

THE CASPIAN PROJECT

A BI-WEEKLY EDITION FROM THE MODERN DIPLOMACY WWW.MODERNDIPLOMACY.EU

THE AMERICAN AND
RUSSIAN
INTELLIGENCE SERVICES
FSB AS RUSSIAN
ECONOMIC DEVELOPER
THE EMERGENCE OF A
RUSSIAN SURVEILLANCE
STATE THE GREAT
OIL GAME THE EVOLUTION
OF THE SCO

BROTHERS IN-UNETHICAL- ARMS

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AMY HANLON

THE INDUSTRIAL SPY GAME

FSB AS RUSSIAN ECONOMIC DEVELOPER

JARED S. EASTON



THE EVOLUTION OF THE SCO

THE PLUTO OF INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

DR. MATTHEW CROSSTON

ALL EYES ON ME

THE EMERGENCE OF A RUSSIAN SURVEILLANCE STATE

JONATHAN HARTNER

KAZAKHSTAN UNSC 2017-2018

SAMANTHA BRLETICH

THE REBIRTH OF THE PATRIARCH OF MOSCOW

DR FILIPPO ROMEO

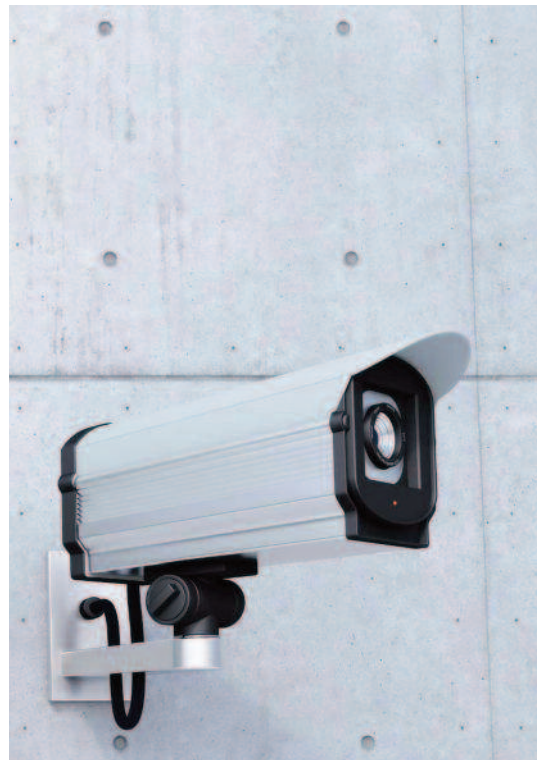
SOFT POWER AS A THREAT TO A HARD POWER

NINA LAVRENTEVA

REIMAGINING THE GREAT OIL GAME

THE RUSSIA-OPEC-AMERICA NEXUS

BRIAN HUGHES



TURKMENISTAN'S HUMAN RIGHTS RECORD

EXPOSING GEOPOLITICAL MORAL RELATIVISM

JEANETTE "JJ" HARPER

KAZAKHSTAN'S WTO MEMBERSHIP

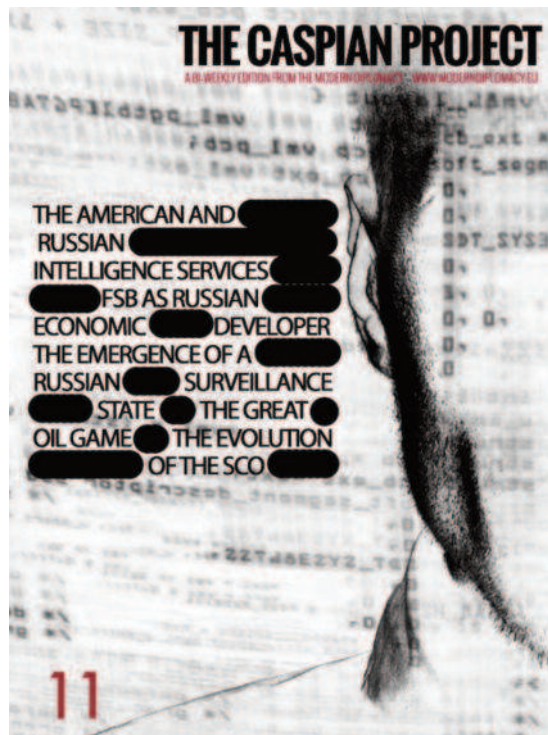
END OF AN ODYSSEY OR NEW LEAP FORWARD?

EVAN THOMSEN

REMAINING ROGUE?

IRAN AND THE CASPIAN CONSEQUENCES OF THE JCPOA

ANDY DEAHN



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Reading the best of both worlds...



Prof. Dr. Matthew Crosston

*Senior Editor,
Caspian Project Director*

This edition of the Caspian Project testifies to the enormous wealth of analytical opportunity seen all across the region. While in the past we have enjoyed producing single-issue specializations (which we did over the past two weeks with *The Russian Debate* and *The Persian Gambit*, to great fanfare and applause), the true essence of the Project is to have great diversity for the readers every issue. No. 11 as it turns out is something of a hybrid of these two aspects: readers with this issue get quite a bit of diversity while also getting to enjoy a mini-specialization, as a number of the articles inside deal with different aspects of the Russian intelligence community, namely, the Federal Security Service or FSB.

So, on top of some very thought-provoking and hard-hitting articles dealing with the ethics, surveillance, and transnational activities of Russian intelligence, readers ALSO get to learn more in this issue about the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, Turkmenistan's human rights record, and Kazakhstan's entrance into the WTO. It is an issue, therefore, that cuts across domestic politics, global affairs, security, economics, and international organizations. This is something we at Modern Diplomacy hold dearly when it comes to the Caspian Project: so much that is happening in the world today, affecting so many countries, transects in one way or another the greater Caspian sea region. It shall always be a hub of activity and importance, far beyond the standard call about energy and natural resources.

So read on and enjoy this edition and all of us at Modern Diplomacy hope it inspires your own questions, new lines of thinking, and opens new doors for research. We take pride not in keeping up with the waves of global affairs, but justifiably feeling like we ride out along FRONT of the leading edge. We hope you enjoy the view and benefit from our efforts.

BROTHERS IN UNETHICAL ARMS

**THE AMERICAN AND RUSSIAN
INTELLIGENCE SERVICES**



AMY HANLON

Amy Hanlon is currently finishing her degree in the International Security and Intelligence Studies Program at Bellevue University and has been employed as a government contractor for the U.S. State Department since 2010. All views expressed within this piece are hers and hers alone and do not represent an official statement or policy from the United States government.

Two of the largest foreign intelligence agencies in the world, the United States' Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the Russian Federation's Foreign Intelligence Service (FSB), ironically appear more similar in their organization, methods, and ethics than not. Similar to the CIA, the Russian foreign intelligence service operates under different levels of concealment from foreign governments. Both foreign intelligence services use "official cover", meaning they pose as government employees in the country's embassy which offers diplomatic immunity if the agent is caught. They also both have "non-official cover" agents (NOCs), where the agents "typically pose as private business employees and are subject to less scrutiny and, in many cases, are never identified as intelligence agents by the host government." This role does not provide diplomatic immunity if caught (Bender 2015, and Finn 2003). The questionable ethical practices of both agencies have tarnished their names in the international public eye at times.

Their politicization of intelligence, financing of insurgents or rebels in other countries, and the use of torture, have sparked international condemnation from many different corners.

THEIR POLITICIZATION OF INTELLIGENCE, FINANCING OF INSURGENTS OR REBELS IN OTHER COUNTRIES, AND THE USE OF TORTURE, HAVE SPARKED INTERNATIONAL CONDEMNATION FROM MANY DIFFERENT CORNERS

Both foreign intelligence services have been accused of being too political. As noted by Robert Gates in his 1992 address to the CIA, discussing recent Congressional allegations of the agency's politicization of intelligence:

"Almost all agree that [politicization of intelligence] involves deliberately distorting analysis or judgements to favor a preferred line of thinking irrespective of evidence. Most consider classic solicitation to be only that which occurs if products are forced to conform to policy maker's views. A number believe politicization also results from management pressures to define and drive certain lines of analysis and substantive viewpoints. Still others believe that changes in tone or emphasis made during the normal review of coordination process, and limited means for expressing alternative viewpoints, also constitute forms of politicization" (Gates, 1992).

Similarly, the international community accused Russia's Foreign Minister, Sergey Lavrov, of politicizing intelligence when he insisted that there were still serious grounds to believe the deadly chemical attack in Damascus was a 'provocation' staged by

Syrian rebels, despite evidence in the United Nations report that seemed to suggest government forces were to blame (Mackey, 2013). In an April 2015 interview with retired Lieutenant General Leonid Reshetnikov, one can see a similar example of Russian politicization as he discusses how the United States 'ditched Israel' to work with Iran to 'encircle Russia', overthrow President Vladimir Putin, and divide the country (Chuikov, 2015).

Both foreign intelligence services have done such things either to promote their own world view or to promote a particular agenda favored by the presidential administration in power.

The problem with politicization is that it distorts information and thus leads to poor analysis and ultimately leads to skewed results rather than fair, balanced, and accurate assessments. Skewed intelligence hinders policy-makers and governments alike and prevents opportunities for understanding and collaboration.

Both the United States and Russia fund insurgents or rebels throughout the world. Currently, the CIA is funding the Syrian rebels against the government of President Bashar al Assad in Syria and 'vetted rebels' in Saudi Arabia against the Islamic State (Mazzetti, 2014). Similarly, both the United States and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe have accused Russia of financing terrorism with respect to militarily arming rebels in Ukraine (Office of Foreign Assets Control, 2014 and EuroNews, 2015).

Arming the rebels, however, in either case, is rarely done in a vacuum: this can lead to the arms or finances falling into the hands of other 'unwanted' extremist groups who wish harm the United States and/or Russia. In other words, the secret maneuvers often can backfire and strengthen the very opposition the CIA or FSB had hoped to defeat.

As noted by President Obama, there aren't many examples of pure success where the CIA [only] provided financing and arms to an insurgency (Mazzetti, 2014).

In addition to the politicization of intelligence and the financing of 'rebels' a third aspect where both the CIA and FSB are similar is in their use of torture to 'confirm' intelligence. In October 2012, during the 49th Session of the UN Committee against Torture, the United Nations reported that Russia's intelligence services participated in torture, including beatings, removing finger and toenails, and sodomizing a subject with a bottle (United Nations Committee Against Torture, 2012, p. 4). Similarly, according to a previously released Senate Intelligence Committee report on the details of 'harsh CIA interrogation techniques,' the CIA has participated in torture including rectal feeding, sleep deprivation, insects, use of diapers, and mock executions. (Business Insider, 2014) Since the report's release, the Senate Intelligence Committee has removed it from their site. However, several news agencies quoted the report:

"The CIA led several detainees to believe they would never be allowed to leave CIA custody alive, the report's executive summary says. One interrogator told another detainee that he would never go to court, because we can never let the world know what I have done to you. CIA officers also threatened ... to harm the children of a detainee ... sexually abuse the mother of a detainee, and ... to cut [a detainee's] mother's throat."

These methods were often found to have achieved little to no actionable intelligence. For example, in an email titled "So it begins," a medical officer wrote that a detainee gave "NO useful information so far," but had vomited several times.



"It's been 10 hours since he ate so this is surprising and disturbing. We plan to only feed Ensure for now," the officer said. (Business Insider, 2014) As noted by the Senate Intelligence Committee report, torture does not usually produce actionable intelligence. Veteran and former prisoner-of-war, Senator John McCain agreed: "I know from personal experience that the abuse of prisoners will produce more bad than good intelligence. I know that victims of torture will offer intentionally misleading information if they think their captors will believe it. I know they will say whatever they think their torturers want them to say if they believe it will stop their suffering." (McCain, 2014)

In conclusion, ethically speaking, both the United States and Russia's foreign intelligence services are unfavorably similar to each other as both participate in practices that hurt their international reputation for little national security gain. Arguably, none of these activities provide their government with fair, balanced, or accurate intelligence and quite often the moral ambiguity encourages corruption and repression, let alone global condemnation. Thus, both intelligence services are similar in nature, organization, methods, and ethics – to their detriment. They are brothers-in-unethical-arms.



THE INDUSTRIAL SPY GAME

**FSB AS RUSSIAN
ECONOMIC DEVELOPER**

JARED S. EASTON

Jared S. Easton is currently an undergraduate in the International Security and Intelligence Studies program at Bellevue University in Omaha, NE, USA.



Since the fall of the Soviet Union, the Russian Federation (RF) has sought to reclaim its former glory and regain recognition as a great power. Throughout this progression the national science base to the RF's economic development is of high importance. This has been demonstrated through policy documents like the RF's National Security Strategy from 2009. The focus of this analysis is to examine the role of RF intelligence-gathering activities for the purpose of domestic modernization.

