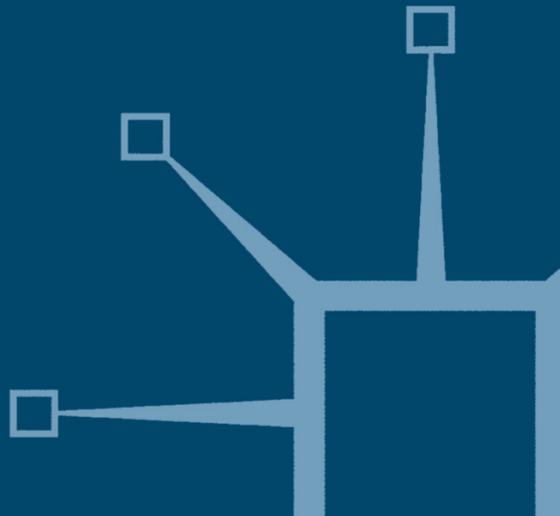


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Russia and the Challengers

Russian Alignment with China, Iran, and
Iraq in the Unipolar Era

Helen Belopolsky



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Russian Alignment with China, Iran, and
Iraq in the Unipolar Era

Helen Belopolsky

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For my family

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List of Abbreviations

| | |
|--------------|--|
| ABM | Anti-Ballistic Missile |
| APEC | Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation |
| ARKARAB | Association of Russian Enterprises for Cooperation with Arab Countries |
| ASEAN | Association of Southeast Asian Nations |
| CBM | Confidence Building Measures |
| FSB | Russian Federal Security Service |
| GATT | General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade |
| IAEA | International Atomic Energy Agency |
| LDPR | Liberal Democratic Party of Russia |
| LITASCO | <i>Lukoil</i> International Trading and Supply Company |
| Minatom | Russian Ministry of Atomic Energy |
| Mintopenergo | Russian Ministry of Fuel and Energy |
| MTCR | Missile Technology Control Regime |
| NATO | North Atlantic Treaty Organization |
| NIKIET | Scientific Research and Design Institute of Power and Technology |
| NMD | National Missile Defence |
| NPT | Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty |
| OIC | Organization of the Islamic Conference |
| OSCE | Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe |
| SCO | Shanghai Cooperation Organization |
| UN | United Nations |
| WTO | World Trade Organization |

Introduction

Russian foreign policy experienced a dramatic shift in the mid-1990s. From a predominantly Western-oriented foreign policy, it embarked on a more diversified strategy. In the early 1990s, Russia's approach had been characterised by the rejection of the Soviet past. Such a high premium was placed on cooperation with the West that Russia relinquished many of its historic partnerships.¹ However, by mid-1993, the resolute turn to the West had been tempered by the move to a more reserved policy. One of the most noticeable aspects of this policy shift related to the diversification of Russia's alignments. Russia began to develop and expand cooperation with a number of key states, which had previously been marginalised in Russian foreign policy, as they were seen to be less than fully integrated members of the international community.² Consequently, far more emphasis was placed on a policy of active alignment³ with China, Iran, and Iraq. This book is concerned with Russian alignment policies, as they constitute a defining feature of the Russian foreign policy shift. It examines the period from 1992 to the start of 2006, focussing on the policy of active engagement with these states from the mid-1990s onwards.

Russian alignment patterns have been substantially overlooked as being of little consequence.⁴ Exceptions to this include a handful of academics who warn of the threat of Russian relations with 'rogue' states, but even then this issue has not been assessed in terms of a systematic analysis of the drivers of alignment.⁵ In contrast to much of the contemporary literature, this book does not focus on examining the history of post-Cold War Russian bilateral relations, as an end in itself. Rather, the goal of the analysis is to situate these developments in a larger context – that of Russian alignment policy. This topic has broader significance in at least three regards.

2 *Russia and the Challengers*

First, Russian engagement with 'challenger' states such as China, Iran, and Iraq was a symptom of a broader shift in Russian foreign policy in the mid-1990s.⁶ Nonetheless, Russia's active alignment policy was central to the shift. Second, Russian partnership diversification was highly indicative of the evolution of Russian foreign policy. Russia's policy towards 'challenger' states reflected the strategic reorientation of Russia. Third, analysis of Russian alignment policies throws revealing light on the array of linkages between self-perception, institutional arrangements, regional security concerns, and geopolitical aspirations of a state adjusting to decline in power and status.

Looking at partnership diversification is a particularly useful way in which to investigate the drivers of Russian foreign policy decision-making. In order to ascertain what factors have driven Russian alignment policy, four dimensions are isolated: economic, domestic security, regional, and global. The dynamic interplay of these drivers in Russian alignment with China, Iran, and Iraq is examined. In unpacking the issue of economic drivers of Russian policy, those individuals, ministries, and groups that spearheaded Russian foreign policy towards 'challenger' states in pursuit of economic advantage are assessed. Domestic security matters, in this particular context, are taken to mean issues relating to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Russian state. This dimension is valuable in analysing the manner in which Russian alignment policy was driven by attempts to ameliorate domestic threats to a weakening Russia. Russia's regional calculations are important in revealing the importance of Russia's Asia-Pacific and Middle Eastern aspirations in influencing Russian foreign policy. The final dimension is the global one. This dimension sheds light on the manner in which the United States influenced Russian alignment policy. The extent to which attempts to balance the United States drove Russian alignment policy in regard to 'challenger' states is considered.

The states examined all occupied a key place in Russia's relations with the Far Abroad. Russia recognised that these countries were seen by the United States as 'challengers' to American interests. On the surface, it would seem that Russian alignment policy in regard to these states suggests a strong connection with the United States. In fact, these particular cases were chosen in order to examine the extent to which the American factor interacted with Russian economic, domestic security, and regional objectives in driving Russian alignment policy. The concept of challengers used here is a new one. It refers to those states which in Russian perceptions are seen in Washington as posing political 'challenges' to American interests. America has been

extremely vocal about 'states of concern'. This, in turn, provided Russia with clear indications of states that would be the most useful partners with which to pursue Russian objectives in the light of American protestation.

At the theoretical level, various analyses have invoked differing appellations for states posing a challenge to the international order and the contemporary political hierarchy. From renegade or revolutionary⁷ to revisionist,⁸ paranoid and pariah states,⁹ each of these terms has sought to elucidate the manner in which particular states have attempted to alter the international status quo. These perspectives are normally associated with the neo-realist view that international politics exists in terms of more or less permanent structural tension between defenders of, and opponents to, the prevailing order. Challengers undertake foreign policies that endeavour to alter the existing international power distribution to their own advantage.¹⁰ Characteristics attributed to such states include involvement in illegal or secret activities with regard to proliferation of weapons of mass destruction; violence in their external relations; repression domestically; willingness to violate international norms and international law; involvement in terrorism abroad; anti-Western and especially anti-American rhetoric; opposition to the spread of democracy and market economies; and contempt for civilised norms.¹¹

One might be tempted to apply these labels to China, Iran, and Iraq. However, this would entail an examination of the 'rogue' nature of these states as well as the way the 'rogue' concept has come to be used in US political discourse which is outside the scope of this analysis. Here these states are examined in the context of Russian readings of American perceptions of them as challengers.

In both the rhetorical and the substantive senses, Russia was aware that the United States viewed these states through the lens of 'challengers' to American interests. The Pentagon set contingencies against such regional powers, ostensibly on the grounds that they might have or acquire hegemonic ambitions and develop weapons of mass destruction, which could pose a challenge to the United States.¹² Thus, capacity in addition to potentially malign intentions drew China, Iran, and Iraq into a group seen as potentially detrimental to American interests. The United States undertook practical steps against these states ranging from economic sanctions to political and military actions. Moreover, in the American discourse these states, especially Iran and Iraq, have been referred to as rogues, outlaws, mavericks, renegades, pariahs, backlash states, and even demons.¹³

4 *Russia and the Challengers*

It is necessary to differentiate between Russian perceptions of America's policy towards China, on the one hand, and Iran and Iraq on the other. The distinction here refers to Russia's comprehension of America's distinguishing between these states on the basis of potential versus actual threat. China was a state in ascendance in international politics. Though on the surface China appeared to be a status quo power, its increasing military might, growing political influence, and economic policies posed a nascent challenge to American preponderance. Moreover, a number of Chinese establishment figures claimed that the rise of China was natural and inevitable. They contended that China was merely regaining an international status lost in the past, thereby restoring justice.¹⁴ American perceptions of the Chinese 'challenger' have been framed against this background.

Iraq and Iran were seen by the United States to more clearly exhibit 'challenger' tendencies in their policies through territorial or religious expansion, opposition to the West, and disgruntlement with the contemporary distribution of power. Iran and Iraq have held prominent roles in much of America's rhetoric concerning 'rogue' states. America consistently expressed concern over Iraq's 'challenge' to the international system following Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1991. American insistence on ridding Iraq of the dictatorial Hussein regime and preventing the development of weapons of mass destruction, which eventually led to the invasion of Iraq and the overthrow and execution of Saddam Hussein, was justified on the basis of this vague 'rogue' threat.

Washington also rather persistently referred to Iran as illegitimate. With the Iranian revolution and the ascent of the Ayatollah Khomeini to leadership, Iran presented a vocal challenge to the international distribution of power. It commenced with a campaign against the West, calling the United States the 'Great Satan' for its values, and sanctioning terrorist activities. Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Khomeini's successor as Iran's religious leader, and his backers continued to jail dissidents, stifle reform, and hold a hard-line stance against the United States and other Western nations. Russia would be unlikely to concur with American assessments of these states given its different historical relationships and strategic interests. However, Russia was fully cognizant of Washington's perceptions.

Numerous works have cited the events of September 11, 2001, signifying a colossal shift in Russia's relations with the United States; this book takes a different approach. The aftermath of September 11 and American political and military interventionism were extensions of the trends Russian foreign policy-makers had already recognised. As a

result, the slight improvement in relations in the direct aftermath of September 11 and the eventual cooling of relations can be viewed as the natural dance of diplomacy rather than a momentous shift.

Approaches

There is no single theoretical approach capable of explaining the nuanced Russian pattern of alignment with 'challenger' states. This book is not concerned with testing the utility of a particular theoretical construct on Russian behaviour; rather it uses the approaches as a basis with which to analyse which are most appropriate in shedding light on particular relationships and specific time periods. There are four approaches which have the potential to shed light on the evolution of Russia's relations with 'challenger' states: alliance theory/balance of power, social constructivism, economic neo-liberalism, and governmental politics.

A balance of power/alliance theory approach can illuminate Russian reasoning for pursuing relations with 'challenger' states in three ways. First, it speaks to why Russia would align. Each actor in the international system has an overriding interest in its own survival. There is near agreement that alliances are driven by expediency rather than ideology or values, that their primary motivation is to enhance state security in the face of some immediate or future external threat. In this view, states seek alliances primarily to enhance their capabilities through combination with others.¹⁵ Liska's aphorism that 'alliances are against and only derivatively for, someone or something' which implies that relations with allies and adversaries are inseparable¹⁶ holds particular significance in the Russian case. Furthermore, common to the various versions of balance of power theory is the prediction that weaker states will form alliances to oppose stronger powers.¹⁷ This work uses alliance theory in order to gain an understanding of how the changing distribution of power in the international system would condition Russian alignment strategies.

Second, it unpacks the concept of threat, which influences a state's alliance decisions. Stephen Walt introduces the concept of balance of threat which asserts that rather than allying in response to power alone, it is more accurate to say that states will ally with or against the most threatening power. Walt identifies four types of threat: (i) aggregate power; (ii) proximity; (iii) offensive capability; and (iv) offensive intentions.¹⁸ Alliance theory elucidates the manner in which Russia's perception of intent is likely to play a role in Russian alliance choices.¹⁹ This is important in understanding Russia's approach to the United

States and also in unpacking regional drivers of Russian policy. Certainly, Russian alignment policy can be understood in part through attempts to diminish security threats posed by China and Iran as well as the reigning American hegemony.

Third, alliance theory makes clear a state's alliance options. States have the option of balancing or bandwagoning. Balancing is alignment against the threatening power. Bandwagoning refers to alignment with the dominant power. Walt argues that states form alliances primarily to balance against other states, and that bandwagoning behaviour is relatively rare.²⁰ Alliance theory can shed light on the particular alignment strategies Russia has undertaken at various points in its post-Soviet foreign policy development. On the surface, it seems that Russia has chosen at different points the paths of bandwagoning and balancing.

According to alliance theory, Russia would have an interest in preventing any other actor from dominating the system.²¹ The system specifies the degree of the perceived external security threat, the availability of international allies, the nature of the security guarantees and economic or military resources that allies might provide, and the autonomy costs that must be sacrificed in return.²²

The utility of alliance theory is suggested by the repeated use of realist terms and approaches in Russian foreign policy. Concepts of 'balancing'²³ and 'leverage'²⁴ were frequently used with regard to 'challenger' states and their use in the Russian–American relationship.²⁵ From statements by Boris Yeltsin and Yevgeni Primakov to declarations in bilateral agreements and Russian security concepts, balance of power terms were often present.²⁶ Thus, it is possible to assert that Russian policy-makers seemed to view the world in zero-sum, balance of power terms. Even in non-subjective ways, it is possible to identify alignments as responses to negative developments in the international system. For example, Russia used its relations with 'challenger' states to demonstrate opposition to such occurrences as the bombing of Kosovo, NATO expansion, and abrogation of the ABM Treaty.

