between June 2000 and April 2002 the US-Russia working group on Afghanistan had seven meetings, but despite the overall positive tones about the shared interests in the fight against terrorism there was already some evidence of rivalry. For example, the US side managed to put the issues of Caucasus security, and Georgia in particular, on the agenda, an action clearly not favoured by Moscow, while the Russian side obtained a concession by insisting on the wording of the joint statement whereby "the US side reiterated that the United States has no intention of establishing permanent military bases in Central Asia."<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Vladimir Socor, "Tajikistan expands effort to take over protection of its border," May 18, 2004, [http://www.jamestown.org/edm/article.php?article\\_id=236718](http://www.jamestown.org/edm/article.php?article_id=236718)

<sup>47</sup> OBSE I NATO vydavlivaiut Rossiu s tadzisko-afghanskoi granicy [OSCE and NATO are pushing away Russia from Tajik-Afghan border], February 12, 2003, [http://www.ng.ru/cis/2003-12-02/5\\_tadjikistan.html](http://www.ng.ru/cis/2003-12-02/5_tadjikistan.html)

<sup>48</sup> During the Soviet-era border control jurisdiction belonged to the Department of Internal Affairs and not Defence. Due to the break-up of the Soviet Union and the ongoing civil war in Tajikistan there was effectively no institution able to monitor the border with Afghanistan. Since 1993, Russian efforts at protecting the Afghan-Tajik border were based on a bilateral agreement with Dushanbe which stipulated that the command and NCO components of the troops should be Russian, while the conscripts or contract servicemen should be Tajik. Both countries shared the financial burden equally. The 201<sup>st</sup> division, at the time stationed in Tajikistan as part of the Russian "peacekeeping effort," unofficially provided force protection for the border troops. Russia acquired permanent basing rights in Tajikistan in 2004, and the 201<sup>st</sup> division re-branded itself from peacekeepers to the force protection of the Tajik border guards.

<sup>49</sup> Joint Press Statement of the U.S.-Russia Working Group on Afghanistan, U.S. Department of State, April 26, 2002.

By July 2002, the US-Russia working group on Afghanistan was renamed as the Working Group on Counterterrorism. The Group's mandate has been expanded to encompass a global anti-terrorist effort as well as problems of "the proliferation of mass destruction weapons and their means of delivery."<sup>50</sup> Russian analysts consider the Russia-US security partnership as Putin's biggest foreign policy achievement. Even though Moscow and Washington do not share the same positions on many arms reduction and proliferation issues, such as those related to Iran's nuclear program, the majority of Russian pundits believe that joint interests in fighting a jihadist threat override those disagreements. Moscow's active contribution in fighting Taliban and Al Qaida in Afghanistan has been deemed by the Kremlin and by Russian analysts alike as the essential cornerstone of the Russia-US global security partnership.

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<sup>50</sup> Cordova, "The Transformation of U.S.-Russian Relations."

## Current Russian Involvement in Afghanistan: 2001-2006

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On September 11, 2001, Putin was the first international leader who called President Bush expressing his country's sympathies and pledging full support for the US in this dire situation. This support for the US efforts in the war on terrorism, and in particular in its intervention in Afghanistan, was far from declaratory. In his September 24, 2001, statement, President Putin laid out specific Russian contributions for the "upcoming anti-terrorist operations in Afghanistan:" intelligence sharing; search and rescue assistance; over-flight rights and other assistance for international humanitarian relief efforts; and diplomatic assistance to enable the US to acquire basing rights in some Central Asian states.<sup>51</sup> In the same statement Putin also pledged Russia's support for the Northern Alliance government headed by Burhanuddin Rabbani, including the provision of arms.