The National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation up to 2020 identified five key high-technology sectors: energy, information technology (IT), telecommunications, biomedicine and nuclear technology (RF, 2009). Nanotechnology was also highlighted as an important investment and growth area. In 2010, the RF announced plans that scientific and technological centers would focus on the development and domestic commercialization of modern technologies, motivated in part by the success of America's Silicon Valley (Medvedev, 2010).

There are many ways a nation can bolster a science and technology (S&T) foundation, not just through domestic industry, and each nation tends to use multiple options. A critical way that is not often discussed in mainstream media sources is to procure foreign knowledge and equipment through espionage activities. Russia engages this path aggressively with the likes of the Federal Security Service (FSB).

**THE NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY
OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION UP TO 2020
IDENTIFIED FIVE KEY
HIGH-TECHNOLOGY SECTORS:
ENERGY, INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (IT),
TELECOMMUNICATIONS, BIOMEDICINE
AND NUCLEAR TECHNOLOGY**

There is little doubt that the FSB has been active in S&T intelligence collection, concentrating on foreign nations for domestic modernization and improving Russia's competitiveness in the global economy. The modern era of intelligence-collection capabilities sees the American intelligence community as dominant. Before the modern era (pre-2001), the RF operated one of the world's largest S&T information-gathering apparatus, which worked almost as a substitute for legitimate industrial domestic research & development (Almquist, 1990). For the RF, intelligence support to the scientific community and its own domestic industrial complex was the standard, not the exception, and in 2010 Russia confirmed that it made no secret of its motivations to gather S&T intelligence for the benefit of its national security interests defined broadly.

The RF intelligence complex, including the FSB, has been obliged by federal law "to assist the country's economic development and its scientific and technical progress and to ensure the military-technical security of the Russian Federation." This activity is in line with Article 8 of the Federal Law on the FSB. The collection of S&T intelligence and "industrial espionage practices established a template for Soviet and later Russian [FSB] intelligence gathering that remains in use to this day; as long as U.S. technology maintains its preeminent global position, such espionage will likely continue" (Sibley, 2004). This was validated in 2010 by the American ODNI (Office of the Director of National Intelligence), which stated that the RF "continues to strengthen its intelligence capabilities and directs them against US interests worldwide. Moscow's intelligence effort includes espionage, technology acquisition and covert action efforts." (Blair, 2010) Jonathan Evans, the head of the domestic British Security Service (MI5), noted in 2007 that "the scope of the Russian intelligence gathering was equal to the Soviet effort during the Cold War... [and] that Russian intelligence services were particularly interested in British science and technology. (Brogan, 2007)

The RF, and specifically the FSB, has extensively leveraged operational cover from diplomatic missions abroad and the posting of illegal agents in their target countries to approach foreign researchers and entrepreneurs. They would often establish a career in one or several third countries, allowing agents to use academic research institutions or commercial companies as platforms for espionage activities (Kouzminov, 2006). But it has also been observed that the triumphs of human intelligence (HUMINT) operations during the former Soviet era are unlikely to be achieved in the present day RF.



In the modern era the primary method for collecting S&T intelligence is through cyber espionage. In 2008, the US noted that more than 1 trillion USD worth of data was lost to cyber espionage (Ackerman, 2009). This fact is further confirmed with the knowledge that the RF is developing advanced offensive cyber capabilities (McAfee, 2009). In addition to cyber espionage, scientific and technological intelligence can be exploited through signals intelligence. This is another area where the RF intelligence services have leveraged the previous Soviet foundation with modern advancements in current technologies.

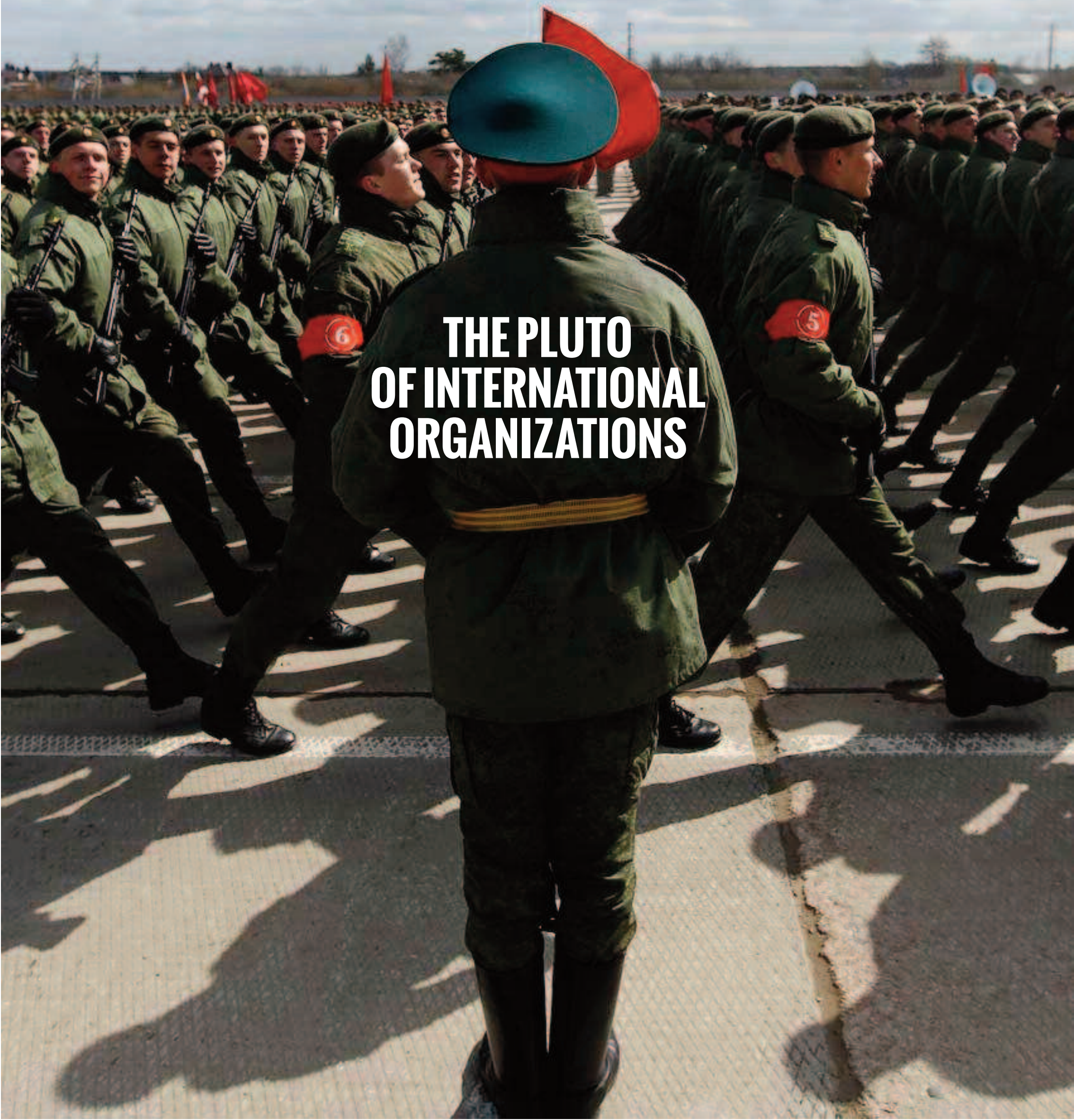
In conclusion, while the FSB has advanced significantly in S&T intelligence collection since the former Soviet period, "the FSB's increased influence may prove to be counter-productive in terms of economic modernization and industrial restructuring. Despite its self-confidence, the FSB is scarcely prepared to manage all the industrial complexes with international standing." (Gomart, 2008) This last point is crucial, as it implies that the gains made covertly

through the intelligence community could in fact have an unintended detrimental effect on economic progress and industrial modernization happening more organically with native companies across Russia. This is not the desired effect, of course, but a consequence of the classical dilemma in modern market economies that try to figure out how much governmental intervention is positive before it hits a tipping point and becomes a net negative impact on development.

This is not even considering the likely more severe stress this reliance on covert activity has on the entrepreneurial spirit and risk taking that is crucial for any developing economy in the 21st century. The Russian Federation operates no differently than the US intelligence community agencies in that it pursues its own national security interests and aims to improve its domestic standing on the global stage. The issue it should consider, however, is whether or not some old school spy thinking might be a less effective long-term strategy, even if it does produce more immediate results.

THE EVOLUTION OF THE SCO

THE PLUTO
OF INTERNATIONAL
ORGANIZATIONS



DR. MATTHEW CROSSTON

Senior Editor, Caspian Project Director

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Director of the International Security and Intelligence Studies Program,
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This piece investigates the unique peculiarities of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Instead of being a Eurasian counterpart to the EU, an additional IO bridge between East and West, or even influenced by organizations like ASEAN, the SCO is dominated by micro-agendas that work in opposition to the theoretical literature explaining international organization purpose.

Consequently, this particular IO has so far not only failed to become a nexus for globalization, democratic respect, or the fight against terror, it really cannot be considered a legitimate IO as is traditionally framed by theory at the present time. When promise is found more in the literature than in empirical reality, there is need for caution. This analysis suggests that there is a present-day tendency to be empirically loose in how the designation 'international organization' is applied. As such, the SCO is the 'Pluto' of IOs and should be renamed and removed as an international organization if its present course does not radically change.

Looking at the SCO's relative power sources and how influence interacts with institutional design, it will become clear why the organization does not increase international cooperation, economic prosperity, or global security, as is typically expected from major IOs to strive to. Rather, the manner in which all three of the above goals are undermined by SCO institutional design and internal agendas should call into question whether it should be classified as an IO at all. Renaming it a politically-motivated axis of convenience is less grand but perhaps a more accurate description of its nature and functions.

**THE MEMBER STATES
SIMULTANEOUSLY
SUPPORT AND UNDERMINE
THE ORGANIZATION
VIA INDIVIDUALIZED
MICRO-AGENDAS BECAUSE OF
THEIR WORRIES ABOUT THE TRICKS
EACH MIGHT PLAY UPON THE OTHER**

CHINA

China's main position within Central Asia is economic, though certain security issues also exist. China is extremely interested in currying favor with Central Asia to help feed its voracious energy appetite. On the other hand issues of ethnic unrest in Xinjiang, China's western border, make cooperation and mutual understanding with Central Asia strategically advantageous. Thus Central Asia acts as a dual purpose economic-security bridge for China: a bulwark against Uighur and pan-Turkic nationalism/separatism and an energy hub for importing oil and gas.

RUSSIA

Russia has always viewed Central Asia as its own backyard and particular sphere of influence. Thus, the SCO has largely been seen as a soft entry for Russia to maintain and project its military influence into the region. While Central Asia may represent a buffer zone for China's western flank, it also represents a buffer zone for Russia's southern flank, in particular against Islamist extremist threats that may look to move into Russia from the region.

There is also a clear competitive dynamic with China that has the SCO as the peaceful arena in which Russia tries to keep a warning embrace around it. Some have seen this as a voluntary division of leadership within the SCO: China maintaining economic oversight while Russia assumes the position of primacy in security matters.

Despite these explicit leadership roles, Moscow remains the weaker of the two 'superpowers' in comparison to Beijing. It cannot, regardless of propaganda or posturing, oppose China's emergent economic influence in the region and as such it has largely embraced the SCO not so much because of a strong belief in the relevance of the organization but rather as an easier conduit with which to maintain Moscow-friendly regimes across Central Asia and a decent mechanism to try to keep China from sprinting too far ahead.

CENTRAL ASIA

Perhaps the most unique ability of the Central Asian members is to simultaneously bargain and balance across multiple fronts. Indeed, the Central Asian states have always been acutely aware of their precarious position in between two major powers while a third distant American power commonly initiates contact because of its own crucial security agenda within the region.



The SCO, therefore, has always been a tool for Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan to attempt to balance China and Russia off of each other and carving out maneuverability space. At the same time, the Stans have not hesitated to engage with the European Union and the United States, striving to expand their options and minimize the possibility of being overwhelmed by the local superpowers. While it is true that Central Asia is largely more sympathetic to Chinese leadership over Russian, it is also true that no major power has single-handedly been able to satisfy all of the diverse needs of the Central Asian states.

The multidirectional policy of bargaining and balancing best serves the interests of the Central Asian states and as such it will likely continue long into the future. After all, the primary economic and security concerns within Central Asia are not unimportant to Russia, China, as well as the United States.

These concerns include: Islamic radicalization; proliferation of weapons of mass destruction; narcotics trafficking; lagging economic development and investment climates; and pervasive poverty. The obvious criticism is that none of these concerns have been alleviated with the Central Asian states' involvement in the SCO, despite a decade of existence.