This analysis looks at multi-dimensional partnerships and not at the kind of military or security alliances which are examined in alliance theory. Alliance theory is a helpful tool in understanding Russian actions but remains limited in its usefulness. It is incapable of explaining issues concerning the timing of policy shifts or the particular idiosyncrasies associated with the evolution of the Russian polity in the early post-Soviet period which have impacted on decision-making. Russian policy was also influenced by the evolution of notions of identity within Russia in the post-Cold War period. Here, the social constructivist

approach might prove helpful. There is, however, no clear-cut division between the two theoretical approaches. Threat perception cannot be clearly understood in the absence of an understanding of identity. As such, social constructivism contends that decisions of states to cooperate or compete respond to the extent to which and the manner in which the self is identified with the other.²⁷ Therefore, social constructivist thought can contribute to the utility of alliance theory's analysis.

Social constructivism is able to shed light on the interaction between identity and foreign policy as well as the way in which role conceptions shaped by international realities impact on foreign policy-making. Instead of taking the state for granted and assuming that it simply seeks to survive, constructivists regard the interests and identities of states as a highly malleable product of specific historical processes.²⁸ From a constructivist perspective, the central issue is how different groups conceive of their identities and interests which are produced by interactions, institutions, norms, and cultures.

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, which had for so long shaped Russian culture, left an identity vacuum in many senses. Russians were forced to engage in a redefinition of the state. There were momentous challenges to beliefs about the Russian nation, about other nations, and about the nature of the relationships that existed or should exist between Russia and other actors in the international arena.²⁹ The debates in Russian society about where Russia belonged and what it was to be were not a new phenomenon, rather they continued from as early as the eighteenth century.

According to constructivist analysis, the *underlying assumptions embedded in national history and myth change slowly over time as political leaders reinterpret them and external and internal developments reshape them.*³⁰ Structural change, or cultural change, occurs when actors redefine who they are and what they want.³¹ Nonetheless, the institutionalisation of national identity tends to make identity constructions relatively resistant to change. It reinforces certain practices and rules of behaviour which explain and legitimise particular identity constructions.³² Given the tumultuous nature of the post-Soviet period for Russian identity, social constructivism can reveal the manner in which changing conceptions of Russian identity impacted on Russian alignment policy. The utility of social constructivism is suggested by numerous official statements demanding Russia's treatment as a great power on the basis of what was often described as its rich history, culture, and peoples.³³

In social constructivist terms, foreign policy-makers are highly influenced by role conceptions, which are sets of norms expressing

expected foreign policy behaviour and action orientation.³⁴ Role conceptions can be understood as a 'road map' for foreign policy-makers to facilitate an understanding of complex political realities.³⁵

Thus, Russian foreign policy-makers may have defined the directions of Russian policy in response to expectations premised on Russia's previous interactions with the international environment.³⁶ Russia's early promulgation of a largely Western foreign policy resulted in increasing domestic pressures centred on a rejection of a purely European path for Russian foreign policy. Certainly, a number of foreign policy declarations related to specific Russian customs, institutions, territory, myths, and rituals.³⁷ As a consequence of the articulation and institutionalisation of these concepts in the political culture, foreign policy-makers may have interpreted the political reality through this particular prism.³⁸ This corresponds with the 'grand strategy' interpretation of foreign policy – that foreign policy is about national identity itself, the core elements of sovereignty it seeks to defend, the values it stands for and seeks to promote abroad.³⁹

A holistic conceptualisation of identity looks not only at the development of identity within the state but also how the international system sets the context for identity formation. State identities are affected by the international system, and those identities are in some ways constituted rather than just caused by the system.⁴⁰ This may be particularly relevant with regard to Russian claims of being forced into the role of 'junior partner' to the United States in the post-Cold War period.⁴¹

There are a number of constraints in the use of social constructivism which limit its utility. There exists a methodological problem of identifying the link between identity and foreign policy decisions. Comprehensively isolating the influence of identity, which is itself an evolving and nebulous concept, remains difficult. We now turn to another approach which can contribute to a more thorough analysis of Russian alignment patterns.

Economic neo-liberalism is helpful in shedding light on the importance of economic interests in driving Russian relations with 'challenger' states. The Russian economy underwent a dramatic decline with the transition from a Communist command economy to free-market capitalism. Russia saw a rapid destruction of the old economic system and the substitution of neo-liberalism. The results were dramatic. Russian Gross Domestic Product fell by approximately 12 per cent per year from 1992 to 1994, meaning that it shrunk by an estimated 45 per cent from 1991. Inflation skyrocketed to 2500 per cent in 1992 and 8 per cent of the workforce was unemployed.⁴²

By the end of 1997, Russia had achieved some progress. Inflation had been brought under control, the rouble stabilised, and an ambitious privatisation programme had transferred thousands of enterprises to private ownership. But in 1998, the Asian financial crisis seriously impacted on the recovery of the Russian economy, contributing to a sharp decline in Russia's earnings from oil exports and resulting in an exodus of foreign investment. Matters came to a head in August 1998 when the Russian government announced a devaluation of the rouble, debt defaults, and a bank bailout. Since that time, Vladimir Putin has undertaken significant actions to place the economy on a more stable footing.⁴³

Economic neo-liberalism is able to elucidate important economic factors driving Russia's alignment with China, Iran, and Iraq. This approach suggests that the optimal means of achieving economic prosperity for all is greater openness to international trade and investment.⁴⁴ Economic neo-liberalism would expect Russian economic actors to seek to maximise their commercial advantages through rational calculations. In this manner, it is able to highlight the economic and commercial advantages to be gained through engagement with 'challenger' states. Given Russia's competitive economic advantage in China, Iran, and Iraq, neo-liberalism would predict that Russia's approach would be guided by desires to consolidate its position in markets which had yet to be overrun by Western competitors. Moreover, neo-liberalism would be able to explain why both the state and important Russian economic actors sought to break down barriers to trade in order to pursue their economic advantage in these states.⁴⁵ This was especially salient, given the potentially temporary advantage Russia held in these states against future Western challenges.⁴⁶

The role of economic actors in influencing foreign policy is also significant in neo-liberal terms. The economists of the early nineteenth century insisted on the primacy of self-interest and incentives as motivating forces for economic actors which would lead to perfect competition.⁴⁷ In the Russian case, economic liberalism demonstrates how the evolution of political structures saw foreign policy decision-making become influenced by economic actors pursuing their own interests.⁴⁸ The capacity for economic influence on Russian foreign policy is intimately linked with the evolution of Russian political structures. Thus, we turn to our final approach, that of governmental politics.

The governmental politics model illuminates the manner in which the institutional context impacts on foreign policy-making. This approach conceives of the government neither as a unitary agent nor

as a conglomeration of organisations, but rather as a number of individual players, bargaining for position and power. Organisational goals and interests are intermingled with personal interests.⁴⁹ Consequently, the decisions and actions of governments are the result of compromise, conflict, and confusion among officials with diverse interests and unequal influence.⁵⁰ The instability prevalent within the foreign policy decision-making system for much of the Yeltsin period facilitated such bargaining and conflict within government.⁵¹ The governmental politics approach is able to elucidate how inconsistencies in Russian foreign policy may have resulted from interaction and conflict within government agencies.⁵²

The lack of a hierarchy within the Russian foreign policy-making bureaucracy permitted those sectors interested in relations with 'challenger' states to have a disproportionate influence on policy. This approach asserts that foreign policy decisions are made as a result of a process which benefits those with bargaining advantages. Bargaining advantages include formal authority and responsibility, actual control over resources, expertise, control of information, the ability to affect other players' objectives, and access to players who have bargaining advantages.⁵³ Bargaining is conducted through action channels which are regularised means of taking governmental action. The rules of the game come from various statutes, court interpretations, executive orders, conventions, and even culture.⁵⁴ These regularised action channels were limited in the Russian case, especially in the early days when bureaucracy and hierarchy were still being restructured. However, increasingly, those with interests in particular alignments, especially those with economic interests, came to gain greater influence on Russian policy towards 'challenger' states.

Kozak and Keagle contribute to the literature on governmental politics by integrating groups that influence policy outside the government structure. These include lobby groups, citizen's coalitions, public pressure groups, and so on. There are strong ties and mutually beneficial relationships between political actors and clientele groups.⁵⁵ By maintaining support for the governmental structure, the clientele groups gain a role in policy-making.⁵⁶

There is little doubt that important economic interests were closely linked with the interests of particular government ministries within Russia. One of the central facets of Russia's economic transition was the emergence of a small group of powerful industrialists commonly referred to as oligarchs. These individuals and their financial and financial-industrial corporations were one of the most influential facets

of the national economy. The evolution of the Russian political system ensured that these groups had strong influence over government policy, most overtly under Yeltsin's regime. Cooperation between the state and the financial oligarchs meant that decisions were taken based on mutual agreement, and decisions were put into action to the mutual benefit of both sides not necessarily to Russia's benefit.⁵⁷

Methodology

This work is by no means intended as a comprehensive analysis of bilateral relations between Russia and 'challenger' states. It is necessary to surrender a certain amount of comprehensiveness in historical narration for a broader understanding of the patterns of development in Russian alignment strategy. This analysis investigates Russian bilateral relations with a number of different states possessing 'challenger' tendencies. These cases are used as studies of more general trends within Russian foreign policy.⁵⁸

The states selected are critical to any investigation of the diversification of Russian foreign policy in the mid-1990s. The three 'challenger' states with which Russia has pursued the most vigorous relations are (i) China, (ii) Iran, and (iii) Iraq. China falls into one category and the other states into a second. This is necessary not only due to the difference in Russian understandings of American perceptions of China's challenge but also because of China's greater potential challenge. Furthermore, China is a different case because of its size, geostrategic importance, and depth of relations with Russia. The other countries are considered within a second group. Both Iran and Iraq posed little true military or political threat to the United States, notwithstanding claims of their nuclear capabilities; however, they were seen as states with the desire and ability to threaten American interests. Though their consequence may vary both within Russian foreign policy and in terms of the policy responses to them, their relevance lies in their ability to reflect Russian foreign policy strategy. The choice of cases offers greater opportunities for comparison between similar types of alignment but controls for size and depth of relations.

The choice of cases was influenced by a desire to examine alignment rather than merely one-dimensional relations. Thus, the particular cases chosen exhibit more than an orientation on Russia's part, but less than full alliance. These states were chosen because of Russia's patterned and regularised set of relations with them over time. A number of alternative cases could have been chosen including Libya, Syria, and Cuba.

These cases posed problems due to the absence of alignment along all of the dimensions examined as well as the paucity of literature, which would have made a thorough study nearly impossible. Though this study assesses the political nature of these relationships, it is impossible to divorce political partnership from economic, security, or military relations.

The book is divided into two sections. Part I addresses the Russian context while the second deals with the cases chosen. The purpose of this division is to first set the context of Russian policy-making and then to delve into the specific circumstances surrounding decisions to align in each case. Chapter 1 provides a broad perspective on the identity debates which shaped the Russian political milieu. It is divided into three sections. The first investigates the Russian debate over identity delving into the manner in which the Eurasianist versus Atlanticist debate coloured Russia's decision to align with 'challenger' states. The second section unpacks the concept of Russian role perceptions and considers how Russia's initial anticipations about the role it was to play in the international system gave way to attempts to use 'challenger' states to entrench a great power position for itself. The final section examines Russia's perceptions of the development of the international system and the manner in which these interacted with Russian alignment policy.

Chapter 2 examines the institutional context. It provides a brief examination of the institutional landscape in which Russian foreign policy has been framed. It then goes on to look at the interplay of various actors in regard to each state demonstrating how the institutional context influenced Russian engagement with these states. The final section of this chapter investigates the broader trends across countries to consider the impact of particular individuals, ministries, and economic groups in driving Russian alignment policy.

Part II (Chapters 3, 4, and 5) investigates the development of Russian bilateral relations with China, Iran, and Iraq respectively from 1992 to 2006. These chapters examine the interplay of four factors driving Russian relations: (i) economics, (ii) domestic security, (iii) regional concerns, and (iv) global issues. In this manner, it gauges the relevance of different dimensions at various points in the development of post-Soviet Russian foreign policy, thereby illustrating the developing strategic interests of the Russian state.

The concluding chapter sums up the inferences made throughout the book identifying key findings.

Broader significance

There has been no systematic attempt by previous authors to address Russian alignment policy with 'challenger' states. Rather than focusing entirely on relations with the United States and Western Europe, Russia's focus turned to cooperation with a variety of states and regions. Active alignment reflected the changing strategic orientation of the new Russia. The increasing centrality of these alignments in Russian foreign policy necessitates a thorough investigation into its origins.