On October 22, 2001, Putin met with Rabbani in Tajikistan and pledged full support for "the liberation of Afghanistan of terrorist groups."<sup>52</sup> The Kremlin was, apparently, aiming at solidifying its sphere of influence among certain tribal and regional leaders in Afghanistan in preparation for a post-Taliban era and in order to counterbalance any future American influence. Russian commentators were probably right when expressing a certain level of discomfort with the Kremlin's apparent lack of a strategy to promote a unified, non-Taliban, Afghanistan, arguing that Moscow was limiting itself in its political options by only partnering with regional warlords who could not bring peace and stability nation-wide and who opposed any centralization of policy-making in Afghanistan.<sup>53</sup>

By January 2002, the successful US military intervention in Afghanistan had impressed Russian officials and made them worried about potential future unilateralism in Washington's regional security policy. Moscow was surprised by the American military's ability to manage a quick and almost casualty-free military campaign and end the Taliban rule in Afghanistan. In retrospect, Taliban's defeat marked the end of Washington's and Moscow's tactical cooperation in Afghanistan and the beginning of their strategic rivalry for spheres of influence in Central Asia.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Zaiavlenie Prezidenta Rossii [Statement of the President of Russia], September 24, 2001, <http://kremlin.ru/text/appears/2001/09/28639.shtml>

<sup>52</sup> Nochnoi politicheskii desant; Putin I Bush deliat sfery vliania v Afghanistane [Night-time political attack; Putin and Bush divide spheres of interest in Afghanistan] *Nezavisimaia Gazeta*, October 23, 2001, [http://www.ng.ru/politics/2001-10-23/1\\_desant.html](http://www.ng.ru/politics/2001-10-23/1_desant.html)

<sup>53</sup> Vozvrashaias iz politicheskogo nebytia [Return from political irrelevance], *Nezavisimaia Gazeta*, November 11, 2001, [http://www.ng.ru/sodr/2001-11-06/11\\_rate.html](http://www.ng.ru/sodr/2001-11-06/11_rate.html)

<sup>54</sup> Igor Torbakov, Russia Worries that Afghan Success will prompt US Unilateralism, January 2, 2002, <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav010202.shtml>

During his January 2002 visit to Kazakhstan and Tajikistan the Duma Speaker, Gennadiy Sleznev, voiced concerns about a prolonged NATO or US military presence in the region, and reiterated that Tajikistan was one of Russia's closest allies - despite the fact that the two countries do not share a border.<sup>55</sup> What worried Moscow even more than the establishment of US and NATO military bases in Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan was the prospect that some countries with soured relations with Russia, as was the case with Uzbekistan at the time, could develop more intimate and long-term relations with the US.<sup>56</sup> Moscow's concerns were reinforced when the acquisition of basing rights was followed by American military cooperation and training with these Central Asian countries. Yet Moscow was not opposed to, or concerned with, India's military presence in Tajikistan, most likely because the Kremlin assessed that it was of limited scope, and more importantly, that Russia and Delhi had common regional security interests.<sup>57</sup>

The end of Taliban rule and the beginning of the political revitalization of Afghanistan, initiated by the Bonn Conference (November-December 2001), opened a new phase in Russia's Afghanistan policy. During the Bonn Conference Russia quickly ruled out the possibility of sending peacekeeping troops to Afghanistan, but offered to help with military training once the fighting was over.

However, Moscow's efforts at significantly influencing Afghan domestic politics at the conference proved futile. Russia eagerly supported the Northern Alliance's takeover of Kabul and the creation of a provisional government in November 2001. The representatives from the Northern Alliance, a long-time Russian proxy, primarily filled the ranks of this government. During the Bonn Conference in December 2001 Moscow was urging, behind the scenes, that key government posts be reserved for the Northern Alliance representatives. Most of Moscow's protégés were ethnic Tajiks, Uzbeks and Turkmen with various linguistic, tribal or personal links with the post-Soviet countries.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Nesluchainii visit Russkikh parlamentariev: Moskva obespekoeana usileniem aktivnosti SshA v Centralnoi Asii [Non-accidental visit by Russian parliamentarians: Moscow concerned by the US's increased activity in Central Asia], *Nezavisimaia Gazeta*, January 14, 2002, [http://www.ng.ru/cis/2002-01-14/4\\_vizit.html](http://www.ng.ru/cis/2002-01-14/4_vizit.html)

