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# Russia and Its Near Abroad: From One Empire to Another?

THE CAUCASUS AND CENTRAL ASIA



Defense Science Board

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National Institute for Public Policy

# Overview

## R U S S I A

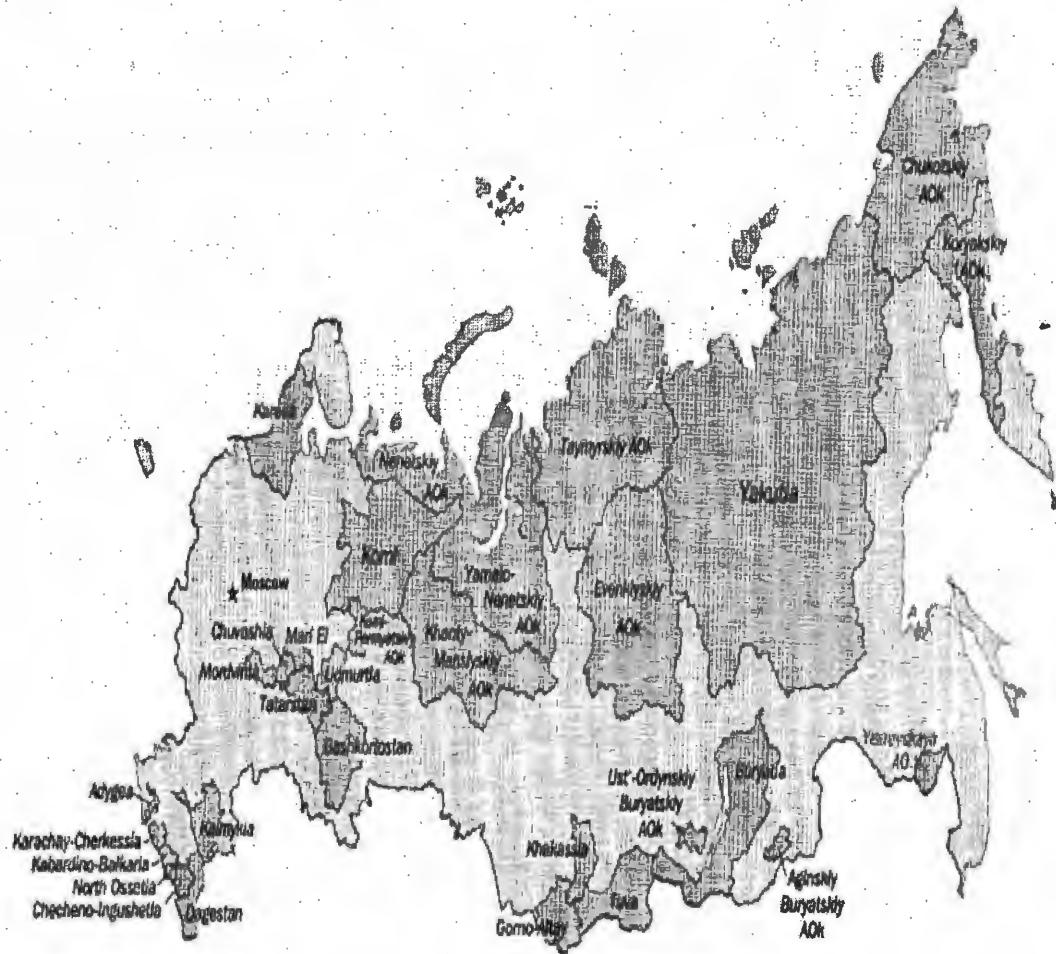
- Historical Background
- Russia's Perceived Interests
- Challenges to Russia's Interests
- Pursuing Russia's Interests: Case Studies
- Conclusions

# Soviet Monolith?



# The Diversity of Russia

## Autonomous Areas in Russia



Autonomous republic

Autonomous oblast (AO)

Autonomous okrug (AOk)