The one characteristic that seemed to be an axiom for the SCO – maintaining the political status quo – cannot be considered a given, what with the non-response to civil unrest in Kyrgyzstan in 2010. The possibility that this lack of response to assist could signal a benevolent ignorance on the part of the SCO, tacitly endorsing potential democratization, falls flat: all of the members of the SCO unanimously voiced their concerns and disapproval over the events in Kyrgyzstan. As a result, it marked an IO 'double whammy' of hypocrisy: the SCO physically did not come to the aid of a member but then still verbally denounced democratic change.

So far, the SCO identifies as an ineffective organization. That lack of efficiency emerges whether analyzing the institutional design of the SCO or reviewing empirical evidence through case study analysis.

The SCO seems to be structured in a manner that undermines its own development, as IO evolution is understood by the scholarly community. The member states simultaneously support and undermine the organization via individualized micro-agendas because of their worries about the tricks each might play upon the other. Interestingly, what the literature does not do is question the legitimacy of the SCO. This is one of the main contentions here: membership of the SCO in the IO community should be questioned instead of simply de facto bestowed. Until now, its membership has always been a given.

Recently, both India and Pakistan have been accepted as future members of the SCO, expecting to be formally incorporated sometime in 2016. There are four other states given 'Observer Status' which include Belarus, Iran, Afghanistan, and Mongolia. Finally, there is yet another category called 'Dialogue Partners,' including Armenia, Azerbaijan, Cambodia, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Turkey. Aside from a geopolitical alliance that seems to be aiming for the SCO to absorb something that could be called the 'Greater Caspian Region,' none of the aforementioned countries, if formal members, can be expected to bring smooth transitions and peaceful cooperative relations between members.

If anything, internal SCO relations would only become more chaotic, micro-managed, and potentially zero-sum (does anyone really think India and Pakistan will resolve their differences by being part of the SCO? Armenia and Azerbaijan? Turkey and Iran?).

In short, the SCO seems to be evolving in a way to guarantee it remaining one of the most fascinating organizations in the world, but that does not mean it will be effective or outwardly-impactful on the global stage.

THE PLUTO OF IOS?

If the SCO seems to affirm only the negative concerns and detrimental aspects of faulty IO formation and development, while providing little to no empirical evidence of the positive impacts and cooperative influence inherent to most of the general IO literature, then how can the SCO continue to be accepted as a formal IO? The answer is it should not be. There is a present-day tendency to be empirically loose in how the designation 'international organization' is applied. This is no small matter: lax empiricism inadequately supported by or even ignoring accepted theoretical underpinnings results not only in misdirected scholarship but actually carries the potential to undermine foreign policy analysis as a whole. Perhaps with the SCO as an initial first step, there can be renewed interest and diligence in looking over the world's IOs and rigorously applying IO theory to empirical reality as a sort of legitimacy litmus test. Is the SCO the world's only Pluto? The present analysis finds that highly unlikely. Scientific brethren in astronomy can attest: just because a planet has always been called a planet does not mean it should remain so. If Pluto can be re-designated, then it should not be considered too high a controversy to rename IOs that do not measure up to accepted standards. Whether that new name is 'politically-motivated axis of convenience' (P-MAC) or some other moniker matters little: the importance is in shoring up the discipline so that empirical reality and intellectual theory inform each other rather than contradict one another and actual analysis becomes more accurate.

THE 10 MOST IMPORTANT THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW ON CASPIAN SEA REGION

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ALLEYES ON ME

**THE EMERGENCE OF A RUSSIAN
SURVEILLANCE STATE**



JONATHAN HARTNER

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Before analyzing the activities and assessing the ethics of any intelligence organization, it is first necessary to remember that intelligence organizations are secretive by nature and it's impossible to assess their methods in full given most countries' secrecy laws. This is especially the case with Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB). Much like its predecessor, the KGB, its activities continue to be troublesome for diplomats, journalists, and citizens alike. The Russian government uses propaganda, deception, and manipulation to a much higher degree and with great effectiveness. The Russian surveillance state, largely powered by the FSB and driven by the threat of terrorism, is resurgent and becoming ever more intrusive.

One example of Russia's use of deception and propaganda, according to David Frum on The Atlantic website on April 18, 2014, even went so far as to include the notorious former NSA contractor Edward Snowden in a propaganda stunt (Q & A forum) with Russian President Vladimir Putin.

During the session, which was televised on Russian television, Edward Snowden challenged Putin on government surveillance in Russia. To this, Putin simply stated: “We don’t have a mass system for such interception and according to our law it cannot exist.” This is typical of the deception that the government uses and this statement was widely regarded by experts and watch-dog agencies as false.

**“OVER THE LAST TWO YEARS,
THE KREMLIN HAS TRANSFORMED
RUSSIA INTO A SURVEILLANCE STATE
—AT A LEVEL THAT WOULD HAVE MADE
THE SOVIET KGB ENVIOUS”**

It would also be foolish to assert that the American intelligence establishment does not continue to engage in covert operations involving ethically questionable methods given the information available. However, it has found itself at the heart of major controversies concerning its collection methods just in the last decade which have forced greater transparency and greater debate, both internally and externally. An analysis of the outcome of the controversy over the NSA’s collection of bulk data, for example, sparked a greater discussion on the legality of the NSA’s collection programs and took place both within Congress and the public media. The constitutional legality of these covert programs caused a lot of problems for the government in the courts. The President, the Director of National Intelligence, and other senior officials were made to answer for the programs before the Supreme Court and Congress. (Mornin, 2014)

This level of transparency cannot and likely will never be found in Russia. Political and legal discourse between academia, the justice system, and the general public is certainly lacking as well. The evidence is clear: as noted in the Atlantic article cited previously regarding Putin’s interaction with Edward Snowden:

“Russian journalists will not ‘revisit’ (as he puts it) the truthfulness of Putin’s answers. Russian journalists who do that end up dead, in at least 56 cases since 1992. Anna Politkovskaya, the journalist who pressed Putin hardest, was shot dead in her own apartment building in 2006, after years of repeated arrests, threats, and in one case, attempted poisoning.” (The Atlantic, April 2014)

Detailed statistics provided by the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) do indeed support these claims. (Akhmednabiyev, Beketov & Gekkiyev)

It wouldn’t be completely inaccurate to think of Russia as an American surveillance state on PEDs (performance-enhancing drugs). It’s asserted that “over the last two years, the Kremlin has transformed Russia into a surveillance state—at a level that would have made the Soviet KGB (Committee for State Security) envious.” (Borogan and Soldatov, 2013) The 2014 Winter Olympic Games in Sochi demonstrated Russia’s resurgent surveillance state. The System of Operative-Investigative Measures (SORM) was Russia’s strategy to legally analyze all electronic traffic and it was used to its maximum extent at the Games. The U.S. Department of State issued travel warnings to Americans traveling to Sochi to watch the Games, giving advice such as “sanitizing” electronic devices, restraining from using local wireless internet, and considering the use of “burn phones” and destroying materials when leaving the country.



Joshua Kopstein noted in 'Sochi's Other Legacy' that drones, soldiers, surveillance blimps, thousands of cameras, and high-tech scanning devices were also used. (New Yorker, February 2014)

Naturally, this surveillance state extends far beyond Sochi. According to Soldatov and Borogan, the Russian government has tightened its grip on the country in the name of national security and safety. Seven investigative and security agencies have been granted permission to legally intercept everything from phone calls to emails, with the FSB establishing the procedures. What's more, these agencies are only required to show warrants (once obtained) to their superiors in the FSB; the parties being investigated have no right to see the warrant, unlike in the United States. The FSB itself has control centers directly connected to computer servers and their usage of SORM systems has increased. These surveillance methods are not restricted to Russian citizens, either.

British Journalist Luke Harding claimed in 2014 that he was constantly followed around Moscow when he lived there, his flat was repeatedly broken into by FSB agents (who purposely left clues to let him know who it was), and that Russian agents made it clear that they were eavesdropping once by cutting phone service after he made jokes about President Putin. The author was finally kicked out of Moscow in 2011 after living there for four years. Aside from this, it is clear that other states, such as the British government, know that the FSB targets foreign diplomats using the same techniques. The FSB and the Russian surveillance state, driven by the Putin administration's Soviet-style political maneuvers, has seen a resurgence particularly in the last decade. This is a divergent path from that of the American intelligence community, which, while it may be no less controversial in its activities around the globe, is certainly more beholden to domestic laws and the system of checks and balances hallmarkd in American democracy, thereby rendering it open to debate and criticism.

The image shows the interior of the United Nations Security Council Chamber. It is a large, circular room with a high ceiling featuring numerous recessed lights. The walls are covered in marble and feature a large, colorful mural depicting various scenes of human history and culture. In the center of the room is a large, oval-shaped wooden table surrounded by blue chairs. In the foreground, there are rows of dark red chairs facing the central table. The text "KAZAKHSTAN UNSC 2017-2018" is overlaid in large, white, bold letters across the center of the image.

KAZAKHSTAN UNSC 2017-2018

SAMANTHA BRLETICH*MD Advisory Board Member*

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Kazakhstan, in an attempt to build its reputation as mediator and the leading country in Central Asia, is seeking a position on the 15-member nonpermanent United Nations Security Council for 2017-2018.

Kazakhstan outlined its global priorities for its position on the prestigious governing and security body via the “Kazakhstan: United Nations Security Council 2017-2018” web site. Kazakhstan’s priorities are: food security, water security, energy security and nuclear security. The campaign for Kazakhstan’s seat for 2017-2018 launched in September 2014; the Government of Kazakhstan declared its candidacy for the seat on 1 June 2010. A promotional video was also released in late 2013.

The four priorities are vital to the stability of the Central Asia states particularly the issue of water security as the Aral Sea is nearly depleted and diplomatic spats between Uzbekistan and Tajikistan over water resources and the Rogun Dam.

Water and energy security are the most prominent as the Central Asia states are primarily land locked developing countries and are resource rich. Many attempts have been made by Kazakhstan to rectify this issue through agreements: Concerning Use of Water and Energy Resources in Syr Darya River Basin (1998); A Kazakh-Chinese Joint Commission on the Use and Protection of Transboundary Rivers has been founded to regulate the use of water resources with China and resuscitating the Aral Sea. Kazakhstan's Working Paper for the UNSC is already available on Kazakhstan's UNSC website.

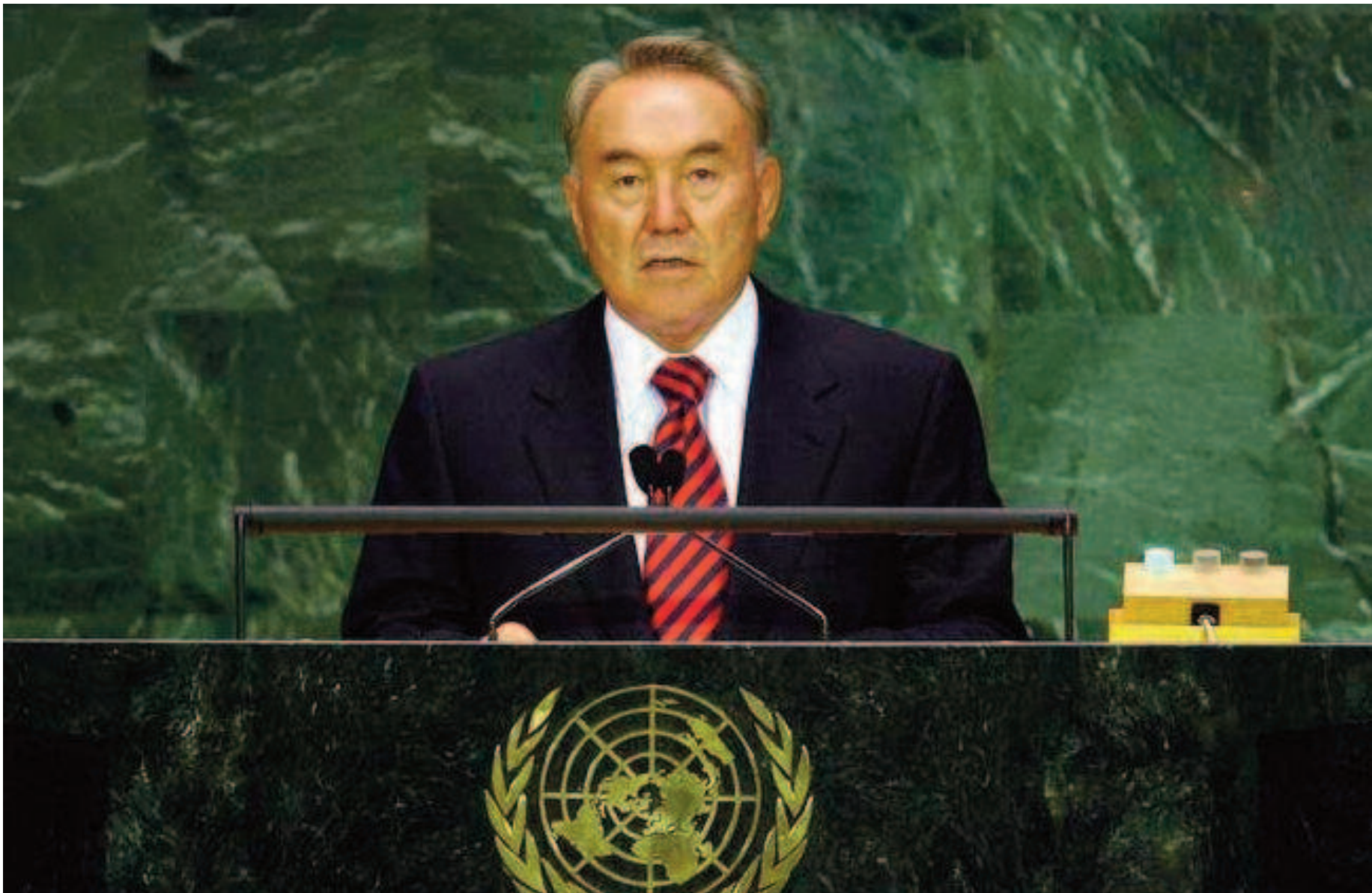
KAZAKHSTAN'S PRIORITIES ARE: FOOD SECURITY, WATER SECURITY, ENERGY SECURITY AND NUCLEAR SECURITY

Kazakhstan's current international commitments (even if unmet) and current programs are consistent with UNSC priorities: Initiated the Congress of Leaders and Traditional Religions, Launched the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA), and held the chairmanship of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in 2010.