<sup>56</sup> Pentagon v Tashkente [Pentagon in Tashkent], *Nezavisimaia Gazeta*, September 28, 2001, [http://www.ng.ru/events/2001-09-28/1\\_pentagon.html](http://www.ng.ru/events/2001-09-28/1_pentagon.html)

<sup>57</sup> Delhi has operated a field hospital in Tajikistan since the late 1990s, and after signing a bilateral defence agreement with Kabul in 2002, has established an air force base at Ayni, near the Tajik capital Dushanbe, in order to facilitate the movement of equipment to Afghanistan. Delhi believes that this base will give them "a longer strategic reach" as well as an opportunity to provide training to the Tajik air forces. "Briefing: India – Regional Focus," *Jane's Defence Weekly*, Vol. 42, No. 28, 13 July 2005, p 29, and IAF's Base in Tajikistan will be ready by '04, September 30, 2004, <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/869687.cms>

<sup>58</sup> In 2001 the majority of warlords were non-Pashtun. Ismail Khan of Herat is a Tajik and so is Marshal Qassim Fahim. General Dostum is an ethnic Uzbek, Haji M. Muhaqqeq is a Hazara and Hazrat Ali, a Pashai. They are from the ethnic minorities, which collectively probably constitute the majority of the population. See A. Jamali, "A Shift in U.S. Strategy in Afghanistan?" May 5, 2004, [http://www.jamestown.org/edm/article.php?article\\_id=236651](http://www.jamestown.org/edm/article.php?article_id=236651) and also "Russia's Ominous Afghan Gambit," *The Wall Street Journal Europe*, December 11, 2001.

Washington argued that the election of such an ethnically unbalanced Afghan government could become detrimental in attracting the Pashtuns, a relative majority in Afghanistan and the main supporters of Taliban, to join the ranks. It appears that by naming Hamid Karzai, a Pashtun, as the chairman of the Afghan Interim Authority (AIA) on 22 December 2001, the US was able to outmanoeuvre the Northern Alliance and to start gradually increasing the Pashtun presence in Karzai's government. This represented a significant blow to Russian efforts at directly influencing the Kabul government because Karzai effectively replaced Moscow's main ally, former President Burhanuddin Rabbani (who had already settled in the old presidential palace in Kabul).<sup>59</sup>

In strategic terms, however, uncertain about the duration of the American military deployment in the region, Moscow and its regional allies maintained that the US military presence in Central Asia had been a "positive factor" and that it did "not run against Russia's interests, and does not aim at restricting Russian influence in the region."<sup>60</sup> Russia's aspirations to great power status, and the assumption that the former Soviet Union is its sphere of interests, have spurred Moscow to pursue a dual track security policy. On the one hand, Moscow has partnered with Washington in a global war on terrorism. On the other hand, when it comes to regional theatres of its particular interest, such as the one in Central Asia, Russia has been acting both unilaterally and multilaterally to counter any eventual US strategic advances.<sup>61</sup> The actual re-direction of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) from confidence-building into bodies oriented towards security cooperation is but one indicator of this policy.<sup>62</sup>

In a speech given in November 2002 and primarily related to Central Asia Putin largely confirmed Moscow's assertive policy in relation to its geopolitical neighbourhood. He declared that the decade of Russian foreign policy concessions was over and that Moscow was determined to consolidate and expand its sphere of influence "all in accordance with treaties and international law."<sup>63</sup> Correspondingly, Russia gained a basing right in Kyrgyzstan (Kant airfield), and launched a myriad of anti-terrorist exercises with the members of the CSTO. Many Russian commentators, in applauding these initiatives, dubbed them a Russian Monroe Doctrine, and argued

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<sup>59</sup> <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/campaign/withus/cbonn.html>

