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

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Overview

- 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)
The Cauldrons of Multi-ethnicity

- Stalin’s Border Demarcation
- Divide and Rule Strategy

Caucasus

Central Asia
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

Tajik Civil War (1992-97)
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

- Ajara
  - Reintegrated
  - May 2004

- South Ossetia & Abkhazia
  - Ethnically Distinct
  - Previous Civil Wars
    - 1990-91
    - 1992-93
  - Ethnic Violence
  - Refugee Issues

▲ — ▲ Existing Russian/CIS Military Bases

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
- 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

- Georgia: about 20% of generating plants and 35% of distribution facilities have been purchased or assumed under trust management.

- Armenia: Assets comprising about 35% of the country's power generating facilities have been purchased or assumed under trust management.

- Kirghiz Republic:
  - Talks are unfolding about purchasing assets (completion of energy facilities).

- Kazakhstan: Consumption of a deal on purchase of a share in a large powerplant.

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