Kazakhstan maximizes the benefits of high-profile positions in seemingly low-level and weak organizations and committees. While the Chairmanship of the OSCE should not be downplayed— as Kazakhstan is a consolidated autocracy and the first former Soviet Republic to hold the position— the OSCE has been perceived as weak and unable to enforce its mandate and compliance.

The organization failed to hold countries accountable for their human rights violations and make headway on transparency. Having a human rights violator (Kazakhstan) as the lead for Europe's primary watchdog group was expected to damage the OSCE's reputation. Kazakhstan's location in a "rough neighborhood" made Kazakhstan a great candidate "to advance the organization's mandate, invigorate efforts to settle existing conflicts, and generate discussions on important security, economic, and human development matters" according to the Center for Strategic and International Studies. Kazakhstan's legacy was adding a "Eurasian dimension," by "highlighting security problems stemming from the Afghan conflict, potential failed states, destabilizing economic and environmental problems, and vexing human rights issues."

Kazakhstan has failed to implement the principles of OSCE and its own commitments. Human rights in Kazakhstan before and after the OSCE chairmanship were poor. Journalists continued to be jailed, freedom of speech and religion is restricted, and the government imprisons human rights defenders and activists. After Kazakhstan's 2010 chairmanship, the country struggles to consolidate democratic reforms, create a multipolitical party system, guarantee freedom of press/speech and human and political rights for all. Arbitrary detention is still rampant despite the government passing the National Prevention Mechanism on Torture in 2014 according to Human Rights Watch. Laws established to support human rights are sophistry and are never enforced, but are passed to make it appear that Kazakhstan is upholding its obligations. Kazakhstan has made great strides compared to many of its neighbors falling behind and struggling with implementing basic governance.



Kazakhstan is scooping up high-profile chairmanships in regional organizations for two primary reasons: to advance Kazakhstan's image as a peacemaker and mediator; and to fulfill President Nazarbayev's vision for Kazakhstan of being the "Eurasian Bridge," linking Asia to Europe. With a track record of high participation in international organizations, Kazakhstan can benefit from and build lasting trade and political and economic relationships. Obtaining the UNSC seat reinforces Nazarbayev's multi-vector foreign policy and adds diversity to the Asia bloc of countries of the 15 member UNSC. If granted the 2017-2018 UNSC seat, Kazakhstan would be able to move beyond its regional problems while addressing global issues most importantly nuclear security and energy security.

Kazakhstan has experience with global threats (nuclear security), extremism, and terrorism. This includes, but not limited to, renewing and strengthening arms control agreements, cracking down on organized crime involving nuclear materials, and negotiating intra-regional water agreements/arrangements in Central Asia. Kazakhstan's history with nuclear work can be considered soft diplomacy: passing the annual "International Day Against Nuclear Tests" (29 August); and starting the NGO, the ATOM project, aimed at stopping nuclear testing and to bring awareness about the physical and environmental devastation caused by nuclear testing.

Kazakhstan, while pursuing these initiatives, offers the UNSC non-permanent Security Council distinct advantages.

Kazakhstan would expectedly act as a mediator, but many members such as Russia and China, may attempt to exploit Kazakhstan's membership, calling on Kazakhstan for support, as China and Russia tend to veto and block actions by other UNSC members. Kazakhstan, in such a scenario, would most likely abstain or make the decision reinforcing its "mediation" stance. This would be no surprise to Russia. From an international security perspective (beyond the issue of nuclear terrorism), Kazakhstan aligns itself with Russia-led organizations as they primarily deal with regional issues such as separatism, extremism, and terrorism. Kazakhstan would also serve as the outlier of the Soviet states (along with the Baltics) that is able to disagree with Russia without retaliation. As a result of the multi-vector foreign policy, Kazakhstan has friendly (or stable) relationship with most P5 members.

India supports Kazakhstan's seat on the 15 member UNSC as "both leaders affirmed their commitment to the negotiations on comprehensive reform of the council." According to the Astana Times, "Nazarbayev reiterated his country's support for India's application to be a permanent member of the expanded UN Security Council." If both India and Kazakhstan were to become members, their policies would be mutually reinforced as India is recognizing the strategic importance of Central Asia and in recent months increased relations with Kazakhstan. India became a full member of the SCO on 11 July 2015. Kazakhstan's and India's presence on the council would challenge the notion that developing countries or "countries in transition" are unable to fulfill the role of power players and would balance out the P5. As global issues are no longer dominated by a hegemon or a bipolar power structure and cooperation is conducted on a regional level, the UNSC membership is expected to reflect the shift.



Kazakhstan's relations and memberships are on a regional level, but memberships in organizations like the SCO, CSTO, and the EAEU have not provided Kazakhstan the opportunity to make impactful decisions and author substantial policy. Kazakhstan relies on bilateral or multilateral relationships and organizations to execute its policy or to project ideas. Kazakhstan's involvement with organizations like the SCO and CSTO have been narrowly focused primarily on economics and security respectively and often Russia and China set the agenda. Debate continues over the proportionality of representation and "geopolitical shifts have led to the radical changes in the distribution of power, interstate interactions on the global playing field, economic fluctuations, and the growth of political confidence of rising nations."



Kazakhstan within the last ten years has increased participation and has expanded its reach not only through natural resource markets and trade, but also diplomatically. Kazakhstan's further integration is demonstrated accession to the World Trade Organization. Mediating high level talks between Syrian rebels (late May 2015), Iran Nuclear Talks (February and April 2013), and the Ukraine Peace Talks with individual leaders (Putting and Poroshenko) the Normandy Group—France, Germany, Russia, and Ukraine. The talks in Kazakhstan in February and April 2013 made little progress, but were lauded by the Kazakhstan Government as Astana has "consistently advocated for peaceful dialogue and negotiations" and

"Kazakhstan "was proud to have made a practical contribution to the negotiations on Iran's nuclear [program.]"

Kazakhstan may not be able to convince Russia or China on many pressing global security issues, but Kazakhstan's participation on the UNSC might mitigate some tension. It is unlikely that Kazakhstan's participation would end badly for Kazakhstan as many of the agitators on the P5—China and Russia—have too much to lose to endanger their diplomatic relations with Kazakhstan. By winning a seat on the UNSC, Kazakhstan will be able to continue its policies it wished to implement during time overseeing the OSCE to better its country and nations facing the same issues.

THE REBIRTH OF THE PATRIARCH OF MOSCOW



DR FILIPPO ROMEO

Director of the "Infrastructure and Territorial Development"
Programme, IsAG Rome.



The Orthodox Church and the Christian tradition have always assumed a role of primary importance in Russian history and tradition. The origins of Christianity in Russia go back to 988 and coincide with the baptism of Prince Vladimir the Great. He had come to Constantinople, following which the evangelization of the Principality Kievan Rus' started. The latter included the space currently occupied by the areas of Russia, the Ukraine and Belarus, considered the predecessor of the Russian Empire. Formed by Igor in 882, the Principality Kievan Rus' is the first political form organised by the Oriental Slav tribes placed on those territories. This gave rise to the common orthodox faith and the Russian people's sense of national belonging. Retracing the path of the Principality one can indeed observe that the Orthodox Christian Faith was immediately embraced by those populations. It also succeeded in asserting itself in the Eastern zones, where there was strong pagan influence.

This barely digested the advent of the new creed and accompanied their evolution, acting as a stalwart for the Country's national and cultural identity. Orthodoxy is even granted with Scripture, which is surely a culture's fundamental principle. It was introduced via the spread of Christianity among the Slav tribes through the creation of the Cyrillic characters due to two great saints, Cyril and Methodius. It also constituted the prerequisite for the political and cultural development of the Principality of Kiev, leaving a heritage that would last even after its disintegration.

EXAMINING THE DATA ALSO REVEALS THAT BETWEEN 1991 AND 2008, THE SHARE OF RUSSIAN ADULTS CONSIDERING THEMSELVES ORTHODOX HAD GROWN FROM 31% TO 72%, WHILE THE SHARE OF THE RUSSIAN POPULATION NOT CONSIDERING THEMSELVES RELIGIOUS HAD DROPPED FROM 61% TO 18%.

Indeed, following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Orthodox religion regained that role it traditionally enjoyed.

To understand the extent of this phenomenon, one can analyze some statistics carried out by the International Social Survey Programme: "Russians return to religion, but not to Church 10/02/2014" relating to the number of the faithful in the Country between 1988 and 2008.

If in 1988, before the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Russian Orthodox Church counted 67 dioceses, 21 monasteries, 6,893 parishes, 2 academies and 3 theological seminars.

In 2008 it counted 133 dioceses, over 23,000 parishes, 620 monasteries (including 298 male ones), 322 convents, 5 academies and 32 theological seminars, 43 schools for seminary preparation, 1 theological institution, 2 orthodox universities and 2 female diocesan theological schools.

Examining the data also reveals that between 1991 and 2008, the share of Russian adults considering themselves orthodox had grown from 31% to 72%, while the share of the Russian population not considering themselves religious had dropped from 61% to 18%. However, research carried out by the International Social Survey Programme also reveals that the return to religion does not correspond to its practice. The research demonstrates two substantial facts: only one in ten of those declaring themselves religious attended mass at least once a month; the growth in practisers was ridiculous when compared to that in believers.

The latter is borne out by the fact that from 1991 to 2008 it was just 5 percent, going from 2% to 7%.

The growth in the population towards the various religious affiliations was also analyzed over various demographic groups. This analysis revealed that from 1991 to 2008 there was an increase of around 38% in women approaching Orthodox religion, going from 43% to 81%; and an increase of 46% in men, going from 17% to 63%. It also reveals that the increase in identification with Orthodox religion grew by 43% in youthful groups, aged between 16 and 49, going from 26% in 1991, to 69% in 2008, and by 39% amongst those aged over 50, going from 40% in 1991 to 79% in 2008. One may further register that approach to the Orthodox Faith grew substantially in the population with a high level of education, and in particular graduates.



This can be augmented by the facts that in 2008, women of faith were the majority and practicing more than men, and that the over-70s were a more religious group than the youngsters. Reference to age therefore, highlights that the elderly form the most religious: 82% of the over-70s declare they are orthodox, in comparison with 77% of people aged between 50 and 69 and 74% of those aged between 30 and 49. Finally, the 62% of youths aged between 16 and 29 remains. Although the above-mentioned study displays a clear discrepancy between the practicing and non-practicing faithful, the great rebirth of orthodoxy in the Russian people cannot be denied. In this regard, it is interesting to quote the episode of great mass participation occurring in November 2011.

Three million Muscovites, facing the cold and rain, poured onto the streets to venerate the belt of the Virgin. This had been brought from Mount Athos to the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour (the church destroyed by Stalin and substituted by a pool, but rebuilt in a few years under El'cin).

There is no doubt that this rebirth was supported by the collaboration between the Church and political power. This significantly grew over time and intensified on the occasion of two events in particular: the election of Archbishop Cyril Somolensk as patriarch of Moscow and all Russia in 2009, and Vladimir Putin's return to power in 2012.

The Orthodox church's policies can actually be easily reconciled with Putin's vision and his strong call to the Country's traditions.