Russian alignment policy towards 'challenger' states signalled and was symptomatic of its broader foreign policy actions. Certainly, Russia's move from a policy of largely bandwagoning to one premised increasingly on balancing had consequences for Russia's ability to effectively integrate into and engage the international system.

This work also has broader implications for international relations analysis. Much of the literature on alliance formation offers security-based accounts premised on issues of threat and threat perception. This work provides both a broader conceptualisation of partnership through its examination of alignment-formation and a more expansive range of explanatory variables in understanding the origins of alignments. In so doing, it shows how multi-dimensional approaches can be useful in the analysis of alignment policy. Alignment is not simply a lesser version of alliance. Rather, it is a fundamentally different concept with discrete foundations.

With the end of bipolar conflict and the emergence of unipolarity, the discipline of international relations has increasingly had to take account of new types of relationships between nation-states. Traditional alliances have given way to more varied and nuanced linkages. Consequently, security issues which might have had the capacity to explain why states align are not wholly capable of shedding light on the origins of contemporary alignments. For this reason, this model has been provided with which to examine these qualitatively different types of relations. This work offers an examination of the linkages between self-perception, institutional arrangements, regional security concerns, and geopolitical aspirations of a state adjusting to decline in power and status.

1

Perception and Misperception: Russia Looking Inward and Out

The realm of ideas and perceptions has been critical in shaping Russian foreign policy in the post-Soviet period. What emerges when one looks inside post-Soviet Russia is a picture of a state in the throes of transition, simultaneously asking essential questions about what it was, what it would be, and what system of relations it was to join.⁵⁹ Constructivist theory provides insight into the manner in which answers to these questions influenced foreign policy-making. Constructivism views ideas and identities not as tangential but central to the way that states engage the international system.⁶⁰

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, which had for so long shaped Russian political culture, left an identity vacuum of sorts which was filled with a foreign policy premised on almost unconditional Westernism.⁶¹ This approach, which pervaded early post-Soviet Russian foreign policy, was characterised by an acute emphasis on relations with the United States and Europe to the virtual exclusion of Russian historic partnerships with Eastern states or even the states of the Near Abroad. The aim of this new policy direction was largely the rejection of Soviet values and structures.⁶² The shift in the mid-1990s towards a more diversified foreign policy indicated that identity constructs had failed to fundamentally change in the short period since the end of the Soviet Union.⁶³

An examination of perceptions and ideas is instrumental to understanding the change in Russian alignment policy in the mid-1990s. First, this chapter demonstrates how conceptions of Russian identity impacted on Russian alignment policy. The re-emergence of the debate between Eurasianists and Atlanticists within Russia reflected a discomfort with the early post-Soviet Western inclination. According to numerous policy-makers and pundits, Russia's position made it unique

and necessitated a diversified foreign policy. As a consequence of the articulation and institutionalisation of these concepts, foreign policy-makers had to interpret the political reality through this particular prism.⁶⁴ The Eurasian approach to foreign policy united democrats, Communists, and nationalists and became a legitimising principle of the regime.⁶⁵ The consolidation of Russian relations with 'challenger' states became a vital part of this redefinition. If Russia was to be Eurasian, it had to re-engage those states with which it had all but abandoned relations in the early post-Soviet period.

A second important goal of this chapter is to examine how Russian foreign policy-makers were influenced by role conceptions, which are sets of norms expressing expected foreign policy behaviour.⁶⁶ The perceptions of Russian foreign policy-makers in the early post-Soviet period were shaped by the expectations that Russia's role would remain largely unchanged. Russia had retained its territory, much of its population, and its enormous potential. Thus, Russian foreign policy-makers defined the directions of Russian policy based on Russia's previous interactions with the international environment.⁶⁷ The learning curve for Russia was rather steep, and many of the assumptions held at the outset of what Russia's role was were to be proved false.

Certainly, perceptions of Russia abroad had changed. By the mid-1990s, it seemed to numerous Russian policy-makers that Russia was no longer being treated as an equal. Increasingly, Russia rejected the 'junior partner' role to which it felt itself being relegated.⁶⁸ Consequently, it came to demand treatment as a great power.⁶⁹ Russia increasingly came to use its relations with China, Iran, and Iraq in the light of challenges to its status.

The third factor that significantly influenced Russian alignment policy was that of Russian perceptions of the international system. By the mid-1990s, Russia regarded with grave concern the evolution of the post-Cold War international system. An international order premised on American hegemony and unipolarity would inevitably exclude Russia. Unipolarity was identified as a problem that had to be surmounted or at the very least diminished. The construction of the multipolar ideal was largely a response to this situation. Rather than seeking direct confrontation with the United States, Russia attempted to create conditions which allowed it to resist American influence and ensure that Russia was seen as a significant international actor.⁷⁰ 'Challenger' states, especially China and Iran, were central to this Russian policy objective.

This chapter is divided into three sections, each a progressively broader appraisal of the context of Russian foreign policy-making. The

first investigates the Russian debate over identity, delving into the manner in which the Eurasianist/Atlanticist debate coloured Russia's decision to align with 'challenger' states. The second section unpacks the concept of Russian role perceptions and determines how Russia's initial perception of the role it was to play in the international system gave way to attempts to use 'challenger' states to entrench a great power position for itself. The final section examines Russia's perception of the development of the international system and the manner in which this interacted with Russian alignment policy.

The great identity debate

Russia is a country that for large swathes of its history has been mired in an essential quandary over its identity.⁷¹ Its eastward expansion beginning in the sixteenth century meant the incorporation of a third of the Asian landmass into what was culturally a European country.⁷² Its people, politicians, and politics have embodied this territory.⁷³ Russian political culture was, therefore, bound to be linked to its position straddling both Europe and Asia.⁷⁴ The debate over Russian identity is not merely an academic exercise in self-discovery. Where policy-makers have stood on the debate has been fundamental to how they have understood both Russia itself and the right path for Russia in the contemporary system of international relations.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the erstwhile debate over whether Russia was a Eurasian or European power re-emerged.⁷⁵ Disagreement over whether Russian foreign policy should reflect Russia's European or Eurasian characters reached a peak between 1992 and 1995 when the backlash against Russia's unreserved Western foreign policy was at its height. The debate can broadly be framed within the context of two camps: the Westernisers/liberals and the Eurasianists/national-patriots.⁷⁶ Each held that their view of Russia was an accurate interpretation of Russia's historical development and the necessary route to its future prosperity. The Westernisers or *zapadniki* have since the nineteenth century defined themselves in terms of Western values. Also referred to as Atlanticists, this approach focuses on a deeply embedded aspiration to join the West,⁷⁷ stressing that Russia should reintegrate into the world economy and the global system of international relations.⁷⁸

The *zapadniki* gained ground from Gorbachev's policy of 'new political thinking', with its emphasis on international accommodation in the early 1990s which spearheaded a re-conceptualisation of

Russian identity.⁷⁹ New thinking disavowed the view that capitalist and socialist states had intrinsically conflicting and zero-sum interests and that the existence of one constituted a threat to the security of the other.⁸⁰ Instead, new thinkers argued that security depended ultimately on good political relations with potential enemies; arming against them was more likely to increase the external danger than reduce it.⁸¹

In the early 1990s, the Atlanticist perspective stressed the importance of social and institutional factors in determining the quality of interstate relations and downplayed the significance of geography and primordial culture.⁸² The modern Atlanticists, democrats and proponents of market reform, had a vocal representative in Russia's first post-Soviet Foreign Minister, Andrei Kozyrev.⁸³ Atlanticists also occupied key positions in Yeltsin's circle. Besides Kozyrev, Prime Minister Yegor Gaidar, Secretary of State Gennady Burbulis, Minister of Communications Mikhail Poltoranin, and Deputy Foreign Ministers Vitaly Churkin, Georgy Kunadze, and Fedor Shelov-Kovedyaev were part of the Atlanticist grouping.⁸⁴

The early leaders of Russian foreign policy, President Yeltsin and Foreign Minister Kozyrev, sought to distance themselves from the positions of their predecessors (Gorbachev and Shevardnadze) and the terminology they had used. Nonetheless, they proceeded with a line highly comparable with that of their predecessors. It appeared to many that the vision of common security and human values inspired by Gorbachev's 'new thinking' could serve as the basis for Russian policy.⁸⁵ Kozyrev clearly indicated that his leadership saw strong common interests with the West, calling for integration and cooperation and identifying Russia's interests with the 'civilised' world and its values. The latest adaptation of new political thinking equated progress and prosperity with Europe.⁸⁶ This approach produced an initial Russian policy dominated by a wide-ranging reaction against traditional Soviet foreign policy doctrine,⁸⁷ premised on a swing towards virtually unconditional Westernism. This meant that Russian foreign policy was almost entirely focused on relations with the West at the expense of Russia's other relations.

Kozyrev promulgated the idea that Russia's future lay in its ability to be incorporated into Europe. In this period, the Russian Foreign Ministry was pursuing broad political cooperation with partners in the United Nations Security Council and was attempting to gain full participation in international economic institutions. Moreover, in line with Russia's Atlanticist inclinations, Russia sought to support Western initiatives to

impose United Nations (UN) sanctions against Russia's old allies Serbia, Iraq, and Libya.⁸⁸

The Western inclination in Russian foreign policy meant the demotion of China, Iran, and Iraq in its foreign policy priorities. If Russia was to truly be Western, then it had little use for the Soviet Union's dubious partners. Russia's relations with China were limited to mitigating potential border tensions. The Russian–Iranian relationship consisted of a few technological agreements responding to Iranian initiatives that were duly terminated in response to American pressures. The Iraqi case was particularly indicative of the Atlanticist turn in Russian foreign policy. Russia made a few meagre diplomatic attempts to prevent war from breaking out between the United States, its allies and Iraq over Kuwait in 1991.⁸⁹

At no point in its troubled tenure did the Kozyrev policy of integration with the West enjoy widespread support among Russian policy-makers and intellectuals. On the contrary, the policy was controversial from the start. In the early post-Soviet period, opposition was diffuse and disorganised. However, in response to Russia's early post-Soviet foreign policy, an opposition group slowly began to coalesce. This group, led by Sergei Stankevich, a Presidential adviser to Yeltsin, was made up of individuals from disparate ideological backgrounds who all believed that Russia had gone too far in its courting of the West and had to begin addressing questions of national interest.⁹⁰

Opposition to the Atlanticist approach coalesced under the auspices of the Eurasianists or *derzhavniki* who held very different perspectives on Russian identity to those of the Atlanticists. Though the debate between Westernisers and Eurasianists had raged since the time of Peter the Great, the *derzhavniki* concept drew heavily upon a philosophical school of 1920s Russian émigrés, who had tried to find a compromise with the Stalinist version of socialism. It stressed the uniqueness of Russia. Elgiz Pozdnyakov, a Russian authority in international relations theory, noted, 'The geopolitical location of Russia is not just unique (so is that of any state), it is truly fateful for both herself and the world.' Eurasianism implies a geographic frame of reference, primarily the Eurasian continent with other regions being of peripheral interest for Eurasianists.

Sergei Stankevich, an ardent Eurasianist stated, 'This land, in which East and West, North and South are united, is unique, and is perhaps the only one capable of harmoniously uniting many different voices in a historical symphony.'⁹¹ Russia, being situated between two civilisations, was a natural keeper of both a civilised equilibrium and a world

balance of power.⁹² Some Eurasianists suggested that Russia assume the role of a bridge connecting Europe and Asia, and many declared that the Kremlin concentrate its attention on the East.⁹³ This group was not anti-Western *per se*, but stressed the need to preserve Russia's freedom of action and the importance of defending Russia's national interests, even when this produced some discomfort in the United States or other Western countries.⁹⁴

Russia's unique history and geostrategic position ensured that Eurasianists were greatly concerned with Russia's status as a great power.⁹⁵ The Eurasianist security concept was premised on notions of national interest. According to Stankevich,

The national interests of any country are predetermined by geography, history, culture, ethnic composition, and political tradition. Between those fundamental interests that do not change at all and those that are always changing, there is a set of interests which reflect what may be called the 'national idea.' The national idea is a nation's self-identity. It is a very emotional topic; a subject concerning the changing course of a nation's history. It is not a scientific value system but a set of visualizations of the national past – and the national future.⁹⁶

Critics of early Russian foreign policy charged that the Russian government should stress the great power interests of the Russian state ensuring that Russia's entry into the civilised world community was not to be at the expense of Russia's national interests.⁹⁷ They accused the government, in its excessive concern for Western goodwill, of having neglected states that were especially important to Russia, such as China, India, South Korea, and Saudi Arabia. They contended that the pro-Western foreign policy had exacted a great price in terms of Russia's international standing, its autonomy, and its national interests.⁹⁸

As opposition mounted against the government's excessively liberal and pro-Western approach, Kozyrev bore the brunt of hostility.⁹⁹ However, the turning point came with the 1993 legislative elections, which resulted in increased support for Vladimir Zhirinovskiy's ill-named extremist Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR). This led many associated with the pro-Western policy to withdraw from government or move towards the Eurasianist group.¹⁰⁰ Thus, within only a couple of years of the collapse of the Soviet Union, there occurred a significant policy shift in Russia in which most elites agreed that Russia should

preserve its great power status in the form of a Eurasian state distinct from the West.¹⁰¹

This move towards a more Eurasianist foreign policy soon came to be reflected in foreign policy. In early 1993, at the time of a Presidential state visit to India, Yeltsin declared, 'the time for Russia's concentration on partnership with the West has come and gone. The recent series of visits to South Korea, China, and now India is indicative of the fact that we are moving away from a Western emphasis in Russian diplomacy.'¹⁰²

The lessons of the early 1990s had significant consequences for the evolution of Russian identity. There was a sense that the implementation of an almost entirely Western approach to Russian foreign policy was alien to a country located at the heart of Eurasia. Moreover, the policy premised on rejoining Western civilisation had paid few dividends. Russia saw the West providing insufficient financial support to its reforms, excluding it from a number of Western clubs, and taking advantage of Russian weakness. The anticipation of full inclusion into the Western world and partnership in the community of democratic states initially stimulating Russia's posture soon turned to disillusionment and resentment. Russia came to focus on a greater range of diplomatic encounters more in line with its Eurasian geographic position. An obvious option was to turn towards its neighbours and former allies. Thus, the rejection of unconditional Westernism brought about a new agenda focusing on states such as China, Iran, and Iraq.