Boundary representation is  
not necessarily authoritative

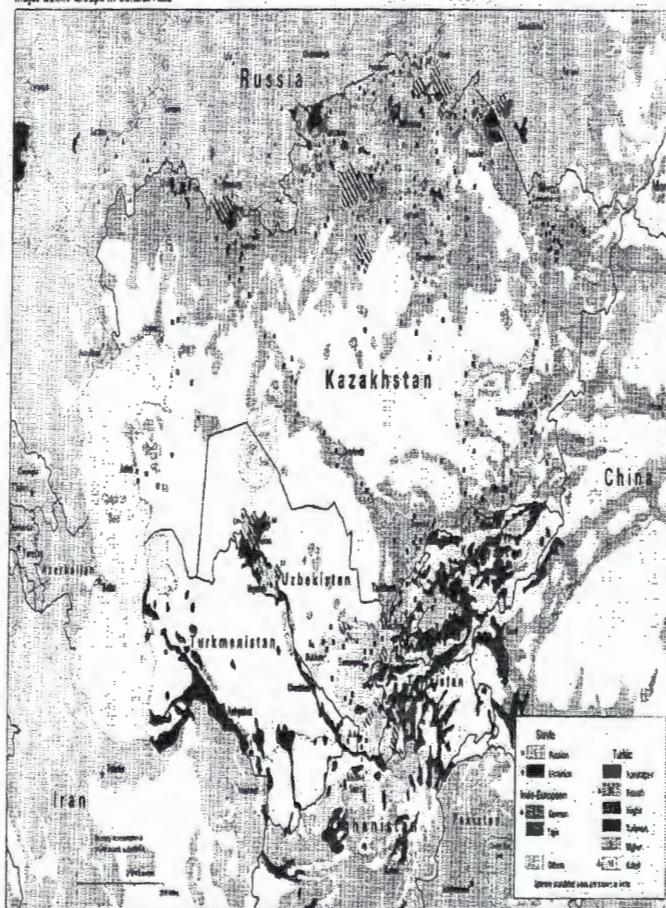
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# The Cauldrons of Multi-ethnicity

- Stalin's Border Demarcation
  - Divide and Rule Strategy

## Central Asia

### **Major Ethnic Groups in Central Asia**



## Caucasus

## Ethnolinguistic Groups in the Caucasus Region



# Soviet Legacies

- Eruption of long-standing regional conflicts
  - Ethnic-territorial disputes throughout former Soviet Union
  - Russian involvement
- Weak political institutions
  - Highly personalized political regimes
  - Pervasive corruption
- Economic development obstacles
  - Crumbling infrastructure, inefficient economies, geographic challenges
  - Economic dependence on Russia
- Russian opportunities to exert influence still available
  - Manipulate regional conflicts
  - Undermine sovereignty and political development
  - Control economies and strategic resources

“The demise of the Soviet Union was the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century.”