Patriarch Alexei II had already set himself clearly apart from the Western concepts of "human rights" and "globalization", considering them unsuited to Russian specifics. Further, Cyril I, his successor, issued the "Declaration of Human Rights of Russia's Orthodox church", after repudiating the Western Universal Declaration of Man's Rights.

The intensification of relations between Church and State has become even more evident in recent years. Indeed, on the forth anniversary of the nomination of Patriarch Cyril, the Kremlin explicitly wished for the Orthodox church to raise its beneficent role in society. In a meeting between the State and religious exponents, held on 11 February 2013, Putin also underlined the need to give the Orthodox church more space. This extended, to political questions regarding matters like the family, education of youths and the patriotic spirit. With reference to defending these values, in particular the family, Russia has often wished to confirm and remark defending traditional, natural values of human society.

To this end it has underlined its conception of "family" – understood as the basic element in ordered development for State and society – and the realization of a political and social strategy favouring it. These have decisively contributed to inverting the very negative demographic trend afflicting the Country over the last decades, warding off out-and-out social disaster. If one considers that the "demographic Winter" striking Russia around 1991 to 2005 is now a common situation in most European states, there can be no doubt that the Russian model constitutes an international example.

Keeping these facts in mind, in some alarming cases the attempt to define and orient States' policies supporting families and young mothers is even more important and current.

It aims to guarantee correct demographic development, crucial for effect on the process of State's main internal and external policy. In this regard, President Putin has often insisted how humanity today clashes with very serious challenges, like continuous attacks on the institution of the family. This explains why Putin's Russia is very interested in demographic and family matters. Protecting the rights and interests of families, motherhood and childhood is a priority for public authorities. This actively support and encourage politics and initiatives in their favour: they, benefit from the close collaboration with non-governmental organisations and voluntary citizen associations. Russia's objective is to defeat this long-lasting demographic deficit, by reaching a fertility rate of 2,1 instead of its current 1,7.

Indeed, for the Russian authorities the problem of birth reduction cannot only be attributed to the economic sphere. It has deeper, cultural roots hence the need to intervene in the fields of education and information too. On many occasions, both Putin and Patriarch Cyril have emphasised that the globalised financial system caused the world economic crisis as of 2008, creating and making hegemonic speculative, parasitical financing. It is also responsible for the ethical, moral yielding developing international to create a dangerous 'tendency to destroying human society'. This moral crisis had exacerbated a tendency to selfishness and individualism. These phenomena appear in Russia as the "social orphan": 80% of abandoned children normally have both parents, who intentionally choose not to bring them up.

One may further note that a new agreement between the Church and the Counts' Court was recently signed at Moscow. It aimed to raise morale in Russia, impaired by corruption, a real blight there; and safeguard the national spiritual, historical and cultural heritage, necessary for the social good.



On the occasion of signing, Patriarch Cyril declared that “The work of the Counts’ Court has a substantial impact on society’s moral climate. We know that corruption degrades human beings. And if corruption reaches a significant extent, it erodes the healthy fabric of society and undermines the basis of the State.”

In fact, for Cyril, the “current vices, connected with theft of public and state property” are attributed to the difficulties faced by the population in the ‘90’s and early 2000’s. They are, “the collapse of the economy, the destruction of certain ideals and the attempt to create new ones”.

For these reasons, the Kremlin considers the Church a fundamental ally to preserve Russia’s spiritual and cultural identity. Politics and the Church are intertwined: the Kremlin needs to promote the Church as an organ representing the nation’s values to regroup consensus; it is opportune for the Church to collaborate with politics to promote choices protecting the family and safeguarding public morality

With reference to safeguarding life, the Orthodox church has worked hard to explain that abortion is nothing but the killing of an innocent human being.

The work of many NGOs promote the pro-life cause in Russia.

Another emblematic case of the common political strategy linking the Orthodox church and the Kremlin is the anti-blasphemy. This was adopted following the episode of three feminist activists, Pussy Riot, who played in the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour in Moscow. Their rock music, blasphemous in character, was performed on the platform of the altar, to protest against Putin’s policy. For the secular authorities the gesture was considered as one by hooligans or vandals; for the Ecclesiastical leaders it was blasphemous profanity.

Further, the Church supported the new regulations limiting access to abortion; and Putin’s law forbidding the publication of material portraying homosexuals, lesbians, bisexuals and transsexuals.

The Orthodox church's action also spreads internationally, appearing as the promoter of dialogue between different religions and cultures. Patriarch Cyril actually stated the need to build orthodox geopolitics, in line with Putin's foreign policy.

To favour this role, the "Inter-Religious Council of the Russian Federation" and its analogous "Inter-religious Council of the CSI" (Community of Independent states) were set up in 1998. Orthodox Christians, 230 million in all, include: countries orthodox by tradition (Belarus, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Georgia, Greece, Macedonia, Moldavia, Montenegro, Romania, Russia, Serbia, the Ukraine), with their own orthodox national Churches, countries containing orthodox ethnic-cultural minorities (Albania, Czech Republic, Finland, Poland, Slovakia), and countries containing orthodox faithful, principally in Western Europe. Patriarch Cyril often visits countries from the former Soviet belt to consolidate cultural, religious, but also political relations. The Orthodox church moves in the former Soviet area, which the Kremlin aims to regroup.

All this, supports the government's foreign policy, continually appealing to a shared values between the "sister nations" with "a unique story, a unique Church and unique future".

To understand the importance one may refer to Eirini Patsea' article, "Church diplomacy: Greece, Russia and beyond".

The author stresses that "after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the Orthodox post-Soviet states chose to submit to the spiritual leadership of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople; not the Patriarchate of Moscow. It was important, for those states and for their western interlocutors, that they cut the cord from the ROC and the Soviet politics".

With reference to foreign policy, the situation lived in the Ukraine following the conflict is also interesting. In this country Orthodox church exponents were submitted to pressure from the Ukraine's new "nationalist" authorities and other organisations. The latter wished to take over faculties to transfer the clergy depending on the Moscow Patriarch under the Kiev Patriarch (the latter not recognised, not even by the Constantinople Patriarch). In this regard it should be stressed that the Ukraine counts the highest number of orthodox parishes after Russia.

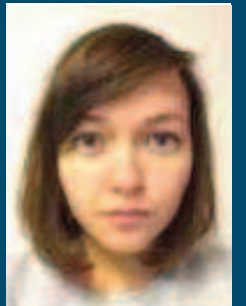
To conclude, it is fundamental to underline that this type of collaboration between Church and state has facilitated the rebirth of faith in Russia. It is possible in the traditional acephalus-national reality of Orthodoxy, which has made the "symphonic" Caesaropapism the true foundation of Russian identity for centuries. It is then clear that the model cannot be exported. However, the National character of the orthodox Ecclesiastical reality has not hindered the possibility of an "orthodox ecumenism" open to international dialogue between cultures and religions.

SOFT POWER AS A THREAT TO A HARD POWER

NINA LAVRENTEVA

MD Russia Editor

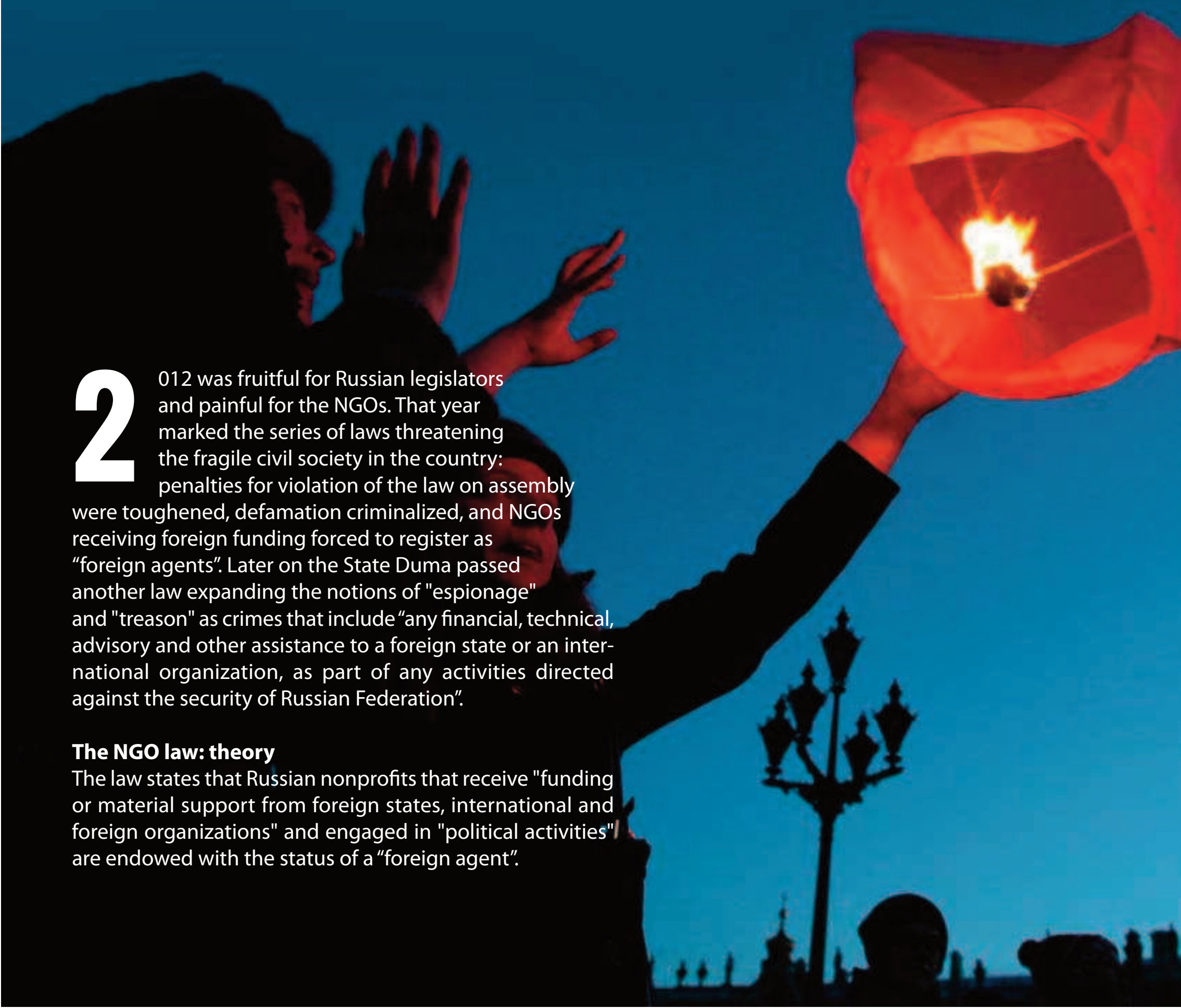
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2012 was fruitful for Russian legislators and painful for the NGOs. That year marked the series of laws threatening the fragile civil society in the country: penalties for violation of the law on assembly were toughened, defamation criminalized, and NGOs receiving foreign funding forced to register as "foreign agents". Later on the State Duma passed another law expanding the notions of "espionage" and "treason" as crimes that include "any financial, technical, advisory and other assistance to a foreign state or an international organization, as part of any activities directed against the security of Russian Federation".

The NGO law: theory

The law states that Russian nonprofits that receive "funding or material support from foreign states, international and foreign organizations" and engaged in "political activities" are endowed with the status of a "foreign agent".



Also, any materials published or distributed by those organizations, even online, should be marked as “published by the organization performing functions of a foreign agent”. In case if an NGO refuse to register or provide any information on its finances, it may face a considerable fine and its representative could be imprisoned.

The law significantly complicates the procedure of financial reporting and also gives grounds for unscheduled inspections.

**THE RUSSIAN NGO LAW
SEEMS TO BE “COPIED”
FROM THE AMERICAN
FOREIGN AGENTS
REGISTRATION ACT (FARA)
- IT CONTEMPLATES ALMOST
THE SAME TERMINOLOGY
AND CONCEPTS AND PROVIDES
SIMILAR PENALTIES
FOR ITS VIOLATION**

The essential drawback of the law is that the definition of “political activity” is rather blurry.

According to the lawmakers it includes any “political action or influence on public opinion aiming to change a policy”. Russian legislation does not provide a clear definition of these concepts and thus gives the freedom of interpretation to the authorities.

However, activities in the field of science and education, culture, health, environment, social protection of citizens are exempt from the law as they are not “political”.

FARA: Is the US Russia’s role model?

In response to criticism of the law Russian officials contend that the same law exists in the United States, which proves that this kind of legislative act may be adopted in a democratic state. Indeed, the Russian NGO law seems to be “copied” from the American Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA) – it contemplates almost the same terminology and concepts and provides similar penalties for its violation. Both American FARA and the Russian NGO claim to “increase transparency”. A law, however, cannot be evaluated outside the context of its implementation practices.