<sup>60</sup> Sergei Blagov, Russia strives to maintain political clout in Afghanistan, February 12, 2002, <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav021202a.shtml>

<sup>61</sup> Similar development occurred during the 1990s. At the time Moscow viewed Turkey's growing influence in Central Asia with concern and actively tried to curb Ankara's expansion. See, Andrei Kortunov and Andrei Shoumikhin, Russia and Central Asia: Evolution of Mutual Perceptions, Policies, and Interdependence, in Yongjin Zhang and Rouben Azizian, eds., *Ethnic Challenges beyond Borders: Chinese and Russian Perspectives of the Central Asian Conundrum* (London, Macmillan Press, 1998) pp. 11-32.

<sup>62</sup> CSTO and SCO were created in 1992 and 1996, respectively, but after several years of dormancy were re-energized and converted into active military cooperation alliances aimed at countering not only residual security threats of jihadism, but also the influence and insertion of non-regional powers, such as the US.

<sup>63</sup> Igor Torbakov, Russia moves to reassert influence in Central Asia, Caucasus, December 16, 2002, <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav121602.shtml>

that it was about time that Moscow reasserted its sphere of influence in the “near abroad.”<sup>64</sup>

Once relative peace came to Afghanistan, Moscow was less able to influence developments in that country due to the limits of its economic resources and soft power. For example, during the February 2002 visit to Moscow by Afghanistan interim Defence Minister Mohammad Fahim no agreements were reached and no major deliveries of Russian aid or equipment followed. This left Fahim to contrast this reaction with the “positive responses” he had received from other countries, which were more forthcoming in their assistance to the Afghan government.<sup>65</sup> While Russia played an important role in arming and training the Northern Alliance troops during their march on Kabul in 2001 the Russian presence in Afghanistan, once the major combat operations were over, primarily rested with the Russian Ministry of Emergency Situations and its deliveries of humanitarian aid and medical supplies and its de-mining activities. This department also provided technical assistance in setting up health-care facilities in Kabul, and in repairing the Salang tunnel, which connects Afghanistan’s northern and southern regions.<sup>66</sup>

Russian aid efforts since 2001 have paralleled those of other international donors in being primarily directed to Kabul and the North of the country.<sup>67</sup> As the security situation in the country improved Russian relief efforts gradually expanded to Southern regions and aid has been replaced with economic cooperation, especially in the areas of energy, transport and trade.<sup>68</sup> Nevertheless, there have been some reports indicating that, when it comes to aid distribution, Moscow keeps providing preferential treatment to its Northern Alliance allies.<sup>69</sup>

During 2003, the US intervention in Iraq consumed much of the attention of both Russian policy makers and analysts, leaving Afghan issues only sporadically addressed. For example, the handover of command of the ISAF mission in Kabul to NATO in 2003 did not cause any visible concern in Moscow. The most probable reason was the timing. The April 2003 NATO decision to take over the command of the ISAF coincided with the ongoing US intervention in Iraq. Furthermore, the handover of command in Kabul in August 2003 coincided with other high-profile

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Sergei Blagov, Russia strives to maintain political clout in Afghanistan, February 12, 2002, <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav021202a.shtml>

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> On Russia’s humanitarian projects to aid Afghanistan, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, *Daily News Bulletin*, January 9, 2003.

<sup>68</sup> Iug Afganistana vstrechaet rossiskii biznes [Southern Afghanistan meets Russian Business], *AsiaInform*, November 28, 2006, <http://www.asiainform.ru/rusdoc/11054.htm>

<sup>69</sup> Dangerous Neighbours, *Far Eastern Economic Review*, January 7, 2003, <http://www.e-ariana.com/ariana/ariana.nsf/allDocsArticles/E4FA09CB76F9EB0187256CA7005D036C?OpenDocument>

events such as the UN resolution on the status of the Multinational Forces in Iraq, and the preparations for the Bush-Putin Summit at Camp David in September 2003.