*Russian President Vladimir Putin*

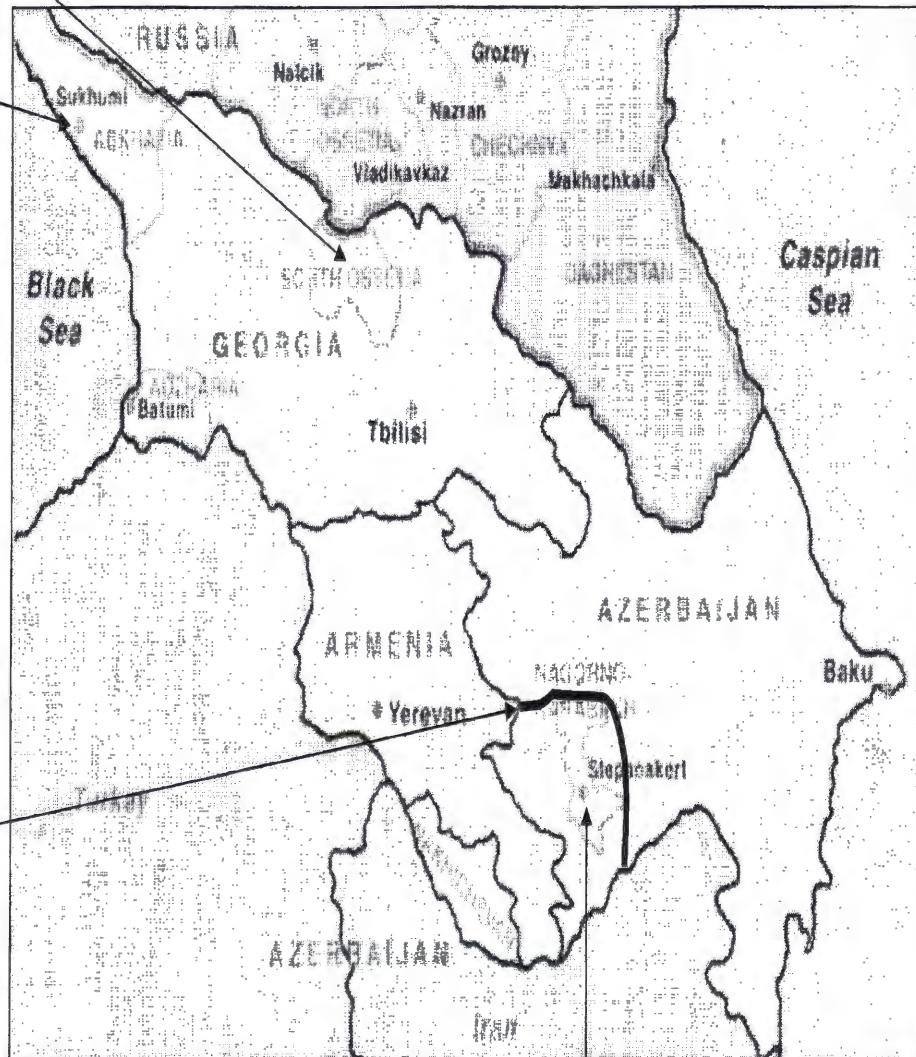
*State of the Nation Address, April 25, 2005*

# Independence & Upheaval in the Caucasus

Georgia: South Ossetia (1990-91)

Abkhazia (1992-93)

Line of  
Armenian  
Occupation of Seven  
Azeri Provinces



Azeri-Armenian Conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh (1991-94)

Conflicts remain frozen and unresolved today (Russian involvement)

# Independence & Upheaval in Central Asia



## Ferghana Valley 1989, 1990 (2005)

## Tajik Civil War (1992-97)

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# Russia's Perceived Interests

- Neo-imperial ambitions: Preserve historic sphere of influence and limit Western involvement
- Prevent the spread of Islamic extremism
- Limit Western security orientation of post-Soviet states
- Ensure political stability through authoritarianism
- Penetrate weaker economies and control strategic resources

"The civilizing mission of the Russian nation on the Eurasian continent should continue. This means that democratic values multiplied by national interests should enrich and strengthen our historical unity."

Russian President Vladimir Putin  
State of the Nation Address, April 25, 2005

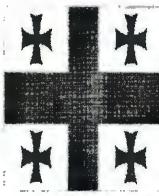
# Perceived Challenges to Russia's Interests

- NATO enlargement into former Soviet Union and beyond?
- U.S. military presence: From temporary to continuous?
- Energy industry looks West: BTC and Shah Deniz pipelines through Caucasus
- Revolutionary Tide: Roses, Oranges, and Tulips
- Chechen quagmire