FARA was adopted in 1938 and aimed to protect the Americans from foreign propaganda during the war. It required that the “agents” representing interests of foreign powers in the US politics have to disclose their ties with foreign governments and information on funding.

Since then the law was several times amended, concepts specified, and the burden of proof elaborated. It has become so complicated that actually just a few criminal prosecution cases made it through the end. However, the most substantial distinction of FARA is that it primarily aims to disclose the foreign lobby that promotes its political interests in Congress and not any organization receiving funding from abroad.

The NGO law: practice

As the law came into force more than a thousand NGOs have been subjected to unscheduled inspections and searches, many of them got “warnings” that their activity is “political” and should be changed.

Some organizations have been charged with administrative offences and fines, and their leaders prosecuted as they refused to enter the roster of Foreign Agents at the Ministry of Justice.



The first organization to be recognized as a "foreign agent" was the Golos Association ("voice" or "vote"), Russia's biggest organization protecting electoral rights. It had to pay a big fine and suspend work for several months but eventually they managed to win the court case.

Many Russian non-profits obtain funding through foreign grants and even though in many cases it is only a few percent of a budget, the government sees it as a reason to suggest that the organization represents interest of a foreign power. Lack of financing is quite a big problem for many of the Russian NGOs. Before the bill became law, Vladimir Putin claimed that public funding for nonprofits will be increased.

Later it was confirmed by Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev – he said that the government will support the NGOs, however, assuming "their activity is useful and positive for the country".

The same year the "foreign agents" law was adopted, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), one of the biggest donors for the Russian nonprofits halted its activities in the country. Besides, the government lunged at some of the international organizations – Russian office of the Transparency International and bureau of the Nordic Council of Ministers which suspended its work this year were forced to enter the "foreign agents" roster.

The inclusion of the Dynasty Foundation in the list of the "foreign agents" and its subsequent closure produced a strong public reaction. The organization is the first family nonprofit foundation in Russia. Created by a businessman and scientist Dmitry Zimin it supported talented scientists and educational projects. Mainly, the organization was financed from his private funds. The Foundation gave scholarships and grants to students and young professionals, supported school teachers of exact sciences, organized public lectures, developed a program of short-term visits of foreign scientists to Russia. The Dynasty also financed the "Liberal Mission" Foundation which conducted researches on economic and political issues. Apparently, this was a good reason to consider its activities as "political". Unexpectedly, several environmental organizations we also included in the Foreign Agents lists.

The law was applied on many organizations promoting human rights and civil society, gender equality, and independent media working in the domains of social protection and assistance to refugees and displaced people. Among them are the prominent human rights center "Memorial" which was originally concentrated on the history of political repressions in the Soviet Union, the famous "Levada – Center", independent sociological research organization, "The Committee against Torture", and "Perm -36", the founder of Russia's only museum of the history of political repressions created on the territory of the former Gulag.

As the Russian paratroopers were detained in the Eastern Ukraine, "the Saint-Petersburg Committee of Soldiers' Mothers" which received the complaints from the families of those who were allegedly involved in the conflict, was recognized as a "foreign agent". The organization claims that it hadn't received any foreign funding.

Soft power as a threat to a hard power

A person familiar with the political history of Russia can easily notice that the Kremlin on both official and unofficial levels more and more actively uses the Soviet phraseology. The expression "foreign agent" had stuck in ideological memory of a Russian - according to polls this phrase is perceived as the analogy with the terms like "spy", "enemy", or "traitor" even among the younger generation. The "foreign agent" terminology used in the text of the law, thus, clearly functions as a pointer - the enemy can sabotage the country from within.

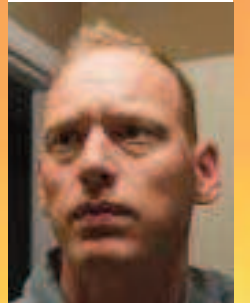
As the Kremlin began to hunt down "unsuitable" NGOs, some organizations terminated their activities or had to change legal forms. Many do not agree to accept the new "shameful" status and continue to press charges against the Ministry of Justice. Some of the NGOs filed complaints in the European Court of Human Rights. The persecution of the independent non-governmental organizations continues. In May this year the new law was adopted according to which any foreign or international NGO "which threaten the national security" can be recognized as "undesirable" and banned from conducting its activities in Russia. The American National Endowment for Democracy (NED) became the first one in the blacklist. After the law was introduced one of the largest US private nonprofits, The MacArthur Foundation, announced its closure in Russia.

REIMAGINING THE GREAT OIL GAME

THE RUSSIA-OPEC-AMERICA NEXUS

BRIAN HUGHES

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The geopolitical implication to the sudden fall in oil prices has had broad-reaching ramifications for a number of very powerful countries. Two of those countries, Russia and Saudi Arabia, are the most important energy commodity exporters in the world. The other, the US, is the single most crucial oil importer in the world. The possibility of Russian fatalism awakening is very real as the country faces tightening sanctions, severely under-priced oil exports, and rapid inflation as military spending has increased.

Similarly, Saudi Arabia's diminishing currency reserves and its military adventurism in Yemen have many questioning how the economy can diversify to stabilize the budget. In the US, shale companies have largely been cannibalized to consolidate power across fewer but larger corporations. At a time when the world is increasingly looking at alternative energies to lower pollution and greenhouse gases, oil industries have drastically lowered prices to the detriment of budgets and investors. The question that looms among these oil producers: who will blink first?

The Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), controlling over 40% of the global crude oil production, curiously refused to cut production while oil prices were plummeting last summer, further exacerbating the price fall. OPEC stated that the decision was not politically based and that prices were simply returning to 'normal.' OPEC's decision to force prices lower in the wake of the worldwide glut confounded oil market pundits.

Many looked to shale oil for a formidable explanation. Producing over 5 million barrels a day, the US shale oil revolution has revitalized the local economies of North Dakota and Texas, while little regulation has allowed companies to produce at prodigious rates. This has lowered US oil imports and softened the influence of OPEC producers on US foreign policy.

**OPEC HAS NEVER REALLY
TRUSTED RUSSIA
AND AN ALLIANCE
MAY ONLY FORM OUT
OF DIRE NECESSITY.
BUT THAT IS SOMETHING
THE UNITED STATES
WOULD STAUNCHLY OPPOSE**

While OPEC may have wanted to deliver a severe blow to the shale oil companies, who operate with smaller margins than traditional producers, the simple reality is that OPEC was too late to react. Shale oil production increased since the drastic price collapse last year and has only recently shown signs of stagnation.

Large shale oil companies have repeatedly bought previously thriving small shale companies for pennies on the dollar as possible bankruptcies have loomed.

This consolidation of the shale industry has provided more oil fields for future exploration to companies that have the capital to wait until prices again rise. While the US shale oil industry only accounts for roughly 6% of the global oil market, OPEC's decreasing reach into the US market may have initiated the production glut. Thus, while the price decrease has recently slowed the shale oil market, consolidations have kept the industry alive.

The most intriguing geopolitical connection with oil prices collapsing is the Western sanction regime on Russia. As inflation hit the Russian economy and protracted recession weighed on Russian morale, OPEC ramped up production. Similarly, Russia has (as of May 2015) produced more oil since the end of the Soviet era. Interestingly, this economic stand-off brought the two biggest oil-producing countries (Saudi Arabia and Russia) to the bargaining table as Russia considers closer ties to OPEC. This tantalizing prospect of a Russian-OPEC alliance has almost always been an illusion since OPEC's formation and would drastically increase OPEC's global power in determining oil prices. OPEC has never really trusted Russia and an alliance may only form out of dire necessity.

But that is something the United States would staunchly oppose.

As Iran will likely demand greater regional power responsibility as the lifting of sanctions occur in coming months, Saudi Arabia will find its close Western ties strained. Thus, a closer OPEC relationship with Russia would be a geopolitical conundrum for the Western world as the Middle East once again faces possible political destabilization.



Witnessing the difficulties of Russian natural gas dependency in recent conflicts in Ukraine, Georgia, and Estonia, an OPEC-Russian alliance would control nearly half of the world's oil, with Russia becoming the likely leading producer.

This could echo the 1973 oil embargo, a time when OPEC controlled 53% of the world's oil and subsequently handicapped Western economies. With Russia continually looking for ways to damage Western economies and strengthen its own geopolitical position, more Russian energy control would be deplorable to the West.

Contrary to the OPEC-Russian alliance is the simple fact that such cooperation would further strain interrelations with Western

powers and would be a difficult political gamble for Saudi Arabia. As Western economies are projected to continually dwarf that of Russia for the foreseeable future, and with an apparent divide between the US and Saudi Arabia regarding Iran, any further strain would leave Saudi Arabia's Western relations questionable. However, as China becomes the world's major oil importer, Saudi Arabia has monopolized the Chinese market and increased Chinese sales 37% in the last year, while every other country lost market share. However, Russia is unlikely to agree with any OPEC policy of lowered production while Saudi Arabia continually strives for dominance in the coveted Chinese market.

While market competition has surely decreased oil prices, it remains the most geopolitically significant commodity in the world by all measures. In this environment of little policy clarification and OPEC's failure to halt shale oil production, Russia has faced the harshest conditions of all oil-producing countries. Although Russia would benefit from an end to shale oil, its economy was already facing difficult projections. Vladimir Putin has had to balance his military adventurism with economic difficulties, exacerbated by the oil glut. In this way, Russia may be aligned with Saudi Arabia in wanting to damage the US shale oil industry (and, at the same time US oil giants, like Exxon), but has more to lose than Saudi Arabia. However, Saudi Arabia and Russia have deftly managed budgets, low debt (a meager 2% and 18% respectively), and strong nationalism. While they would serve each other better as partners in OPEC, the US cannot allow it and Saudi Arabia is, as of now, most unlikely to make that gamble.

All countries involved have much to gain and, similarly, much to lose by way of oil. The US will be the last to consider any kind of radical action in the oil market as low prices serves the White House's policy for the moment. Russia has little history of giving into foreign pressures and most likely will adapt to lower oil prices.

Saudi Arabia, as the leader of OPEC, will most likely act first to balance its budget. While this will leave Russia to increase oil production if OPEC lowers theirs, it may be the only workable political solution.

As of now, however, production remains high as all sides stare down each other and decide which direction is the best direction to take. For the first time in a long time, because of so many diverse geopolitical maneuvers happening at one time amongst the world's energy producers and consumers, the future of 'status quo' may indeed be very uncertain.





EXPOSING GEOPOLITICAL MORAL RELATIVISM TURKMENISTAN'S HUMAN RIGHTS RECORD

JEANETTE "JJ" HARPER

Jeanette "JJ" Harper is a graduate student in the International Security and Intelligence Studies program at Bellevue University in Omaha, NE, USA.



With all eyes on Iran, the human rights abuses that continue in the repressive country of Turkmenistan have taken a back seat. Despite pressure from international NGOs and the U.S. Department of State's designation of Turkmenistan as a country with an abysmal human rights record, its regime has not really done much to address these issues. In fact, things have gotten worse in the last few years.

Unlike other states that have a poor human rights record, Turkmenistan enjoys quite a bit of prestige because it has the fourth largest reserves of natural gas in the world and an impressive network of major gas pipelines that pass through it, terminating at its ports in the Caspian Sea. In fact, its foreign relations are contingent on its immense oil and natural gas holdings. State control of these resources is also what allows Turkmenistan's regime to keep a tight grip over its citizens.

Is Turkmenistan essentially getting a free pass? One has to wonder why North Korea is consistently singled out for international condemnation while Turkmenistan – with the exception of a little head-butting with the United States about how it should proceed on the path towards democratic and economic reform – gets very little pushback from global powers. In general, the public knows at least something about North Korea but knows virtually nothing about Asia's other reclusive dictatorship. Most cannot even identify Turkmenistan on a map.

**UNLIKE OTHER STATES
THAT HAVE A POOR
HUMAN RIGHTS RECORD,
TURKMENISTAN ENJOYS
QUITE A BIT OF PRESTIGE
BECAUSE IT HAS THE FOURTH
LARGEST RESERVES OF
NATURAL GAS IN THE WORLD**

While some might think it not entirely fair to compare the isolated and tyrannical country of North Korea with Turkmenistan, which is actively and largely cooperatively working with the other "Caspian 5" countries of Iran, Russia, Azerbaijan, and Kazakhstan to promote the oil and gas industries in Central Asia, one thing is clear: Turkmenistan has a human rights problem that cannot continue to be ignored by the global community if the country expects to realize its full potential. It has already been passed up for valuable opportunities that could have boosted its international image and regional presence, all of which would have been a direct benefit to the Turkmen people.