This new Eurasian approach to foreign policy was truly inculcated with the ascension of Yevgeni Primakov to the position of Foreign Minister. In a move designed to signal the end of one era and the opening of another, on 5 January 1996, the Kremlin announced Kozyrev's resignation and the appointment of Yevgeni Primakov, an ardent Eurasianist, as Foreign Minister.¹⁰³ Primakov believed that Russia, like any great power, needed a diverse foreign policy cultivating strong ties not only with the West but also with China, India, Japan, and the countries of the Far and Middle East.¹⁰⁴

China began to occupy a more central role on both practical and rhetorical issues of domestic security and within the economic realm. Russia simultaneously pursued cooperation with the Middle East, which was especially significant given Primakov's marked interest in the region. He reinforced trends towards deepening ties with both Iran and Iraq at the expense of Russia's relations with Israel and the United States. Finally, Russia came to respond positively to Iraqi diplomatic initiatives seeking to reinvigorate Russian–Iraqi economic relations.

This shift has been pursued under President Putin. His foreign policy approach has been marked by the pursuit of a Eurasianist policy while simultaneously undertaking a policy which links Russia with European partners. This was particularly evidenced in the mid-2000s when Russia pursued a multi-vectored foreign policy based on maximising Russian interests through partnership with both the East and the West.

The evolution of the debate over Russian identity in the post-Cold War period resulted in an emphasis on Russia's unique history and geostrategic position, which necessitated a Russian rejection of a foreign policy path premised entirely on cooperation with the West. Russia thus chose the path of diversification, which meant engagement with 'challenger' states. This did not mean the rejection of cooperation with the West or the denial of Russia's European past. Rather, political pragmatism dictated that Russia remain pointedly looking both East and West to adequately reflect both Russia's past and its future.

Russia's post-Cold War role: the search for great powerhood

The successor of the Soviet Union was a state economically weakened, militarily in disarray, and politically unstable. Nonetheless, the Kremlin had few doubts that Russia's role in the post-Cold War international system should be influential. Roles are not merely ephemeral conceptions with little impact on behaviour. In fact, they are compound phenomena, created by the combination of an actor's biased understandings of what its behaviour should be (role conceptions), society's demands (role expectations), and the particular context in which the role is being acted out.¹⁰⁵ Thus, roles in the political context provide actors with a secure sense of identity. As such, interpretations of past and current experiences that the nation has with other countries, and the social and economic pressures that the nation perceives both from its citizens and from other countries, shape role conceptions.¹⁰⁶ In the Russian context, regardless of its contemporary decline, Russia wanted what it had had for centuries: great power and influence.

During the time in which states develop their roles, they also develop myths and institutions to protect them. Hence, even when major structural changes occur as they did with the collapse of the Soviet Union, the society could not completely discard and transform the remaining myths and institutions.¹⁰⁷ This was especially true of the foreign policy-making elites, many of whom had been retained from the Soviet period. Interestingly, and perhaps understandably, Russia's continued

claims of greatness proliferated precisely at a time when international and self-perception coincided in the diagnosis that its status, power, and influence in world affairs had declined.¹⁰⁸

The Russian state was compelled to set out a framework for its new role in the context of the evolving international system.¹⁰⁹ A consensus emerged and continues to exist within Russia with regard to its desire to be treated as one of the world's great powers and not merely in relation to its formal status in the UN.¹¹⁰ Russian claims to great power status could hardly be premised on its contemporary circumstances. Rather, Russian policy-makers contended that Russia's greatness lay in its many centuries of history, unique geopolitical position, adequate military might, and considerable technological and intellectual potential.¹¹¹ This potential necessitated Russian inclusion at the highest echelons of international decision-making. As Kozyrev described it, Russia, while in a period of transitional difficulty, retained the inherent characteristics of a great power.¹¹²

Increasingly, Russia was faced with the realisation that its great power status was under threat. Russia found the role it was permitted in the international system entirely unacceptable.¹¹³ Challenges to Russia's great power status can be separated into two categories: broad challenges to Russian influence and becoming America's junior partner. In the early post-Soviet period, Russia believed that the United States would support its unassailable position as a great power. American foreign policy statements and policies encouraged the notion that Russia remained a geopolitically important actor. However, gradually Russia was receiving neither the economic benefits of cooperation with the United States nor the influence due a great power. Thus, the Atlanticist approach was challenged as resembling, particularly at the outset, the posture of a country defeated in war.¹¹⁴ In addition, a number of American policies further disgruntled Russian decision-makers, clearly demonstrating Russia's inability to integrate into the Western-fold and influence the development of international affairs. Tensions were fuelled by North American Treaty Organization (NATO) expansion, American abrogation of the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty (ABM Treaty), and American indifference to Russian interests in the Balkans, the Caucasus, and the Caspian basin.¹¹⁵

The second challenge Russia perceived to its status was the sense that Russia was being forced into the role of junior partner to the United States. Yeltsin spoke with mounting force of American discrimination against Russia and attempts to force Russia into the role of a junior

partner.¹¹⁶ It is in this context that Russian foreign policy continued to move in the direction of demanding the maintenance of its role as one of the most influential states in the international system.¹¹⁷

Russia's problem was twofold. It was losing influence because of its declining political, military, and economic power and these conditions were augmented by the perception that 'a number of states [seek] to weaken Russia's positions in the political, economic, and military spheres'.¹¹⁸ Russia had ceded a number of its historic interests in exchange for promises of inclusion and assistance, which simply had not come to fruition. The fact that there was a disjuncture between the perception of great power status and the reality of Russia's declining power meant that Russia would have to determine a new approach to attaining its objectives.¹¹⁹

China was particularly important given its size, growing power, and influence in reinforcing Russian perceptions of itself as a great power. Primakov declared that friendship with China was 'indispensable to Russia, which resists the notion that there are winners and losers of the Cold War and that a unipolar world order should be created against Russian interests'.¹²⁰ Iran was also useful in raising Russia's profile. It was especially constructive in providing Russia with a means of retaining bargaining power in its relations with the United States as well as demonstrating Russian sovereignty and defiance. Russia's active participation in the series of Iraqi crises reinvigorated its place as a major diplomatic actor in international relations.

Russia no longer occupied the superpower position it had during the Cold War. Many indicators suggested that Russia had little right to be considered even a great power. Nonetheless, Russian perceptions dictated that Russia's role would be that of other great powers. These beliefs were soon to be challenged in the light of American foreign policy decisions. Russia's manner of reconciling these challenges was the use of 'challenger' states to pursue its great power aspirations. Given Russia's perception of itself as a great power, it intended to use its international alignments to reinforce Russian great power aspirations. Primakov lamented the initial Russian approach of attempting to smooth relations with the United States by ignoring historical partnerships.¹²¹ The reinvigoration of these partnerships served three purposes: it raised Russia's profile by demonstrating that Russia still possessed powerful friends over which it had influence; it provided greater authority in Russia's relations with the United States; and it indicated Russian defiance against American attempts to diminish its influence. By diversifying, Russia

sought to find a balance between Russian perceptions of its role in the international system and its treatment by great powers, especially the United States.

Perceptions of the post-Cold War order

Perceptions of Russia's rightful role in the emerging international system were intimately connected with understandings of how the post-Cold War international order was developing. Many in Moscow saw Russia's emergence as the successor to the Soviet Union as a great victory not for the United States but for Russia itself.¹²² Russian policy-makers felt that Russia had made an immense sacrifice in the name of general human interests, a new civilised and humane world order, and a common European home. This sacrifice was the abandonment of the Soviet Union and the Soviet bloc.¹²³ As such, there were no losers; there were only winners.

The resultant expectation was that Russia's contribution to international peace and security would be suitably understood and appreciated. What this meant in practical terms was that Russia would be welcomed into the community of democratic states as an equal. Ostensibly, the Cold War had ended, leading to the end of bloc politics. Russia would be one pole of power, and there would be no need for America to seek hegemony. Numerous Russian academics and political actors denied the hegemony of the United States following the end of the Cold War. They maintained that though America was a strong economic and military power, it was a power heavily reliant and dependant upon its allies.¹²⁴ Thus, it could not deem itself to be an independent centre of global leadership and had little right to act in that way. Kozyrev was so certain of this fact that he asserted, 'one thing is sufficiently clear: the international order in the twenty-first century will not be a *Pax Americana* or any other version of unipolar ... dominance'.¹²⁵

Russia accepted that the evolution of the international system was a process and likely a long-term progression. In the initial stages, relapses into attempts to create a structure of international relations based on one-sided solutions to key problems of world politics would likely remain strong.¹²⁶ Yet, Russia saw its role as providing firm opposition to any possible recurrences of imperialist manifestations in American foreign policy, or any efforts to turn the United States into the only superpower.¹²⁷ Russians still believed that Russia, as a great power, was responsible together with the other permanent members of the United Nations Security Council for maintaining world peace and security.¹²⁸

The Russian belief that the system would move towards a balanced playing field was rather myopic. Russian policy-makers soon came to identify unambiguous threats from the evolution of the international system. Numerous American claims emerged of the United States bringing about the end of the Cold War and subsequently seeking to institutionalise this victory and consolidate a geopolitical order beneficial to them.¹²⁹ Thus, Russia was faced with two corresponding problems in the development of the international system. First, the emergence of an America bent on hegemony which implied a unipolar world in which Russia possessed no pole. Despite the early reluctance of the Clinton administration to portray the United States as the 'world's policeman' the wars in the former Yugoslavia demonstrated to Russia America's more assertive foreign policy direction in the mid-1990s.¹³⁰ The American government sought American-led and directed collective security with the new democratic Russia to play the role of follower. Underpinning these policies would be the foundation of American power and leadership.¹³¹

This threat in itself was sufficiently daunting but when coupled with attempts by the United States to counter Russia's consolidation as an influential centre of the international system, the menace to Russian interests was clear. Russians saw American policies as attempting to reduce Russia's importance in the solution of key international problems and sideline Russian input into issues of concern to its populace.¹³² Former Deputy Secretary of State, Strobe Talbott contends, 'It has become increasingly apparent that the United States is not pursuing a policy of alliance, but rather one of renewed containment under a new guise.'¹³³

Russia was also highly concerned with the increasing movement towards unilateralism in American foreign policy. Numerous foreign policy thinkers in both Russia and the United States contend that there are pronounced tendencies in American political culture towards unilateralism and moralism.¹³⁴ The Bush administration's approach to foreign policy has only served to more deeply institutionalise unilateral action, disregarding the interests and perspectives of other states.¹³⁵ Russian policy-makers saw the system of international relations developing in such a way as to exclude Russian influence, while policies on the international agenda were increasingly touching on issues of concern to Russia.

Russia saw its role in the world order under threat. Russians were unwilling to cede their place in the halls of power given their history, but they were slowly being expelled. Notwithstanding, initial Russian hopes for the development of a more egalitarian international system,

Russia was forced to face reality. The near consensus in Moscow was that the proper response to encroaching American hegemony was the conscious and active construction of multipolarity.¹³⁶ Multipolarity was a concept consolidated under Foreign Minister Primakov.