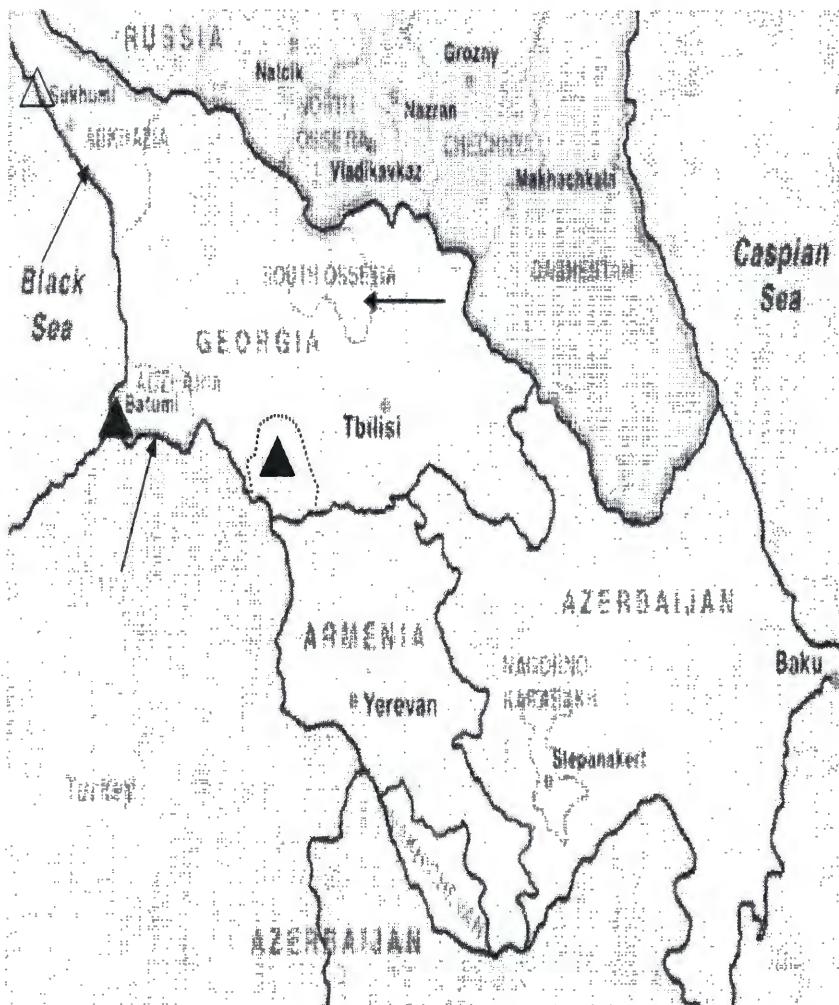
Russian Perception: Regional predominance challenged and crumbling

# Pursuing Russia's Interests: Case Studies

- A weak and divided Georgia
- Orange Revolution: The loss of Ukraine
- Economic penetration & monopolies



# Russian Involvement in Georgia



▲-△ Existing Russian/CIS Military Bases

- Ajara

- Reintegrated May 2004

- South Ossetia & Abkhazia

- Ethnically Distinct
- Previous Civil Wars
  - 1990-91
  - 1992-93
- Ethnic Violence
- Refugee Issues

Russian bases: Little military value, but powerful reminders of Russian presence

# Orange Revolution: The Loss of Ukraine

- Ukraine closely tied to Russian national identity
  - Kiev: Birthplace of Russia state
  - Russian minorities/Russian-speakers in Eastern Ukraine
- Putin on the Yanukovich campaign trail
- Fraudulent elections and revolution
- Kiev looks to the Euro-Atlantic community



# Russian Economic Strategies: A New Empire?

## Economic Penetration

- Georgia
  - Gazprom & Unified Energy Systems, Summer 2003
- Armenia
  - Nuclear power plant
- Building Monopolies
- Turkmenistan
  - Recent gas deals to sell exclusively to Russia
- Kazakhstan
  - Export pipeline monopoly

Purchase of Energy Assets in Other Countries

time is pressing



Georgia: about 20% of generating plants and 26% of distribution facilities have been purchased or assumed under trust management.

Armenia: Assets comprising about 85% of that country's power generating facilities have been purchased or assumed under trust management.

Kirghizia, Tajikistan: Talks are unfolding about purchasing assets (completion of energy facilities).

Kazakhstan: Consummation of a deal on purchase of a share in a large power plant.

A. Chubais, RAO-UES Chairman, 28 Sep 04  
"Russia: Investing into Economy of Growth"

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# Conclusions

- Near abroad closely tied to Russian national identity & great power status
- Russia still pursuing neo-imperial policies, but using different tactics
- Revolutionary tide and U.S. military presence chipping away at Russia's former sphere
- Zero-sum thinking: U.S. gains = Russian losses
- Russia is there and resolve unlikely to waiver in short-term