The atmosphere at this summit, and the joint statements issued from it, created an impression in the Russian media that Moscow and Washington were strengthening their relations and that the impetus of cooperation created by the 9/11 events was continuing. As a result, the majority of Russia's pundits thought that the UN Security Council confrontations between Washington and Moscow over Iraq were temporary and tactical and thus could be put behind. The air of optimism continued with President Putin's statement of November 2003 where he stressed, in rather unequivocal terms, that the mutual understanding and confidence between Moscow and Washington, built after the 9/11, was not a tactical rapprochement, but a "program for long-term partnership."<sup>70</sup> At the same time, NATO was of the view that cooperation with Russia in Afghanistan was going well, including as it did regular ambassadorial and ministerial exchanges on the evolving security situation.<sup>71</sup> Russian officials took pride in Russian assistance to NATO in Afghanistan, especially in intelligence sharing.<sup>72</sup> However, the value of this contribution is questionable. Russian intelligence assets were instrumental in facilitating the Northern Alliance's successful attempt to recapture Kabul, but as the Western allies started building their own intelligence capabilities in the region Moscow's assistance began steadily to decline.<sup>73</sup>

When Taliban attacks began to escalate in 2005, Russian analysts became more skeptical about the alliance's chances for success in Afghanistan. Simultaneously, the Kremlin increased its rhetoric about NATO not being able to provide an "effective solution of the problems of terrorism and narcotics" in Afghanistan.<sup>74</sup> As a remedy for this problem Moscow has been offering a partnership between NATO and CSTO. Some Russian experts described this effort at promoting Moscow-controlled regional organizations as NATO partners in Central Asia as a potential geopolitical rivalry, the "small game," between Russia and the US (in reference to the 19<sup>th</sup> century "great game" between the Russian and British Empires).<sup>75</sup> At the forefront of this rivalry

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<sup>70</sup> Putin hopeful of "long-term partnership" between Russia and USA, *Interfax*, November 22, 2003.

<sup>71</sup> Article by NATO Secretary General Lord Robertson in Russian newspaper *Krasnaya Zvezda*, October 30, 2003, <http://www.nato.int/docu/articles/2003/a031027a.htm>

<sup>72</sup> NATO thanks Russia for intelligence information on Afghanistan, *Pravda*, October 10, 2003, <http://newsfromrussia.com/world/2003/10/10/50425.html> and *Shpion o kotorom zabyli* [The Forgotten Spy], *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, December 14, 2006

<sup>73</sup> See Battle for the FSU: Drugs and Distrust in Tajikistan, *Stratfor*, February 02, 2004, [http://www.stratfor.com/products/premium/read\\_article.php?selected=Special%20Reports&id=227682&showForecasts=1&specialReports=1](http://www.stratfor.com/products/premium/read_article.php?selected=Special%20Reports&id=227682&showForecasts=1&specialReports=1)

<sup>74</sup> "Russia Seeks Bigger Role in Afghanistan, Cooperation with NATO – Putin Envoy," *MosNews*, October 25, 2005.

<sup>75</sup> *Malaia igra: geopoliticheskoe sopernichestvo grozit zaslonit' bor'bu s terrorizmom* [Small game: geopolitical rivalry endangers war on terrorism] Dmitrii Trenin, Briefing 8 (Moscow Carnegie Centre, September 2005).

were regional security interests while in the background were lingering issues of supply routes for oil and gas pipelines.<sup>76</sup>

Throughout 2006, Russian officials kept interpreting Moscow's efforts in Afghanistan as consistent with the international community's attempts at stabilization and post-conflict reconstruction. The enlarged responsibility and scope of NATO operations in Afghanistan have been interpreted in Moscow as being necessary.<sup>77</sup> Moscow, however, assesses that lasting peace and stability will be possible only when the Afghan state gains the strength and capabilities to fight terrorism independently. In order to facilitate such a development, according to the Kremlin, the world should also work on improving the socio-economic wellbeing of ordinary Afghans. Moscow often argues that it is fulfilling its share by providing training and military hardware to the Afghan armed forces, totaling around \$200 million US since 2001.<sup>78</sup>