Only in a multipolar system could Russia take its rightful place as a major international actor. To Russia, multipolarity meant continuing equality, influence, and stability.¹³⁷ It referred to the strengthening of the economic and political positions of a considerable number of states and their integration-oriented associations, as well as the improvement of mechanisms for multilateral control of international political, economic, financial, and informational processes.¹³⁸

Primakov viewed Russia's role as preventing a unipolar world dominated by a single superpower and supported the multipolarisation of the international system. Moreover, he saw Russia's role as a counterweight to the negative trends that were appearing in international affairs, opposing American attempts to dominate the situation.¹³⁹ Balancing behaviour is relational.¹⁴⁰ American foreign policy played a critical role in determining its timing and nature. If the United States was seen as imposing unilateral outcomes in situations of concern to great powers, the result would be a negative reaction to those policies, in the form of balancing behaviour.¹⁴¹ Criticism of unipolarity was a persistent theme in Russian political discourse before the Kosovo crisis; it became even more vocal after the NATO intervention had occurred.¹⁴²

The construction of multipolarity was largely a defensive measure. Rather than seeking direct confrontation with the United States, Russia attempted to create conditions which allowed it to resist American influence and protect traditional spheres of influence from American encroachment.¹⁴³ Multipolarity was a means of pursuing two objectives: allowing Russia to retain its self-perception as a great power and challenging the main threat to this, American preponderance. By promoting this multipolar model, Primakov was recognising not only that Russia's status as a great power was in jeopardy, but also its ability to respond to threats emanating from the United States.¹⁴⁴ A more diversified strategy of alignment gave Russia flexibility in its dealings with the outside world¹⁴⁵ at a time when its economic and military capabilities were seriously weakened.¹⁴⁶

'Challenger' states were useful in Russia's pursuit of multipolarity for a number of reasons. Primakov specifically and repeatedly sought to use the relationship with China to demonstrate that there were other states actively resisting the notion that a unipolar world order should be created.¹⁴⁷ These conceptions coalesced in April 1997 with the signing

of the Russian–Chinese Joint Declaration on a Multipolar World and the Establishment of a New World Order.¹⁴⁸ In a veiled reference to the United States, the declaration noted, ‘No country should seek hegemony, conduct a policy based on force and monopolise international affairs.’¹⁴⁹

Russia also used its relationships with ‘challenger’ states in its pursuit of multipolarity by way of constructing a challenge to American unilateralism. Russia and China came to view a number of significant international issues in the same way, which permitted them to speak with one voice. A number of these coinciding positions responded to American policies which both China and Russia found alarming, such as America’s policy on terrorism, the invasion of Iraq, and the threat of an American intervention in Iran.

Iran was a significant partner for Russia given its political inclinations and particularly hostile attitude towards the United States. Primakov declared that he intended to confront Washington with a demand for equal partnership by strengthening Moscow’s ties in the Middle East.¹⁵⁰ Likewise, he made clear that Russia had the option of increasing its Middle Eastern commitments if it were deliberately excluded from Europe.¹⁵¹

Finally, Iraq was especially important in pursuing Russian multipolar objectives. Russia’s multilateral approach to diplomacy in the Iraqi case demonstrated that Russia and other major powers were able to ally and oppose the United States, weakening the conception that the United States was an omnipotent hegemon.

Conclusions

The collapse of the Soviet Union brought forth many transformations, but also left much unchanged in the Russian polity. It would be unreasonable to assume that Russians could instantaneously adjust from being citizens of a superpower to members of a society in political, economic, and structural decline. How could Russian foreign policy simply contract to respond to the capabilities, or lack thereof, of the new Russia? Russian foreign policy-makers continued to demand the esteem and influence they saw as their entitlement as a great nation. Many of the beliefs and interests, legacies of Soviet times, had remained accepted norms of behaviour. Identity shapes the way states respond to developments. Russia had little doubt that it would remain a great and influential power in the evolving international system. However, identity also permits an understanding of the lessons learned within the foreign policy-making establishment and the resultant choices made.

Russia learned much from its initial policy decisions. It had rejected its past only to find itself removed of the vestiges of glory associated with this past. Russia could choose to accept these realities or alter its foreign policy in line with a more pragmatically oriented agenda focused on national interests, interests which continued to focus on issues of great power and security. Russia could not do this alone; it required the support of partners. Thus, improved relations with 'challenger' states were instrumental in facilitating a role corresponding with Russian self-perception which concomitantly led to the pursuit of an order in which Russia would have more influence. Gradually, 'challenger' states came to occupy a more important role in demonstrating Russia's Eurasian character, confirming Russia's great power status, and advocating Russia's version of a multipolar world. Thus, in many senses, Russian pursuit of alignment with 'challenger' states were conditioned by modern identity issues which arose from the vestiges of Soviet identity.

2

The Russian Institutional Context

Individuals, ministries, and groups within the Russian polity have been instrumental in shaping Russia's policy towards 'challenger' states in the post-Cold War period. This chapter assesses the priorities of the various actors in order to understand why Russian policies towards these states developed in the particular ways they did. Given the diversity of the cases assessed, one would imagine that the drivers of Russian policy would respond to varying strategic concerns.

The evolution of Russian alignment policy reflects broader patterns in Russian foreign policy-making. In the period between 1991 and 1996, Russia had no truly coordinated policy towards any of the 'challenger' states assessed in this study. First, there was a distinct lack of an institutional framework delineating the hierarchy of and horizontal links between government actors. Second, and related to the first, competing ministries and economic groups pursued incongruent policies. What resulted was a cacophony of voices within government and outside, ostensibly speaking for Russia. Almost all of these groups, for the purposes of rhetoric, tended to describe their interests as national.¹⁵² In this sense, the cases examined in this study did not radically differ from more general lines of Russian foreign policy in terms of institutional constraints.

Though the institutional context operated in similar ways towards these states, in examining the institutional interactions across countries, it is possible to identify distinctive patterns. First, given the salience of economic concerns and the sporadic attention of the Kremlin and Foreign Ministry towards 'challenger' states in the early post-Soviet period, economic groups had a considerable impact on Russian

engagement with these states. Economic interest groups were largely the vanguards of Russian policy. Consequently, economic groups were able to set the context of Russian relations with which political actors subsequently had to deal.

Second, Russia's approach to 'challenger' states underscores the interaction between private commercial and public economic interests. Given the difficulties in determining what was public and private in the Russian context, what emerged was a government often working in the interests of Russian business. Furthermore, the achievement of economic interaction with these states came to be tied to political means. This was particularly salient in the Iranian and Iraqi cases; government frequently had to intervene in defence of private and public commercial gain. For the most part, there was no conflict between private and public interests, especially during the Yeltsin period. Nonetheless, the importance of economic drivers of policy ensured that there was less room for state policy in Russia's relations with these states.

The relationship between government ministries and private economic groups is not unusual, even in Western states. However, what was remarkable in the Russian sense was the extent to which there was a blurring of the lines between public and private interests. Ministries were, in a sense, so deeply connected with their client groups such as the case of the military establishment and military-industrial complex, that it was difficult to ascertain where one ended and the other began. As coordination increased in Russian policy towards 'challenger' states, these connections were institutionalised through the formation of commissions bringing together Chinese, Iranian, and Iraqi governmental officials and Russian governmental and private commercial groups to formalise the relations.

Third, state priorities were developed largely independently of ministerial interests. This resulted in incongruities in Russian policy towards 'challenger' states. From Yeltsin's point of view, Iran and Iraq were part of Russia's overall relations with the United States. For example, Yeltsin was willing to trade off Russia's military technology and nuclear power interests with Iran for improved Russian-American cooperation. Yet, this contradicted and impeded the actions of ministries such as the Ministry of Atomic Energy (Minatom) and the Ministry of Defence which had been actively pursuing their own policies towards these states. This tallies with Yeltsin's approach to foreign policy in general which did not entail a high degree of strategic policy coordination.

Fourth, institutional interactions varied by period, which had an important impact on the conduct of relations towards 'challenger'

states. As previously mentioned, for much of the early post-Soviet period, with the exception of China, individual ministries pursuing their economic interests were largely responsible for formulating Russian policy towards these states. However, in times of crisis in Russian–American relations, the Kremlin and the Foreign Ministry took charge of these relations to provide increased coordination in Russian policy.

The various arguments of this chapter have been informed by the governmental politics approach. This approach posits that foreign policy decisions are made as a result of a process which benefits those with bargaining advantages and skill in using these advantages. Bargaining advantages include formal authority and responsibility, actual control over resources, expertise, control of information, the ability to affect other players' objectives, and access to players who have bargaining advantages. In the Russian case, the lack of a distinct hierarchy among the foreign policy-making bureaucracy for much of the post-Soviet period permitted those sectors concerned with relations with 'challenger' states to have a disproportionate influence on policy.

The governmental politics approach also unpacks the manner in which groups outside the governmental structure influence policy decisions. Consequently, it explains the manner in which strong and mutually beneficial ties between political actors and clientele groups can impact upon Russian alignment patterns.¹⁵³ This approach demonstrates how government agencies can form partnerships with various groups with similar interests within government and outside the governmental structure. Coalitions may include relevant outsiders, legislators, or lobbyists. In the Russian context, we can see how Russian policy towards 'challenger' states was influenced by the interactions between public and private, as well as the interaction between government ministries and their associated clients. The governmental politics approach is therefore able to shed light on a number of significant institutional constraints on Russian policy towards these states.

The following section provides a brief examination of the institutional landscape in which Russian foreign policy has been framed over the past decade. The second section of this chapter discusses the practical conduct of Russia's relations with China, Iran, and Iraq. It analyses the interplay of various actors towards each state. The final section sheds light on the broader trends across countries to uncover the impact of particular individuals, ministries, and economic groups in driving Russian alignment policy.

The Russian institutional landscape

Though Russia adopted many of the foreign policy-making institutions of the former Soviet Union as well as its personnel, there were significant differences which determined that Russian foreign policy would not merely be a replica of the Soviet Union's. Russia had to develop a new strategy corresponding to the new national interests of a democratic state. Initially, with the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russian foreign policy-making was guided by an amended Soviet-era constitution, seeking to accommodate new democratic institutions. However, its failure lay in its vagueness about the distribution of power between legislative and executive bodies as well as the relationship between the roles of the government and executive branches.¹⁵⁴

The 1993 Constitution was meant to create a coordinating mechanism for Russian foreign policy. In actuality, it mainly served to consolidate power under President Yeltsin. Thus, when asked in December 1993 who would be making Russian foreign policy, Yeltsin responded, 'Russia's foreign policy will be determined by the President.'¹⁵⁵ Under the new Constitution, Yeltsin was permitted to determine the basic guidelines of foreign policy, represent Russia in international relations, appoint diplomats and the Security Council, and conduct international negotiations. The new Constitution did little to clarify the division of executive authority between the Foreign Ministry and the President, and it encouraged the proliferation of Presidential structures and advisers.

This situation ensured that Russian foreign policy tended towards unpredictability and ineffectiveness. Russia continuously produced disjointed policy as a result of various institutions speaking on behalf of the government. This was exacerbated by Yeltsin's dependence on advisers who issued statements in his name and rarely coordinated their activities with either the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or the Security Council, established in 1992.¹⁵⁶ Moreover, Yeltsin was an unpredictable foreign policy actor prone to making foreign policy pronouncements with little or no consultation with other officials involved in the foreign policy-making process especially in the early post-Soviet period.

The Foreign Ministry was a victim of Yeltsin's centralisation of Russian foreign policy. After initial ambiguity about its role, Yeltsin decreed in 1992 that it would coordinate the foreign policy activities of other government agencies. However, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was a

battleground of foreign policy formation from 1990 through 1996. An important example of this was in March 1995, when Yeltsin's criticism of Kozyrev resulted in Yeltsin assuming control of the Ministry with the authority to appoint all Deputy Foreign Ministers. At the same time, Yeltsin enhanced the Ministry's powers by making it responsible for coordinating and controlling all governmental foreign policy actions. In reality, the President's consolidation of power ensured that the Foreign Ministry was often sidelined or subordinated.

Since no effective coordinating mechanism had been established to integrate policy, at times various government agencies undertook their own, often contradictory foreign policies, revealing little relationship to the policy of the President, which in turn, sometimes differed from the policy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Consequently, for much of the Yeltsin period, the 'power' ministries were able to engage in their own independent foreign policies. Thus, the Defence and Atomic Energy Ministries engaged in diplomacy, negotiation, and partnership towards their own interests.

The Duma also played a part in this fragmentation. Constraints on Parliament's ability to limit Yeltsin's foreign policy-making did not prevent the Duma from engaging in actions tantamount to foreign policy, going so far as to adopt resolutions which clearly contradicted official foreign policy. Although they were not binding, the confusion they caused had damaging effects on perceptions of Russian foreign policy abroad.

Under Vladimir Putin, the foreign policy-making process was increasingly centralised and coordinated. In contrast with the Yeltsin regime, Putin was able to bring a cohesion and balance to Russian foreign policy. Whereas governance was initially characterised by chaotic dealings between openly competing institutions and agencies, the bureaucratic atmosphere became one of calm and relative compliance.¹⁵⁷ Putin sought to clearly delineate between corporate and state interests. Consequently, there was a tighter nexus between the formulation and implementation of policy. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs was provided greater authority to manage the actions of various ministries.

The increased coordination of the Putin period reflected broader trends in Russian relations with 'challenger' states. The following section examines the manner in which the evolution of the institutional context impacted on the making of foreign policy towards 'challenger' states.