For example, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) has been hesitant to invest in Turkmenistan's businesses because of its pervasive state intervention and state ownership. Even though private entrepreneurs and companies are growing in Turkmenistan, the country's private sector is still very small and closely regulated by the state. The Bank has plans to offer financing to privately-owned companies outside the oil and gas sectors (where most of the jobs are) to boost Turkmenistan's food processing and distribution, logistics, transport services, packaging, furniture, and hospitality sectors. But it wants the Turkmen government to meet specific benchmarks on pluralism and accountability, establish media freedoms, and improve its overall human rights record. With Turkmenistan's incredibly high unemployment rate – some economists believe it is somewhere around 60% - the country cannot afford to pass up this important opportunity. Until Turkmenistan's government starts making progress on these issues, the EBRD's engagement will remain limited.

The European Union has also expressed serious concerns about Turkmenistan's human rights situation, specifically on the issue of its reported use of torture. They urged the Turkmen government to release information on the status and location of prisoners who have disappeared in detention, facilitate prison visits by international monitors and to cooperate with UN special procedures. The EU also wants Turkmenistan to ease its restrictions on Internet access, cease dismantling satellite dishes, and lift excessive restrictions on civil society. It requires Turkmenistan to stop interfering with the right to freedom of expression, association, and religion and to be more transparent on issues regarding arbitrary evictions – like those that are happening in the country's deserted



capital city of Ashgabat to make way for more white marble-clad monuments, hotels, and office buildings. The UN plans to review Turkmenistan's progress on these issues by sometime next year.

Unfortunately, even though Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov regularly professes respect for peace, integration, and good-neighborliness – which he claims are “essential for sustainable, stable and balanced international work” – the country is still very much at risk of falling back into the bizarre totalitarian-style rule Turkmenistan knew under its previous president – Saparmurat Niyazov, a megalomaniac dictator who ruled the country from 1985 to 2006 – whose cult of personality rivals North Korea's contemporary despotic dynasty. Elements of this cult of personality still exist, as evidenced by the golden statues that dot Turkmenistan's landscape. Alas,

Berdymukhamedov has also started to add some of his own.

President Berdymukhamedov – who “won” re-election with 97% of the vote in 2012 – is considered an improvement over his predecessor. Even though he did, to some degree, dismantle Niyazov's personality cult, he is still regarded by most as a despotic ruler who represses minorities, has a deep disdain for basic freedoms, forces thousands of people to attend long events (with no breaks), and has zero tolerance for dissidents, journalists, and organizers of political parties. His regime has closed the country off from both geopolitical and independent inspection, frequently dodges inquiries from concerned foreigners, imposes draconian restraints on media and religious freedoms, and practices government strong-arm tactics on activists who dare to step forward to defend human rights.



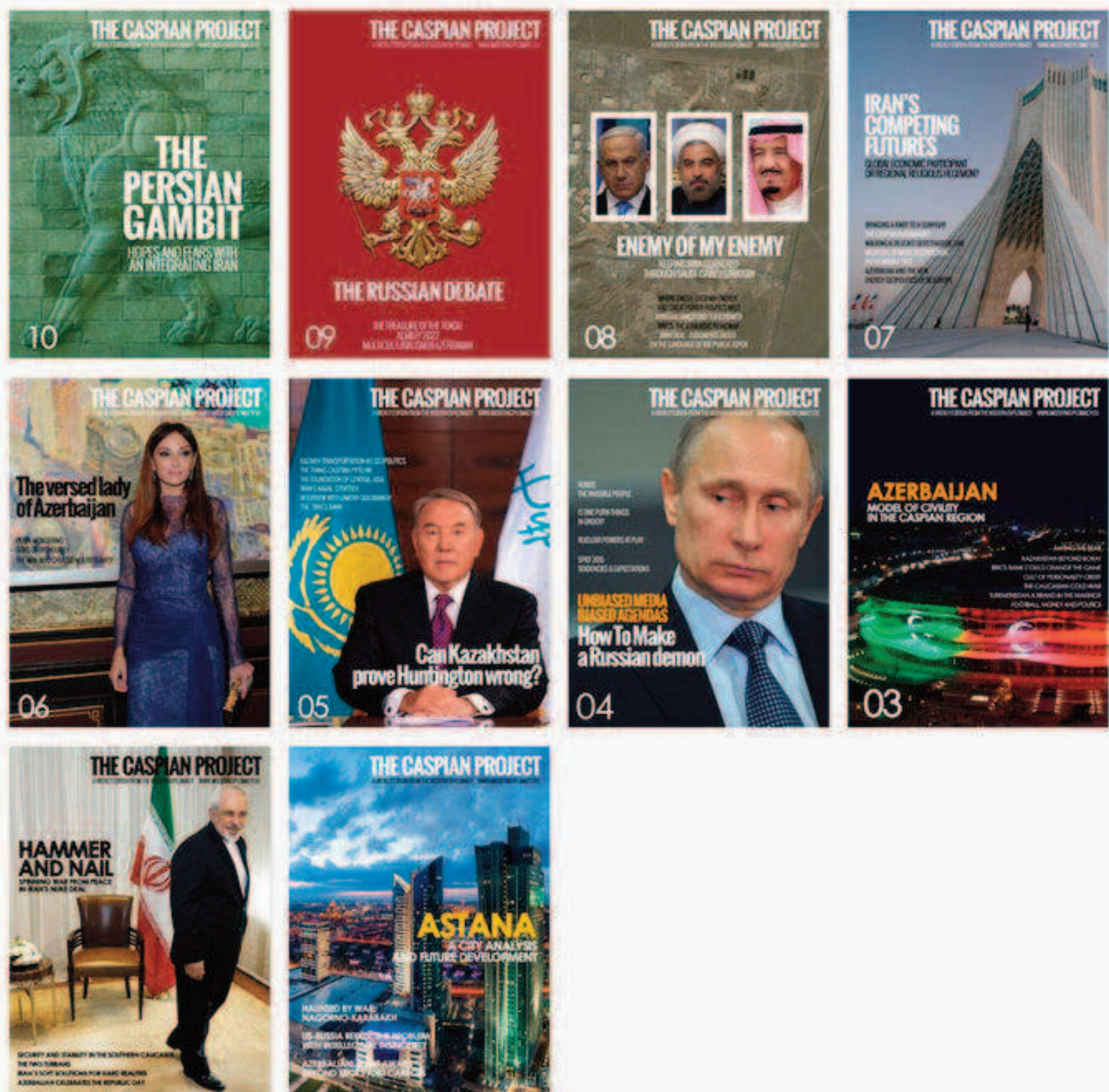
Despite claims by the president that there have been reforms, imprisonment and/or forced labor are still being utilized as tools for political retaliation. It is feared many of these prisoners die or just “disappear” in captivity. The country’s justice system lacks transparency and there is no due process. The government is known to monitor electronic and telephone communications. Religious freedom is nonexistent in that unregistered religious groups or communities are not allowed and fines are imposed for unregistered religious activity. There are also nasty rumors that children are being taken out of school to go to work harvesting cotton or to labor in other sectors.

Despite all of this, there is hardly any demand globally for accountability. NGOs are banned from doing anything until they are registered. However, few independent NGOs have obtained legal registration in years. The International Committee for the Red Cross does not have full access to Turkmen prisons and Turkmenistan’s record of cooperation with the UN and the International Labor Organization is bleak.

To make matters worse, it appears Berdymukhamedov is intent on building a new personality cult to replace the one he has slowly been trying to eradicate. While his speeches do receive positive reception at the regional level, questions still linger at the international level about how Turkmenistan will handle its human rights issues in the future and how the country will manage its massive resources under Berdymukhamedov’s one-party, dynastic leadership.

If Turkmenistan cannot get important things done – like industrial privatization, market liberalization, fiscal and legal reforms – the country will not be able to attract foreign trade and investment like the prosperous and sovereign state it has the potential to become should.

Unfortunately, that motivation may rest with the global community to forcefully make it a major Turkmen priority. So far, that global responsibility has been weak at best and laughable at worst. Perhaps the greatest difference in terms of human rights attention between North Korea and Turkmenistan is the former’s ownership of nuclear weapons and nuclear technology. While this is no small matter, it is disappointing to see the international community basically sending a message to the rest of the world that the only time it will truly care about basic civil liberties and human dignity in oppressive countries is when said countries actually have the capability of causing damage or doing harm to people other than their own. In short, if all Turkmenistan is interested in is hurting Turkmen, that is acceptable to outside observers. This inhumane example of geopolitical moral relativism must be ended at the global level. For the message it sends is heard far beyond the borders of Central Asia’s own Hermit Kingdom.



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A photograph of a building facade with a sign that reads "WTO OMC". The sign is mounted on a light-colored wall, and the letters are dark and stylized. The building has classical architectural features, including columns and decorative moldings. The lighting is warm, suggesting late afternoon or early morning.

WTO OMC

KAZAKHSTAN'S WTO MEMBERSHIP

END OF AN ODYSSEY OR NEW LEAP FORWARD?

EVAN THOMSEN

Evan Thomsen is a graduate of the International Security and Intelligence Studies Program at Bellevue University in Omaha, NE and is currently a Master's student at the world-renown Elliott School of International Affairs at The George Washington University in Washington, DC. He has just joined with the Eastern Congo Initiative as Strategic Partnerships Officer.

Kazakhstan applied to join the World Trade Organization (WTO) in January of 1996. Twenty long years later (July 27, 2015), President Nazarbayev signed the official ascension documents in Geneva, making it the 162nd WTO member state. While assessing the impact of Kazakhstan's entrance into the WTO is difficult at this early stage, speculation is rampant given current geopolitical tension in Central Asia and the global price of oil. This article will attempt to contextualize this decision by adding insight to three questions - why, why now, and what's next?

Why?

The WTO is an important stepping stone for legitimacy and integration on the world stage. To some, most notably Kazakh economist Aidarkhan Khusainov, WTO membership is more comparable to United Nations membership, simply providing an image boost, rather than a substantive change in Kazakh political economy.

This diminished outlook is not the only position in Kazakhstan and around the world, however, as many believe that this move will open up Kazakh markets, allow for increased foreign investment, and diversify the largely energy-dependent and landlocked nation. Regardless of economic prognostications, Nazarbayev's signature ultimately formalized an already informal economic reality. As Nazarbayev himself said, "In the mid-1990s, Kazakhstan had ties only with post-Soviet states, while now we are trading with 185 countries of the world." Kazakhstan's elevated status into the WTO, therefore, is a bit more pomp and circumstance, and less sub-

**THE MEMBER STATES
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EACH MIGHT PLAY UPON THE OTHER**

stantive change, as much of the Kazakh economy has already been developed in the global arena for some time. Thus, WTO membership is more about affirmation of deeds already accomplished, than hope for potential development somewhere far off in the future.

Why Now?

Kazakhstan's membership status in some ways could always be seen as a foregone conclusion. For example, more than 50% of the nation's trade is with the European Union. WTO membership, therefore, is a continuation of a two-decade long process of real economic integration and reform, rather than a radical departure from it.

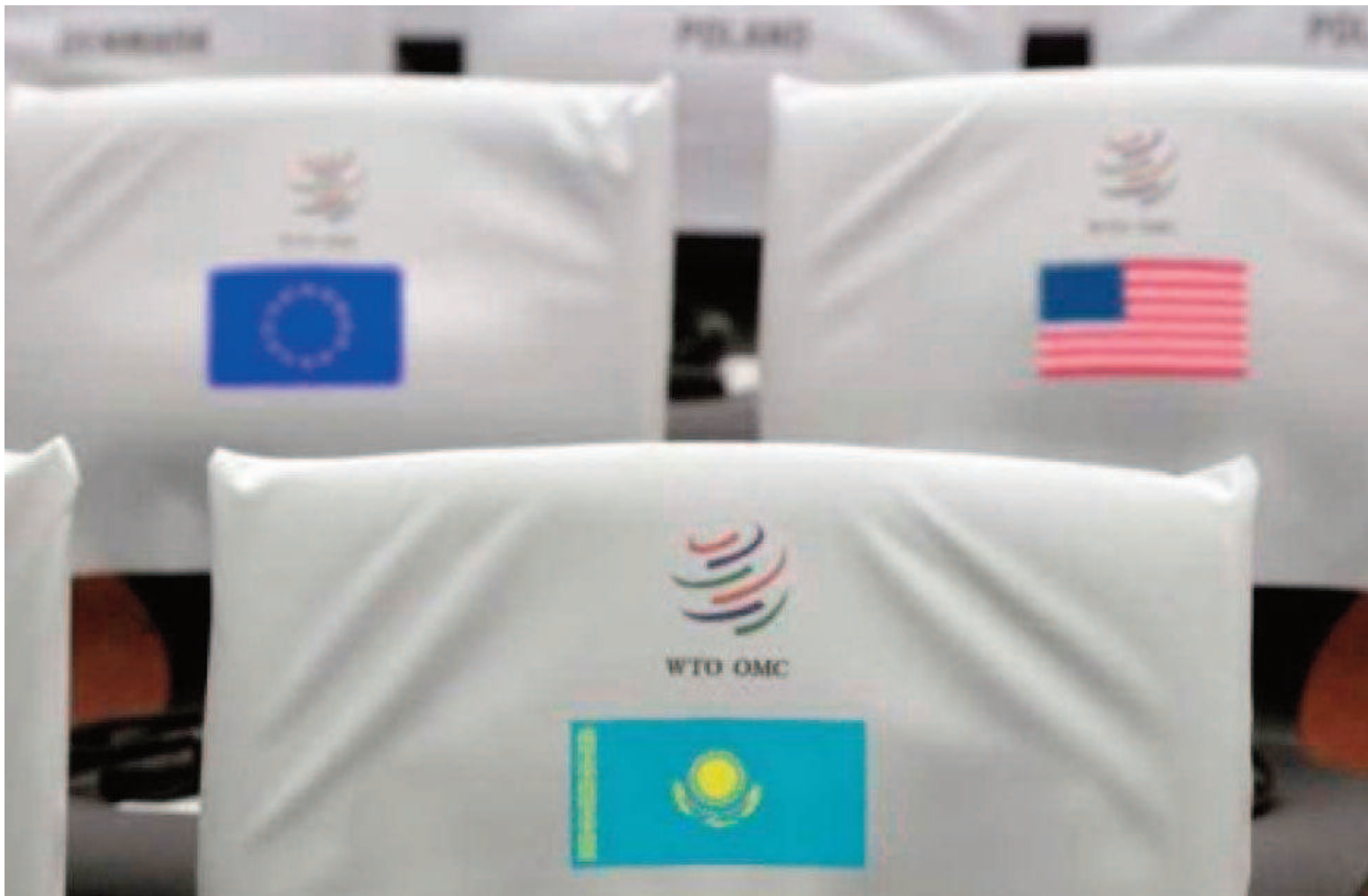
The significance of 'now' is less about Kazakhstan's economic reality and more about the potential geopolitical and economic challenges in the region.