The rest of the Russian assistance record is less stellar. Moscow is still arguing with Kabul over Afghanistan's Soviet-era debt, estimated at \$10 billion US, and insists that it will be prepared to cancel that debt only if Afghanistan acknowledges its existence (Kabul does not recognize the debt, and indeed insists on Russia paying colossal reparations for damages inflicted during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan).<sup>79</sup> Simultaneously, Kabul wants Russia to return geological survey data, currently held in Moscow, a further irritant in bilateral relations. Kabul maintains that this documentation belongs to Afghanistan and that it arguably represents the most promising opportunity for the country's economic recovery. Moscow argues that the documentation is the property of the Russian state and is willing to hand it to Kabul in exchange for Russian companies gaining majority stakes in all gas and oil related projects.

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Interviu Zamestitela Ministra inostranyh del Rossiii A.Iu. Alekseeva [Interview with Russian Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs A. Yu. Alekseev], *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, December 11, 2006.

<sup>78</sup> "The Eastern Vector of Russian Foreign Policy," Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Alekseev, [http://www.mid.ru/brp\\_4.nsf/itogi/F8FA9D9B84461467C32570E600251C6B](http://www.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/itogi/F8FA9D9B84461467C32570E600251C6B)

<sup>79</sup> "Russia to Forgive Afghanistan's Soviet-era Debt," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, January 30, 2006.

## Russian Public Opinion

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The majority of Russian public surveys related to Afghanistan were primarily held during the 2000-2001 period and they recorded an extremely high rate of approval for Russia eventually confronting Taliban at the Tajik border. Similarly, the public approval of the 2001 US intervention against Taliban and Al Qaida was very high. No specific surveys related to Afghanistan were conducted after 2002, yet data analysis from surveys dealing with the war on terrorism and Russian foreign policy could be instrumental in indicating recent Russian public perceptions.<sup>80</sup>

Results of public surveys conducted during the 2000-2006 period have indicated that Russians consider the threat of international terrorism, and radical Islam in particular, to be of a global nature. They also believe that this threat has been increasing, and they overwhelmingly believe that “destroying terrorists” rather than negotiating with them will resolve this threat.<sup>81</sup> These perceptions are similar to the views expressed by the US public. On the other hand, the majority of the Russian public is not supportive of US military strikes against terrorist targets in other countries.<sup>82</sup> Russians believe that US foreign policy, and especially military interventions, do not take into account the interests of other countries and is often destabilizing for regional and international security. On this particular view the Russian public is closer to some West European nations.<sup>83</sup>

It is interesting to note that public attitudes toward the US are more favourable among younger and less educated segments of Russian society, meaning that it is middle-aged and more educated Russians, such as the political elite, that are more suspicious of American policies.<sup>84</sup> In contrast, EU surveys show an elite support of the US global leadership role versus the clear anti-Americanism expressed by the general public.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> The assessment was based on various surveys conducted by The Public Opinion Foundation, VCIOM, and Levada Centre, three very reputable Russian polling houses. See, <http://www.levada.ru/> <http://wciom.ru/> [http://www.russiavotes.org/Mood\\_intnl.htm](http://www.russiavotes.org/Mood_intnl.htm) and <http://bd.english.fom.ru/report/cat/az/A/afghanistan/etb002511>

<sup>81</sup> Nationwide VCIOM surveys in August 2002. See, <http://www.russiavotes.org/terror.htm#357>

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> See in particular the answer to the question “Global perception gap on American unilateralism” in “Global Opinion: The Spread of Anti-Americanism, Trends 2005,” Pew Global Attitudes Project, [www.pewglobal.org](http://www.pewglobal.org)

<sup>84</sup> *Attitude towards the US: Monitoring* (The Public Opinion Foundation Database, September 2006) , [http://bd.english.fom.ru/report/cat/az/U/USA/Russia\\_USA/etb063513](http://bd.english.fom.ru/report/cat/az/U/USA/Russia_USA/etb063513)