'Challenger' states and Russian foreign policy-making

Russian players in the Chinese context

Russia's relationship with China has been characterised by state-driven engagement. For the most part, state actors sought to deepen partnership with China both politically and economically. This differed from both the Iranian and the Iraqi cases, in which economic actors spearheaded engagement. At the political level, the state sought to institutionalise cooperation through agreements with China at the highest levels. However, the state was also instrumental in facilitating the entry of various Russian economic actors into China. There were repeated attempts by the state to bring economic relations to the same levels as political ties. The major actors influencing Russia's China policy can be divided into three main groups: executive (President, Presidential administration, Prime Minister); ministerial (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Fuel and Energy (Mintopenergo), Ministry of Defence, and the Minatom); and commercial (military-industrial complex, oil interests, and atomic energy interests).

The first groups to undertake cooperation with China laid the foundation for further relations. However, they were more accurately contending with the legacies of Soviet times. Yeltsin and the Foreign Ministry were keen to do away with disputes with China in order to prevent the emergence of an aggressive Chinese neighbour. Thus, early stages of cooperation sought to deal with border issues and illegal immigration.¹⁵⁸ However, Yeltsin and his administration were under increasing pressure from Russian industrial lobbies to create favourable conditions for economic collaboration with China. The Russian defence, atomic energy, and oil and gas industries were all keen to reap economic rewards in China. The government, including the President and the Foreign Ministry, sought to facilitate Russia's advantageous economic position in China.

The Russian military-industrial complex was quick off the mark. Empirical evidence is far from strong; however, it seems the government encouraged such activities. China was to become Russia's largest arms buyer. This was a result of Russia's indisputable position in the Chinese marketplace given that the United States and Western Europe had refused to supply high-technology weapons to China.¹⁵⁹ Not all segments of the military, however, were so keen on arms transfers. Some within the military and the government feared that providing China

with high-technology weaponry was arming a potential hegemon on Russia's borders.¹⁶⁰

The Minatom was also highly interested in the Chinese market from the early post-Soviet period onwards. The state took an active interest in facilitating such cooperation.¹⁶¹ The Russian fuel and energy sector was more tentative in its approach to China. The push by the Russian government responded to the real interest of Russian business in developing relations with China. Economic cooperation continued to underachieve as compared to the evolving political relationship.

Increasingly, Russia both responded to and sought out avenues for deepening political cooperation. The sheer number of bilateral summits demonstrated the importance state-led interaction held in driving Russian policy towards China. Thus, by April 1996, Yeltsin was seeking, if only at the rhetorical level, strategic partnership with China. Given the salience of China in Russian foreign policy, it is not surprising that the state was the most important driver of relations with China. The proactivity of Russian foreign policy in the Chinese case differed significantly from institutional approaches in the Iranian and Iraqi cases.

Russian players in the Iranian context

The institutional context played an important role in the manner in which Russia engaged Iran. In the Iranian case, in contrast with the other cases examined, there was strong division between various segments of the government about the extent to which Russia should cooperate. This both stymied and encouraged cooperation at various times. In large part, economic actors were the first to engage in relations with this state. Both ministries and their 'clients' had much to gain in the Iranian market.

In a manner consistent with Yeltsin's general foreign policy approach, he took decisions with regard to Russia's policy towards Iran with little consideration for the ramifications for particular ministries and economic groups. This was especially true at times of crisis in the Russian–American relationship when threats of sanctions and political consequences for Russian–Iranian cooperation were at their peak. Given that Yeltsin saw Russian relations with Iran and Iraq as part of Russia's broader relations with the United States, at times of tension Yeltsin was willing to cede ties with Iran in favour of closer relations with the United States.

A problem which emerged rather early in the Russian–Iranian relationship was that Russia’s political and economic elite were not only unconsolidated, but had divided into competing factions openly battling each other and pursuing incongruent interests.¹⁶² The major actors influencing Russia’s Iran policy can most conveniently be divided into those seeking and those opposing Russian–Iranian cooperation. It is noteworthy that one of the most remarkable characteristics of the emergent relationship was the manner in which certain government entities moved between the two camps, at times encouraging and at others hampering cooperation with Iran.

The first group consists of economic actors broadly coordinated under the auspices of the Ministry of Foreign Economic Relations including military interests (Ministry of Defence, *Tekhnopromexport*, *Rosvooruzheniye* previously *Rosoboronekспорт*), nuclear power interests (Minatom), and energy interests (Mintopenergo, *Gazprom*, *Lukoil*, and *Transneft*). The economic ministries and commercial lobbies drove relations in the initial period by responding to a multitude of Iranian proposals for lucrative cooperative ventures. What was clear from the very beginning was the focus on economic rewards to be reaped by cooperation with Iran in three main areas: arms sales, atomic energy, and oil. These sectors acted as lobbies seeking concessions from the government.¹⁶³ However, divisions existed even within these groups.

Tensions were experienced between the Defence Ministry and the military–industrial complex. On the one hand, the military viewed Iran as an important market for weapons. On the other, Iran had the potential to pose a serious threat to Russian security interests. Notwithstanding, by 2001 Iran had become the third largest importer of Russian arms.¹⁶⁴ Thus, despite concerns, the military and military–industrial complex were able to overcome differences to pursue a largely consistent policy of engagement with Iran. In addition to arms sales, the Russian Atomic Energy Ministry, led by Viktor Mikhailov until 1997 and then by Yevgeny Adamov, was significant in advancing Russian relations with Iran. Mikhailov, who was elevated to the Russian Security Council, wanted to go considerably further than Yeltsin in selling nuclear reactors to Iran. Mikhailov’s successor Adamov was also keen to expand cooperation with Iran. The third economic group actively seeking cooperation with Iran was that of oil interests.¹⁶⁵

These groups were at various times hampered and encouraged by political actors (President, Presidential administration, Prime Minister, Ministry of Foreign Affairs), which constitute the swing group. There

was little consensus within the government itself on the manner in which to conduct relations with Iran until the inception of Yevgeni Primakov's tenure in the Foreign Ministry. The trend towards engagement preceded Primakov's appointment. Russian policy towards Iran often appeared inconsistent and incongruous with various ministries pursuing fundamentally incompatible policies.

On the one hand, Russian ministries such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Foreign Economic Relations facilitated increased trade and cooperation. On the other hand, we see the government significantly impeding cooperation by way of the Gore–Chernomyrdin agreement, a secret agreement in which Russia effectively stifled the conclusion of further arms agreements between Russia and Iran in order to satisfy American concerns over the Russian–Iranian relationship.

By 1996, more coordination within the Foreign Ministry and between the Foreign Ministry and other government ministries facilitated greater cogency in Russian policy. This was when Russia came to use these relations more strategically to pursue its own regional and global objectives. At this point, Russian governmental policy clearly sought to advance greater ties between Russia and Iran.

Any attempts to improve Russian–Iranian relations had to occur against the backdrop of significant opposition not only from some segments of the Defence Ministry but also from the Russian Space Agency.¹⁶⁶ The Gore–Chernomyrdin agreement meant to compensate Russia for losses in military sales with higher quotas for satellite launches for the Russian Space Agency. Given that all communications satellites used American components, Washington held significant influence over this particular agency with the threat of imposing across-the-board sanctions and banning all commercial launches. Though these threats were unlikely to deter the majority of Russia's defence enterprises as they did not rely on American contracts, it seriously impacted on the Russian Space Agency.¹⁶⁷

Any attempts to circumvent the Gore–Chernomyrdin agreement or to deepen ties with Iran were adamantly opposed by the Russian Space Agency. At the same time, the Agency may also have been playing a dual role as it was reported to have sold Iran gyroscopes for possible use in missile guidance systems, helped in the design of nose cones, and missile guidance and propulsion systems.¹⁶⁸ Notwithstanding, by 1998 Yeltsin signed a directive ordering government authorities to look for legal loopholes that would allow Moscow to continue selling arms to Iran without formally breaking the agreement.¹⁶⁹

Russian policy reflected the pursuit of disparate positions and interests within the Russian political and economic elite. Though economic interests drove Russia's initial policy towards Iran, eventually the Russian government had to deal with the consequences of Russian–Iranian cooperation for Russia's broader strategic objectives. The case of Bushehr is particularly enlightening in this regard. In the light of the international crisis around Iran's nuclear programme in 2006, Russia continued to seek out resolutions at the political level while simultaneously seeking to resolve disputes over Iranian payments for Bushehr. Despite ministerial interests which spearheaded relations with Iran, at times of crisis in the Russian–American relationship, the Presidential administration took control of these relations.

Russian players in the Iraqi context

The Iraqi case is particularly important in highlighting the interaction between public and private interests in driving Russian alignment policy. The Foreign Ministry and Ministry of Foreign Economic Relations were instrumental in facilitating Russian–Iraqi cooperation. This policy position was conditioned by a desire to pursue state economic interests. Thus, there was a blurring of the lines between public and private interests in the Iraqi case. This case is also significant in demonstrating the manner in which the state took over policy-making in times of crisis. Yeltsin and official representatives took over the strategic course of Russian–Iraqi relations precisely when tensions between Iraq and the United States were at their greatest.

Political actions served the primary function of protecting state and commercial economic stakes in Iraq and secondarily responded to Russian geopolitical objectives. What is noteworthy in the Iraqi case is the fact that domestic groups within Russia from disparate ministries, businesses, and political groups often held coinciding or coordinated stances. This is likely related to the fact that any economic relations between Russia and Iraq were subject to international sanctions. For this reason, any aspiration to deepen economic relations with Iraq could only be achieved through state-level diplomacy.

The major actors influencing Russia's Iraq policy can be divided into three groups, though it should be noted the entities within these groups did not necessarily possess similar agendas: executive (President, Presidential administration, Prime Minister); ministerial (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mintopenergo, Ministry of Foreign Economic Relations, and the Ministry of Defence); and commercial (oil interests – *Gazprom*, *LUKoil*, *Rosneft*, and *Zarubezhneft*).

The Foreign Ministry was the first to engage with Iraq though it would be more apt to say that they responded to Iraqi initiatives. Its actions were a reaction to Russia's need for debt repayment and the increasingly strident demands of the economic ministries in July 1994. These resulted in the Foreign Ministry's first diplomatic foray seeking to remove sanctions against Iraq. It was extremely active in pursuing contacts with Iraq, encouraging the lifting of sanctions and opposing any form of military action in Iraq. By September, the Ministries of Foreign Economic Relations and Fuel and Energy began an active campaign of accelerating relations with Iraq culminating in the creation of the Russian–Iraqi Commission on Trade, Economic, Scientific and Technical Cooperation.

The commission was able to bring various Russian oil companies into official dialogue with the Iraqis. In such a manner, *Lukoil*, *Rosneft*, and *Zarubezhneft*, which are part of the Association of Russian Enterprises for Cooperation with Arab Countries (ARKARAB), were able to coordinate a special Russian–Iraqi company to fund the work of Russian oil firms in Iraq following the lifting of United Nations Security Council sanctions. As the political situation continued to heat up around Iraq, the Foreign Ministry, Duma, and Presidential administration took measures to oppose any form of military action against Iraq, which could harm Russian economic interests.

Though most governments see a blurring of the lines between government and private commercial interests, the Iraqi case witnesses a particularly conspicuous example of this phenomenon. In essence, Russia's state debt was to be recouped through private and semi-private commercial organisations. There was recognition that this debt was unlikely to be repaid, thus the state sought to recoup its losses through post-sanction contracts with Russian companies. Therefore, political actions served the main function of protecting state and commercial economic stakes in Iraq. The executive was vital in driving relations at times of crisis. When it seemed that American military intervention in Iraq would divest Russia of its economic interests in Iraq, the state took over relations from the various ministries. Certainly, after the invasion of Iraq, the Presidential Administration under Putin was particularly active along with ministries with a financial interest in the post-Hussein Iraq, in entrenching whatever position Russia was able to maintain.

The previous section has investigated the manner in which institutional factors impacted upon Russian engagement with 'challenger' states. It unpacked the intricate interactions which have influenced patterns of alignment. The following section will examine the actors

most important to Russian policy towards these states across the countries.

Institutions influencing Russian engagement with 'challenger' states

The institutions in post-Soviet Russia were in a state of persistent evolution. This section provides a broad sketch of the evolution of the institutions and offers an understanding of how these groups influenced policy-making towards 'challenger' states. This section is divided into an examination of four different groups in policy-making: the executive; Parliament; ministries; and economic groups. It is important to note that in a number of cases, economic interests have been deliberately folded in with ministries. This is a result of the distinctive interaction between ministries and their 'clients' with regard to the pursuit of relations with 'challenger' states. This is not to say that these groups have always held consistent interests. However, to a large extent, they have pursued similar goals.

The Executive

The Presidency

The differences in approach between Yeltsin and Putin were conditioned by their varying perceptions of institutional structures. Whereas Yeltsin was willing to override policy-making structures to intervene in Russia's relations with 'challenger' states when he thought necessary, Putin sought to subordinate the institutions in order to better coordinate the policy.