First, the global drop in the price of oil has had a significant impact on the Kazakh economy. WTO membership will not only provide new opportunities for investment and economic diversification, but greater flexibility in global markets.

Second, U.S.-led sanctions on Russia have indirectly constrained Kazakhstan's economy. Russia and Kazakhstan are more than trade partners, but members of the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), which features Kazakhstan, Russia, and Belarus. Russia's economic woes have negatively affected the strength of this union. Evidence of this from a political perspective is the renewed stress on WTO negotiations from both Kazakhstan and Belarus starting in 2013. Moreover, Russia has gradually shown a willingness to support these negotiations (Russia joined the WTO in 2012) rather than oppose them.

Third, the why now of this moment is representative of a broader desire for engagement in Central Asia, particularly between those global players with higher stakes in the region. We are far from a proliferation of cooperation, but recent events have shown an environment in cautious conversation and optimistic consideration. WTO membership does not magically transform enemies into friends, but it does pave the way for a more solid process of enhanced cooperation between Kazakhstan and many other nations.

What remains to be seen is whether this shift is more representative of the dynamism of the landscape or the individual states? In this case, will we see motivated regional cooperation or cooperation in lieu of state capacity for direct or unilateral action?



What's Next?

Economic projections range from the optimistic (new investment and development) to the pessimistic (job loss, wage decrease, and simply being out competed) to the apathetic (WTO is more about banal prestige and less about workable policy). Any basic economic theory will show that increased free trade comes with benefits and drawbacks, where the effect on the state is ultimately determined by good governance. What is most clearly next is Kazakhstan's opportunity to diversify economically and have that diversification feed into a new positive political evolution. If the country is able to broaden its economic capacity, then its membership in the WTO, at least in the short term, is a win, offering Kazakhstan an outlet from energy export dependence.

If it is able to broaden that into real political (read: democratic) consolidation, then membership in the WTO will have proven far more invaluable than anyone could have surmised. These potential geopolitical ramifications and speculative regional suggestions are what should be seen as the truly fascinating, and still unknown mystery, of pending WTO ascension.

What Kazakhstan's WTO entrance hopefully suggests is less contestation and more cooperation across Central Asian economies. The EEU can be seen as strong evidence of this. Until very recently, the EEU was a barrier for Kazakhstan's entrance in the WTO. With Russia and Kazakhstan now WTO members, and Belarus poised to follow, the EEU (which is Russian-led), has shown a clear willingness to conform to global economic standards.



The EEU is thus now operating within the parameters of the WTO. What remains to be seen is if there is a bigger or more politically-motivated strategy behind Russia's cooperation. Put another way – how does this affect the regional economic strategy of Russia's so-called privileged area of influence? Is Kazakhstan moving away from the regional fold and into independence (or interdependence) in the global market?

The EEU is thus now operating within the parameters of the WTO. What remains to be seen is if there is a bigger or more politically-motivated strategy behind Russia's cooperation. Put another way – how does this affect the regional economic strategy of Russia's so-called privileged area of influence? Is Kazakhstan moving away from the regional fold and into independence (or interdependence) in the global market?

This is not necessarily a bad thing. Indeed, it is quite a normal thing when considering international political economy. But there are both acceptable ways of achieving those advantages or privileges and non-constructive ways. In this case, a win for WTO liberal institutionalism is a sign that both sanctions and the regional economic landscape have limited Russia's influence and ability to project power arbitrarily. Russia can either adapt to that reality and incorporate itself better into that changing landscape or problematically try to fight such change. Time will tell exactly how that plays out.

To turn to Kazakhstan's strategic outlook, however, WTO membership represents not only a win for Nazarbayev's ambitions, but for Kazakhstan's potential as a serious player on the international stage. Being the strongest economy of the former Soviet states but also quite literally surrounded by great and regional powers, Kazakhstan has been unable so far to cast a long geopolitical shadow in any direction. I expect Kazakhstan to gradually fill this opportunity of potential by trying to expand its own capacity and in so doing drafting more of an independent, rather than subservient, strategy to its large imposing neighbor to the North. Hopefully, Kazakhstan will carve out that new role without incurring a heavy price militarily or in terms of new economic regional conflict. So congratulations, Kazakhstan, on the end of your 20-year odyssey. Here is to hoping a WTO with Kazakhstan turns into a win-win-win for all sides: Kazakhstan, Central Asia, and the global community.



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EXPERIENCE
OPINION
UNDERSTANDING**



REMAINING ROGUE?

**IRAN AND THE
CASPIAN CONSEQUENCES
OF THE JCPOA**

ANDY DEAHN

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He is currently employed as a Field Service Engineer at the Sierra Nevada Corporation (SNC) providing aerial surveillance and intelligence analysis for the Department of Defense throughout various worldwide locations. He had previously worked as Special Tactics-Tactical Air Control Party member in the U.S. Air Force supporting Army Special Forces ground teams as a Joint Terminal Attack Controller.

Could the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) create a pathway toward democracy in the Islamic Republic of Iran or is the United States investing in a nation whose political portfolio has continually displayed a diminishing return? We know that democratic nations tend to be less willing to engage in conflict and are generally more cooperative in the realm of international relations. Moreover, democratic nations tend to be economically independent and more developed, and are more likely to hold alliances with other nations. While this is political theory, there is a significant amount of weight behind its importance. So how could the JCPOA lead to the promotion of democracy within Iran and the greater Caspian Region?

If we take the above-mentioned political theory of increased cooperation among democratic states and apply it to the diverse political environment of the Caspian region we observe a series of rivalries exacerbated by political, economic, and religious ideologies that have remained as relics of the Soviet Era.

Take, for example, the nations of Iran and Azerbaijan. Iran is a nation whose political structure follows that of a theocracy, which allows for a single “Supreme Leader” to exercise total ideological and political control throughout a system dominated by clerics who manage every function of the state. Iran is home to the world’s largest population of Shi’a Muslims, with its northern neighbor, Azerbaijan, home to the second largest. Due to their contiguity these two countries share a mutual past and hold common links between their cultures. Despite this common culture—which should be a strong element for any relationship—the two nations are stuck in a continual paradox of competition. The reasoning behind this competition lies in the Islamic Republic of Iran’s ideologically-motivated foreign and domestic agenda, where its version of Shia Islam influences all aspects of political, social, and economic life.

COULD THE AGREEMENT ROUSE A PATHWAY TO DEMOCRATIC PROMOTION WITHIN IRAN OR IS THE DEAL SIMPLY A DISTRACTION THAT HOLDS THE POTENTIAL TO CREATE MORE INSTABILITY IN BOTH THE CASPIAN REGION AND THE MIDDLE EAST?

Unlike Iran, which has observed multiple economic sanctions from the international community, Azerbaijan has been the recipient of over \$967 million in U.S. foreign aid. The Obama administration has stated that U.S. assistance to Azerbaijan is to develop democratic institutions and civil society; support the growth of economic sectors not related to oil; strengthen the interoperability of the nation’s armed forces with NATO;

as well as increase maritime border security, combat terrorism, eliminate corruption, and prevent the growth of transnational crime. After the September 2001 terrorist attacks, Azerbaijan allowed U.S. over-flight of its airspace, as well as approved numerous landings and refueling operations at Baku’s civilian airport to assist coalition military operations occurring in Afghanistan.

It was the threat of an emerging common enemy—global terrorism—that created a new positive relationship between the two nations, regardless of cultural differences and/or political structures.

These efforts have later become scrutinized by mainly Iran and Russia—the other major super power in the region—which signed a political declaration barring foreign militaries from having a presence in the Caspian Sea region.

This is a geostrategic attempt on behalf of Iran and Russia to prevent Western influence in the smaller states making up the region. This is because Western support would undoubtedly come in the form of developing the trans-Caspian pipeline, a move that would diversify other littoral states’ (specifically Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan) energy dependence and break the monopoly of Russia’s exports of natural gas to European countries. Moreover, Tehran may observe a Western presence in the Caspian Basin as an attempt to place more pressure on its long-term geostrategic ambitions, including the nuclear issue.

The international isolation of economic sanctions placed upon Iran by the United States and European Union (EU) severely crippled its petroleum-dependent economy. After decades of failing economic policies driven by religious ideology, Iran is now ranked last out of fifteen countries in the Middle East-North Africa (MENA) region.



While religious beliefs are a cultural trait and should be embraced with deep conviction by any believer, Iran's failure to separate religious propaganda from economic, political, and social realities has fueled this decline. Moreover, these failures have impacted not just Iran, but also the bordering states within the Caspian Region, with cascade effects throughout the MENA Region. The JCPOA would undoubtedly lead to socio-economic developments within Iran and create new dynamics--intentional or not--for the Caspian region. Despite the controversy surrounding the nuclear deal, it is these resultant economic developments that could possibly create a pathway to democracy within Iran.

However, when Iran has remained the world's largest state sponsor of terrorism despite the crippling sanctions, which seem to have had little effect on quelling Iranian support, can Iran be trusted to not utilize its JCPOA-inspired economic advancement to fund or equip terror organizations more effectively?

Iran has previously deceived and defied world powers as well as covertly constructed nuclear facilities throughout the last two decades. And while Iranian leadership declared these nuclear pursuits peaceful, its disregard for democratic processes and cooperation with the international community earned it the label of rogue nation.



I think the question that needs to be asked is whether the JCPOA will be ultimately hopeful diplomacy or political folly? Is the U.S. allowing a rogue state to increase its use of proxy forces to build regional hegemony or is it leading said regime out of its 'roguishness'?

The JCPOA has seen divided support among the political elites of both the U.S. and Iran. So could the agreement rouse a pathway to democratic promotion within Iran or is the deal simply a distraction that holds the potential to create more instability in both the Caspian region and the Middle East? I believe there is a possibility of democracy within Iran because of two hopeful dynamics. First, the historical and religious commonalities shared between Azerbaijan and Iran and the established partnership between the U.S. and Azerbaijan prove that democratic processes can gain ground even in a radically ideological nation.

Second, if the agreement is approved by the U.S. Congress, the socio-economic developments that will arise from the lifting of sanctions and the economic opportunities for Iranian citizens will likely produce both social and political change, mostly from a bottom-up approach that is from the citizens themselves.

Acceptance of the JCPOA could possibly establish a pathway to renewed relations with the hopeful prospect of promoting democracy within Iran, while a Congressional rejection could aggravate historical grievances due to economic and political isolation. While either outcome will not be zero-sum in nature, the regional dynamics in trade, terrorism, and energy will be dramatically shaped through the consequential shifts in power. These shifts could either exacerbate the paradox of continual competition as observed in the Iranian-Azerbaijani model or lead to the acceptance of democratic processes through socio-economic developments within Iran. For now only time will tell if Iran will continue to be an isolated nation or if constructive actions can create new American engagement, proving the JCPOA was a positive investment.

THE 10 MOST IMPORTANT THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW ON CASPIAN SEA REGION

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