<sup>85</sup> “Unprecedented survey finds deep divides between European leaders and public,” (Siena, Italy: The Centre for the Study of Political Change, September 6, 2006) <http://www.compagnia.torino.it/english/comunicazioni/pdf/EES%202006%20Press%20Release%20Final.pdf>

Despite the Russian public's low approval rating of the Bush administration's foreign policy, it appears that specific events, such as the July 2005 London bombings, can generate a change in public perceptions. For example, after the London attacks in July 2005, 64% of Russians said that the joint anti-terrorist efforts of the US, Russia, the UK and other interested parties are possible and needed, because "terrorism represents a threat for all states."<sup>86</sup>

It is difficult to find Russian public attitudes toward the NATO mission in Afghanistan, probably for two main reasons. First, attitudes toward NATO are not linked to the alliance's mission in Afghanistan, but rather to NATO enlargement in Eastern Europe. Second, the Russian public views Afghanistan more as an American effort than as a NATO one.

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<sup>86</sup> See <http://www.levada.ru/press/2005072002.html>

## Current Perceptions

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Russian analysts are currently pessimistic about the US and NATO intervention in Afghanistan. For example, in September 2001, a high-level military delegation from the Pentagon apparently visited Moscow and talked to, among others, General Boris Gromov, the former commander of Soviet troops in Afghanistan, and another former Soviet general who served in Afghanistan, Ruslan Aushev.<sup>87</sup> Both interlocutors shared their experiences with the Americans, but warned them about the perils of a foreign military engagement in Afghanistan. In November 2006, five years after those talks, the two generals argued that the US military had not been following their advice, and that, due to the deteriorating security situation and the strengthening of Taliban, the NATO troops might ultimately face the same fate as the Soviet military and have to pull out of the country.<sup>88</sup>

Russian analysts view Taliban's resurrection and the intensification of combat, especially in Southern Afghanistan, as being a challenge, not only for NATO's military capability but also for the alliance's internal cohesion. Many Russian commentators assess that the Afghan mission is creating divisions within NATO between those who share the burden of actual fighting, such as the US, Britain, Canada and the Netherlands, and the rest, concluding that Moscow has been right in being cautious in its partnership with NATO.<sup>89</sup> The November 2006 NATO Summit in Riga spurred broad speculation among Russian analysts that Russian troops might become involved in Afghanistan, either at a request for assistance from the alliance or unilaterally, based on the need to protect Russian national interests in the case of a NATO defeat and withdrawal.<sup>90</sup>

Based on the sorry experience of the Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan any decision by Moscow to militarily intervene in that country would have to meet two very high thresholds: domestic approval and the likelihood that Afghanistan can be pacified. First, the Russian public has to be convinced that Afghanistan represents not only a direct but an imminent threat to Russian national security, something that is unlikely given the limited capacity of jihadists in Afghanistan, Chechnya and the Northern Caucasus to strike at Russia proper. The diversion of the financial and

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<sup>87</sup> General Gromov's rather critical memoirs about his service in Afghanistan, *The Limited Contingent*, are available on-line at [http://www.rsva.ru/biblio/prose\\_af/limited\\_contingent/index.shtml](http://www.rsva.ru/biblio/prose_af/limited_contingent/index.shtml)

<sup>88</sup> Amerikantsi skoro pobegut iz Afghana? [Americans will leave Afghanistan soon?], November 1, 2006, <http://vlasti.net/?Screen=news&id=178616>

<sup>89</sup> "Afghanistan: A Chance or a Trap for NATO?" *RIA Novosti*, December 1, 2006, <http://en.rian.ru/analysis/20061201/56326680.html>