Yeltsin's tenure was characterised by unpredictability, his being given to making impromptu policy pronouncements, repeatedly taking both his own advisers and his interlocutors by surprise.¹⁷⁰ Yeltsin intervened intermittently in the foreign policy-making process, ensuring that the Foreign Ministry was occasionally sidelined particularly while Kozyrev was the Foreign Minister.¹⁷¹

Yeltsin's policy towards 'challenger' states varied. He originally rejected any sort of close relationship with these states in favour of close ties with the West. The 'Bill and Boris' relationship was crucial to Yeltsin's self-perception as an important international actor. However, as a result of deteriorating relations with the West, especially insufficient attention from the Western leadership, Yeltsin soon came to appreciate the benefits of closer cooperation with 'challenger' states both in

satisfying domestic constituencies and in pursuing his own objectives internationally.

Certainly, Yeltsin became a vocal, if somewhat impulsive supporter of Russia's relations with China, Iran, and Iraq. He held summits with Chinese leaders frequently, including meetings in September 1994, May 1995, April 1996, April 1997, October 1997, and in one of his last meetings as Russia's President, in December 1999. Yeltsin's personal diplomacy in the Chinese case was instrumental in raising the salience of China in Russian foreign policy and giving some overlying strategic concept to these interactions. He moved the relationship forward from a state of good-neighbourliness to constructive partnership to strategic partnership.

In both rhetoric and practice, Yeltsin was instrumental in drawing connections between Russian–Chinese relations and the state of the Russian–American relationship. The importance of the deterioration of the 'Bill and Boris' relationship as well as the increasing loss of prestige in Russia's relations with the United States brought about a more unyielding position from Yeltsin. At times of particularly tumultuous relations with the United States, Yeltsin clearly leaned on his close relationship with the Chinese leadership.

His approach to the Iranian issue was more ambiguous. In all his years in office, Yeltsin never paid an official visit to Iran. Though he supported increasing economic and political relations, he was willing to trade off this relationship for benefits to be reaped from the United States thereby undermining the long-standing activities of the Defence Ministry and the Minatom. He permitted the conduct of official visits by his subordinates in the context of American pressure; however, he also allowed the signing of the Gore–Chernomyrdin agreement. In conversation with Clinton in May 1995, Yeltsin consoled the American President on Russian–Iranian relations by noting, 'I have just imposed new controls on Russia's nuclear cooperation with Iran. The issue is now disposed of and the two of us should stop torturing each other about Iran.'¹⁷² Yeltsin's personal influence was most salient at times of tension in Russian–American relations. Otherwise, decision-making in the relationship was largely left to the ministerial level.

The dilemma surrounding Iraq was far clearer, at least in the longer term. As Iraq gradually became somewhat of a litmus test of Russian great power, it took on greater importance for Yeltsin. His emphasis on a peaceful resolution to the crises surrounding Iraq can be seen in his appointment of key figures to deal with diplomacy towards Iraq. The

issue of Iraq continuously elicited bold statements by Yeltsin. This was the legacy left to Vladimir Putin.

Putin sought to consolidate the gains made in relations with 'challenger' states by institutionalising and legitimising relations. Putin's policy towards 'challenger' states was far more coordinated and proactive, encouraging and driving relations. He hoped to improve relations with China, Iran, and Iraq across the board notwithstanding American objections to the contrary. Furthermore, at least at the rhetorical level, Putin attempted to subordinate private economic interests to Russian national interests in foreign policy-making.

Putin met with Jiang Zemin, and his successor Hu Jintao, numerous times a year. In 2002, the two leaders concluded a number of significant bilateral agreements including the Beijing Declaration seeking to increase economic and political cooperation as well as the signing of a new Friendship Agreement. This document plainly demonstrated Putin's approach to Russian relations with China. It stated, 'In the international arena, Russia and China speak out in support of the strength of peace, stability, development and cooperation, against hegemonism, power and bloc politics, attempts at the revision of the fundamental norms of international law...'¹⁷³ Putin brought about a series of Russian–Chinese joint statements on international issues of concern to both states including the abrogation of the ABM Treaty,¹⁷⁴ NATO expansion,¹⁷⁵ and the structure of the international system.¹⁷⁶

President Putin was also a strident advocate of Russia's relations with Iran. He placed increased emphasis on these relations by engaging in the first post-Soviet Russian–Iranian summit. Moreover, he emphasised increased economic ties giving Russia permission to supply nuclear technologies and materials to Iran in May 2000¹⁷⁷ as well as repudiating the Gore–Chernomyrdin agreement in November 2000. Putin's policy on Iraq was also clear. It was only in July 2000, after Putin took office, that Tariq Aziz, Iraq's erstwhile representative, visited Moscow as an officially invited guest of the Russian government, and upon Russian initiative.¹⁷⁸ Putin's diplomatic acumen ensured that the American military operation in Iraq and its bellicose position on the Iran crisis of 2006 were dealt with diplomatically and with allies rather than undermining Russian–American relations.

Yeltsin's approach to 'challenger' states underwent an evolution from initial neglect to ever-increasing pro-activity to use these partnerships to Russia's advantage. For much of the period, China was the only state that held consistently high salience for Yeltsin. As to Iran and Iraq, Yeltsin's involvement was sporadic and largely responded to heightened

tensions in the Russian–American relationship. However, for the most part, ministerial interests drove foreign policy-making towards Iran and Iraq. Conversely, Putin ensured that ministerial interests were aligned with the broader strategic goals of the state. He became much more proactive in his approach to ‘challenger’ states. In so doing, he rid foreign policy-making of Yeltsin’s reactive and vacillating character.

Prime Minister Chernomyrdin

Viktor Chernomyrdin’s role as Prime Minister is cited for two reasons. First, he was Yeltsin’s longest-serving Prime Minister, acting in this position from December 1992 to March 1998. Second, he played an important role in Russian relations with ‘challenger’ states. On the one hand, Chernomyrdin sought to diversify and deepen Russian relations with these states. On the other, he attempted to ensure that these relations did not pose a significant hazard to Russian–American cooperation. This was more a result of the pragmatism of his policy approach than any particular affinity for the United States. Chernomyrdin’s emphasis on relations with ‘challenger’ states focused primarily on economics, especially oil and gas. In practical terms, this meant he supported arrangements which would bring hard currency to Russian coffers.

His background may have strongly influenced his approach to ‘challenger’ states. Chernomyrdin had a history as a Soviet apparatchik. From 1985 to 1989, he was the Minister of the Oil and Gas industry of the USSR. In post-Soviet Russia he became the patron of and, on his removal from office, the President of the world’s largest gas company, *Gazprom*.¹⁷⁹ Thus, his affiliation with the oil and gas industry was long-standing. With this background in mind, it is unsurprising that Chernomyrdin proved a strong supporter of deeper relations with China, Iran, and Iraq, especially in the fields of oil and gas.¹⁸⁰

His emphasis on economic engagement was clear. Chernomyrdin regularly stressed the importance of Russian–Chinese cooperation. This was reinforced through Chernomyrdin’s June 1997 visit to China, during which a major trade agreement was signed for the years 1997–2000. Chernomyrdin’s approach to the Middle East was more complicated because of the blatant American objections to these relations. It should be noted that he, like Yeltsin, tended to deal with crises in Russian–American relations relating to ‘challenger’ states, rather than the day-to-day workings of these relations. Chernomyrdin continually advocated a peaceful solution to the situation while maintaining relatively clear support for the Iraqi cause throughout his tenure.¹⁸¹

In many senses, Chernomyrdin pursued a similar line to Yeltsin towards 'challenger' states. He sought to exploit the relations for economic gain, but was unwilling to create strong challenges to Russian-American relations. He also engaged these states, for the most part, in the economic realm and took into account Russia's broader strategic considerations rather than ministerial concerns when making decisions about further engagement.

The Russian Duma

The new Russian Constitution produced a bicameral Parliament, which exacerbated the emerging executive-legislative divide. Given the rather imprecise division of powers under the Constitution mentioned earlier, the Parliament legislated, but the President could rule by decree in areas where the law was silent. The President could freely veto acts of Parliament; Parliament could stymie Presidential decrees by passing contrary laws, and if the President vetoed such a law, a two-thirds majority of both legislative chambers could override the veto. At times, these provisions placed the President and Parliament in direct opposition.¹⁸² As no coordinating mechanism was established to integrate policy, the legislature had its own, separate, and often contradictory foreign policies, which bore little relationship to the policy of the President or the Foreign Ministry.¹⁸³

The Duma sometimes adopted resolutions which contradicted official foreign policy. Although they were not binding, these actions, often quite extreme, had implications on how Russia was perceived as a political actor, internationally.¹⁸⁴ Moreover, Duma deputies used foreign policy debates and resolutions to express general opposition to the government and the President. Given the more traditional and nationalist inclinations of the Duma, it is not unexpected that they have been one of the bodies instrumental in asserting and enflaming Russian policy towards 'challenger' states. In terms of the pursuit of relations with these states, there was cross party support for numerous measures. The Duma challenged the Russian government to go further in support of 'challenger' states with a view to maintaining Russia's great power status.

The Duma helped to link the issue of Russian alignments with Russia's relations with the United States. First, they repeatedly and vocally challenged America's right to intervene in Russian foreign policy. Second, the Duma objected to American attempts at unilateralism especially when American pressure was placed on states with which Russia had

strong relations. Third, they used their authority to interlink issues of relations with 'challenger' states with Russian–American relations.

The Duma generally favoured increasing cooperation with China as both a highly lucrative endeavour and a means of challenging the United States. Moreover, they strongly opposed any attempts by the United States to limit Russian influence or constrain Russian alignments.¹⁸⁵ Duma Chairman Gennady Seleznev said in October 1998, 'The main thing is not to ask questions of what Americans would think about it.'¹⁸⁶ The Duma considered any attempts by the US to interfere in Russian foreign policy-making as a threat to Russian sovereignty. In September 1998, Duma Chairman Gennady Seleznev declared, 'Russian-Iranian partnership should develop despite the fact that the United States is still sharply criticizing Iran and calling it a country of terrorists'.¹⁸⁷

The Duma was particularly vocal with regard to Russian engagement with Iran and Iraq. They consistently supported increased cooperation, often to the detriment of Russian–American ties. Therefore, in November 2001, Vladimir Zhirinovskiy and many other Duma deputies expressed full support for the decision of Russia's military–political leadership to renew military-technical cooperation with Iran.¹⁸⁸

During the 2006 crisis surrounding Iran's enrichment of uranium, the Head of the Russian Duma's Foreign Affairs committee indicated that, 'The Russian Duma has indicated many times that Iran has signed the Non-Proliferation-Treaty and should not be deprived of nuclear energy. Hasty referrals of Iran's nuclear file to the UN Security Council and probable sanctions against Iran are unconstructive.'¹⁸⁹

The Duma position on Iraq was even bolder. They went so far as the adoption of a law on 'Measures to Develop Cooperation with the Republic of Iraq',¹⁹⁰ which would permit Russian state institutions, individuals, and legal entities to resume commercial relations with Iraq.¹⁹¹ In December 1996, Aleksei Mitrofanov of the LDPR and Chairman of the Duma Committee on Geopolitics argued that the bill was to prompt the Russian President and government to work more actively to lift sanctions.¹⁹² Though this bill did not have an immediate effect on Yeltsin's policy towards Iraq, it further highlighted the broad basis for Russia's policy of engagement with Iraq. This draft fell firmly in line with the generally positive views the Duma held towards Iraq. However, the Federation Council, the upper house of the Russian Parliament rejected the bill, as it would have violated UN sanctions to which Russia had agreed.

The Duma tried again in February 1998 to adopt an amended bill on 'Measures to Develop Cooperation with Iraq', providing for the resumption of commercial relations with Iraq.¹⁹³ The Duma also recommended that the Russian President should 'instruct the Foreign Ministry to study, within the framework of international law, whether it is advisable to maintain the regime of sanctions in the event of the use of force against that country'.¹⁹⁴ However, after the bill was passed, Foreign Minister Primakov stated that the Chamber did not have the authority to adopt such a decision evidencing the divides within the Russian government over how best to approach the issue of Iraq. Once again, in December 1998, the Duma attempted to override the President's veto of this bill but was able to obtain only 217 votes when 300 were needed.¹⁹⁵

The Duma also attempted to link the Iraq issue to broader Russian-American relations. A significant example of this occurred in February 1998, with the beginning of bombings on Iraq. The Duma issued a statement, approved by all factions, calling the bombings an act of international terrorism.¹⁹⁶ In December 1998, Gennady Seleznev announced that the Duma had stopped discussing the START-II Treaty as a result of the air strikes.¹⁹⁷ Incidentally, a few days before the start of the American military intervention in Iraq in March 2003, the Duma Chairman and an accompanying Duma delegation visited Iraq.¹⁹⁸ The Duma did take quite a strong stance in the aftermath of the kidnapping and killing of Russian diplomats in Iraq. In June 2006, the Duma approved a statement criticising 'occupying countries' in Iraq for failing to prevent the abduction and murder of four Russian diplomats.¹⁹⁹

The Duma was an important institution in inducing greater cooperation with 'challenger' states. This corresponded with conceptions of Russia's role as a great power and sovereign international actor. Duma representatives supported and at times challenged the Russian government to pursue deeper cooperation with these states. The Duma has also at different times tried to link and decouple Russian-American relations from those with 'challenger' states.