<sup>90</sup> *Rossia mozhет vernutsia v Afganistan* [Russia Could Return to Afghanistan] *Gazeta*, November 23, 2006, <http://www.gzt.ru/politics/2006/11/23/220035.html> and *Rossiiskie voiska mogut vernutsia v Afganistan, uveriaut politologi* [Russian Forces Could Return to Afghanistan, Political Scientists Claim] *Novosti Rossii*, November 24, 2006, <http://www.newsru.com/russia/24nov2006/back.html>

military resources needed to pacify Afghanistan would cause an enormous problem for the Russian economy, and there are no indications that the Russian public is ready to pay the bill. Second, although Moscow has proxies in the Northern Alliance, any unilateral intervention in Afghanistan by Russia would be very likely to unify all Afghan factions against the Russian troops, much as the mujahedeen resistance did during the 1980s. Such a development would very likely further strengthen Taliban and Al Qaida. The most that Moscow could hope to gain in this scenario would be the creation of a para-state in Northern Afghanistan, with the intent to use it as a buffer against the spread of jihadism from the rest of Afghanistan. Yet even in this scenario the cost of maintaining such an entity would override its benefits. The ramifications of unilateral military intervention in Afghanistan are clear to the Kremlin, and this is probably why Moscow has been engaged in building its own “coalitions of the willing” such as CSTO, and SCO as a contingency solution in the case of NATO’s defeat and withdrawal from Afghanistan.<sup>91</sup> Even in the case of a NATO withdrawal, it is more likely that any Russian-led “coalition of the willing” would deploy along the Afghan border than intervene into Afghanistan, judging by its current strength and capabilities.

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<sup>91</sup> Tsygankov, *Russia’s Foreign Policy: Change and Continuity in National Identity*, p 171.

## Conclusion

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The 2001 US intervention in Afghanistan resulted in Russia providing intelligence, over-flight rights, military training and equipment for the Northern Alliance and other assistance to Washington's war effort. Yet this led into an apparent paradox: Moscow gained globally by becoming one of the key US partners in the war on terrorism, while at the same time witnessing and even supporting an American intrusion in Russia's sphere of influence. Moscow's ability to influence Afghan domestic developments significantly declined, while Russia's dominance over the Central Asian space has been challenged by the US and NATO insertion into the region. The Kremlin considers these developments as injurious to regional security and detrimental to Moscow's great power aspirations. In response, Russia has pursued what it considers a pragmatic great power policy: partnering with the US globally while at the same time balancing against it on regional issues. This is one of the trademarks of Putin's realism, especially when compared with the approach adopted by Primakov, whose overambitious assertiveness vis-à-vis the US did not bring many benefits to Russia. The analysis of Russian public discourse on Afghanistan indicates that Putin's approach has been widely supported by Russian pundits and public alike.

Even though the Russian side praises Russia-NATO cooperation in the fight against international terrorism, especially in Afghanistan, it appears that Moscow has been hoping that, on a basis of such an engagement, it could influence NATO to halt its further enlargement in Eastern Europe. Evaporation of this rather unrealistic hope has not yet negatively affected Russia's assistance to NATO in Afghanistan, especially since the common enemies, Taliban and Al Qaida, are flourishing. In parallel to its partnership with the West in fighting global jihadism, Russia regards it as vital that it continue to protect its sphere of interest in Central Asia. Thus, Moscow's current unilateral and multilateral efforts at countering any eventual US and NATO regional advances are likely to persist, as they form part of what the Kremlin considers to be the revival of Russia's great power status. The scope of Moscow's influence in Central Asia, however, is not likely to dramatically increase due to Russia's limited resources.

## List of symbols/abbreviations/acronyms/initialisms

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AIA	Afghan Interim Authority
CSTO	Collective Security Treaty Organization
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
SCO	Shanghai Cooperation Organization

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This Technical Memorandum aims to present and assess Russian policies and views related to Afghanistan, while paying particular attention to Russian attitudes towards the ongoing NATO mission. An understanding of Russian involvement in and motives behind Moscow's current policy towards Afghanistan might assist policy-makers and military planners in their responses to this regional conflict.

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