Ministries and related 'client' groups

Ministry of Foreign Affairs

The Foreign Ministry played a variety of roles in the formation of foreign policy. It has been one of the numerous institutions competing for influence in the evolving Russian foreign policy-making structure. Increasingly though, and under the leadership of strong Foreign

Ministers, it played a coordinating role seeking to reconcile Russia's foreign policy objectives with Russian capabilities. Notwithstanding the Foreign Ministry's rather 'anti-challenger' state approach in the early post-Soviet years, relations under Foreign Ministers Primakov and Ivanov blossomed. As 'challenger' states came to engage the realm of high-politics, the Foreign Ministry became more proactive. It came to support those ministries involved in 'challenger' states against American objections, and use these states to demonstrate Russian diplomatic prowess.

Though the Foreign Ministry was charged with coordinating the foreign policy activities of other ministries, Yeltsin's penchant for control meant that the Foreign Ministry often seemed to be sidelined. Kozyrev was appointed as Foreign Minister in November 1990 and began to develop new approaches to international issues even though policy remained firmly in Yeltsin's hands. He was a weak political player and the Ministry itself was thrown into perpetual chaos because of repeated 'purges' and reorganisations.²⁰⁰

As mentioned earlier, Kozyrev was a true Atlanticist, determinedly believing that Russia's future lay with the West. Consequently, Russia's early relations with China were limited to mitigating potential border tensions. The Russian–Iranian and Russian–Iraqi relationships were also highly limited with little inclination on the part of the Foreign Ministry to actively pursue relations.²⁰¹

Kozyrev proffered his resignation on the prompting of Yeltsin in December 1995 making way for Yevgeny Primakov's tenure as Foreign Minister. Primakov was a far stronger Foreign Minister, in many ways raising the status of the Foreign Ministry and improving, if not entirely resolving, the issues of cooperation between institutions with foreign policy interests.²⁰² Increasing coordination within the Foreign Ministry and between the Foreign Ministry and other government ministries facilitated a greater cogency in Russian policy. It was only after 1996 that Russia came to employ its relations with 'challenger' states more strategically to pursue its regional and global objectives.

In contrast with Andrei Kozyrev, Primakov was a staunch Eurasianist, a specialist in the Middle East with a history in Russian intelligence. Primakov was instrumental in increasing the salience of Russian alignments for Russia's broader strategic international goals though the turn towards increased engagement with these states occurred under Kozyrev. Primakov viewed Russia's international role as preventing a unipolar world dominated by a single superpower.²⁰³ In achieving this goal, he felt Russia should diversify its foreign policy interests.²⁰⁴ In looking back

on Russian foreign policy under Kozyrev, Primakov saw an incorrect policy path. He contended,

We explain our inadequate activity in the Near East by the fact that our efforts were aimed at evening out relations with the former Cold War adversaries. But this was done without an understanding of the fact that, by not surrendering our positions in the regions and even strengthening them, we would have paved the way to the normalization of relations. A shorter and more direct way.²⁰⁵

This augured well for the development of Russian relations with 'challenger' states. With his marked partiality for cooperation with the Middle East, he reinforced trends towards deepening ties with both Iran and Iraq. Certainly, it was only in 1996 that Russia more actively began to prompt cooperation with Iran. However, Primakov's diplomatic aplomb also sought to ensure that these relations did not cause irreparable damage to the Russian–American relationship.²⁰⁶

The Foreign Ministry was even more active in the case of Iraq. Primakov pursued a more proactive approach to Russian–Iraqi relations seeking increased economic cooperation.²⁰⁷ Primakov was also personally instrumental in seeking to defuse the crises around Iraq continually engaging in diplomatic forays to prevent a military intervention. His efforts were significant in averting war on a number of occasions.

Russian relations with 'challenger' states benefited greatly from Primakov's time as Minister of Foreign Affairs. His perceptions of Russian national interest as well as his diplomatic acumen ensured that Russian relations with China, Iran, and Iraq improved exponentially in this period. This continued with the appointment of Igor Ivanov as Foreign Minister.

Ivanov had worked under Primakov for many years and followed a similar foreign policy path. The pragmatic elements of the Primakov period were supplemented with Putin's ascent to the Presidency. Thus, there were fewer capricious statements which the Foreign Ministry would be forced to conceal. This increased pragmatism ensured that relations with 'challenger' states continued at an accelerated pace. Russia and China came to occupy many similar positions serving to reinforce Russia's foreign policy line. During Ivanov's visit to China in June 1999, both states declared their opposition to 'diktat by force and highlighted the necessity to respect the rights of the peoples of all nations to choose their societal structures, value systems and development paths, emanating from their own realities'.²⁰⁸

The Foreign Ministry was instrumental in facilitating increased cooperation with Iran. Ivanov defended Russia's right to engage with any state it felt appropriate.²⁰⁹ Ivanov was also at the forefront of the diplomatic initiatives to prevent war from breaking out over Iraq. He adamantly opposed any American intervention in Iraq and undertook a number of international diplomatic initiatives to seek agreement with other states on the issue. He also threatened Russia's use of its United Nations Security Council veto if the United States put forth demands that could not be fulfilled.²¹⁰

Sergei Lavrov succeeded Igor Ivanov in March 2004. Lavrov had a long history of work at the UN and a belief in the value of multilateral diplomacy. Lavrov has stated his belief that the Russian state occupies a central place in international relations. His foreign policy approach was based on 'pragmatism, multipolarity, and the consistent advancement of national interests without sliding toward confrontation'.²¹¹ Lavrov sought to ensure that resolutions to the questions of Iraq and Iran were dealt with in the UN, a system with which he was extremely familiar and in which Russia retained a key position. He played a central role in seeking a resolution to the Iran crisis in 2006 and in ensuring a continued Russian presence in Iraq. His approach to China built upon the strong relationships developed by his predecessor.

The Foreign Ministry increasingly coordinated Russian policy towards these states. Over the course of the period examined, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs became more strategic in its relations with these 'challenger' states, demonstrating increased coordination within the foreign policy making system and the increased value of these states to Russia.

Ministry of Foreign Economic Relations

This Ministry was vital in signalling a change in state policy. It reflected state priorities by coordinating and institutionalising the otherwise rather haphazard economic interactions between Russian ministries, economic actors, and 'challenger' states. It was also important in bringing together state and private interests in order to prevent unnecessary competition and disorganisation in Russian policy, and integrating various Russian interest groups into bilateral commissions in order to coordinate Russian policy.

The Ministry of Foreign Economic Relations was the Russian organisation responsible for the direction of economic cooperation internationally. It provided for the development of government and foreign

economic policies and coordinated and regulated foreign trade. It was at the forefront of attempts to engage 'challenger' states. In practical terms, as soon as the decision was made within the Russian government to diversify Russian partnerships, the Ministry of Foreign Economic Relations forged agreements with China, Iran, and Iraq. It began an active campaign to accelerate relations with Iraq in 1994, culminating in the creation of the Russian–Iraqi Commission on Trade, Economic, Scientific and Technical Cooperation. By 1996, it had also managed to forge the Russian–Iranian Commission on Economic Cooperation. Oleg Davydov, Minister of Foreign Economic Relations, who later became Deputy Prime Minister, was a key player in deepening both Russian–Iraqi and Russian–Iranian economic cooperation.²¹²

It was only after a series of meetings in 1995, culminating in a trip to Tehran by Deputy Prime Minister Davydov that prospects for a significant rise in trade improved.²¹³ By December 1996, he declared Iran as Russia's strategic economic partner.²¹⁴ This was because the Minister of Foreign Economic Relations saw the Iranian market as one of the most attractive markets for Russia to increase its exports of machinery, equipment, and a variety of products.²¹⁵

Davydov's role was equally important in Russian–Iraqi relations. He was Co-chair of the Russian–Iraqi Commission on Trade, Economic, Scientific and Technical Cooperation. In this role, he spearheaded the restoration of trade and economic ties with Iraq. Moreover, he repeatedly sought the abolition of sanctions against the Hussein regime. In November 1996, he declared, 'Russia wants international economic sanctions against Iraq to be lifted and is ready to carry out big industrial projects in the Arab country worth a total of ten billion dollars.'²¹⁶

Demonstrating the continued evolution of the Russian state, this Ministry was abolished in April 1998, its functions taken over by the newly created Ministry of Industry and Trade, which was also short lived. Its responsibilities were transferred to the Ministry of the Economy, which was abolished in May 2000, as part of President Putin's broader government reorganisation. These functions have now been taken over by the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade as well as the Ministry for Industry, Science and Technology. Notwithstanding the changes in Ministries, the policy of engagement with 'challenger' states in the pursuit of economic gain has continued unabated.

The Ministry of Defence and the military–industrial complex

The Russian Ministry of Defence was created in May 1992. It was a far different organisation than it had been in Soviet times. In the

final decades of the Soviet Union, the military and military-industrial complex were highly autonomous structures. The defence industry and military research elite were able to use enormous funds practically without control and also largely defined foreign policy.²¹⁷ With the end of the Cold War, however, this changed. It is necessary to note that it is difficult to separate out the military establishment and military-industrial complex. There was a high coincidence of interests between the two in the policy towards 'challenger' states, even if their motivations have been distinct.

Given the interests of the military-industrial complex in these markets, it is probable that this group was able to sway the military's stance on engagement with 'challenger' states. The military and military-industrial complex were very significant in regularising contact and deepening relations throughout the period, especially with China and Iran. As Russian-American relations deteriorated, the military came to use these relations to reinforce Russia's role as a great power.

The dramatic decline in Russia's economic and political power in the post-Cold War period ensured that the demand for such a massive military-industrial complex ebbed.²¹⁸ The military experienced problems caused by shrinking armed forces, steep declines in weapons procurements, defence budget cuts, the government's inability to pay for weapons, and plummeting arms exports following the Soviet collapse.²¹⁹ Moreover, between 1990 and 1996, the overall production of the military-industrial complex was reduced by 53 per cent.²²⁰

Its change in fortunes influenced its foreign aspirations. The military-industrial complex, fearing the contraction of their influence, sought new markets for high-technology production and a foreign policy direction corresponding with their continued significance within Russia.²²¹ Uncontrolled sales of military technology, however, were to be prevented. *Oboroneksport* took on a coordinating role, though rather ineffectually, in the early post-Soviet period. Since 1994, there was an effort to reassert central coordination with the formation of *Rosvooruzheniye*, a state-owned arms exporter. In 1995, *Rosvooruzheniye* was joined by the State Committee for Military-Technical Policy.²²² In 2000, *Rosvooruzheniye* incorporated three former state enterprises: *Oboroneksport*, *Spetsvneshtekhnika* (Special Foreign Technology), and the Committee for Military Technical Cooperation of the Ministry of Foreign Economic Relations.²²³ The connection between the military and the military-industrial complex was strong. This was particularly exemplified by the former Defence Minister Pavel Grachev, who was appointed the chief military advisor to *Rosvooruzheniye*.²²⁴

The groups encompassed in the military–industrial complex had an appreciable influence on Russian foreign policy especially in the areas of arms export, military technology, and non-military nuclear technology.²²⁵ Yeltsin, at times, acted as an exponent of the military and the military–industrial complex, granting them advantages and privileges through his decrees and orders. Certainly, Yeltsin owed these groups a debt after the Duma’s rebellion and the August coup.

In terms of Russian relations with ‘challenger’ states, the military and military–industrial complex experienced tensions over the appropriate approach. These groups saw both the threats and the benefits of cooperation. Especially with regard to China and Iran, the provision of military technology had the potential to pose a serious threat to Russian security in the future. This friction between current benefits and long-term threat underpinned Russian military’s approach to ‘challenger’ states throughout the period. Even during a visit by a Russian military delegation to China in April 1997, a Russian delegate stated, ‘China will not pose a threat to Russia within the next fifteen years.’²²⁶

These states also facilitated the continued survival of a number of Russian military industries which would likely have collapsed without their patronage. Therefore, notwithstanding the military’s concerns over the potential threats, ‘challenger’ states may cause in the future (as well as the concerns of regional leaders and some nationalists),²²⁷ the desire to survive was far greater.²²⁸ Increasing cooperation with ‘challenger’ states was especially salient as Russia saw heightened competition in the international arms market.

From 1993 onwards, the defence lobby began intensive cooperation in the military-technical fields with China, Iran, and Iraq. Defence Minister Pavel Grachev went so far as establishing autonomous sales agencies under his control in order to carry out broad military cooperation with these states, contradicting government policy.²²⁹

The Russian Defence Ministry sought to ensure that the United States did not view Russian–Chinese military cooperation as threatening. Thus, Defence Minister Igor Rodionov made clear in April 1997 that ‘military contacts and cooperation between Russia and China are not spearheaded against third countries’.²³⁰ However, the ministry was unwilling to bend to American pressure to end the economic partnership.²³¹ The same position held with Igor Sergeev’s ascent to Minister of Defence. Thus, in October 1998 he declared, ‘Russian and Chinese military and technical cooperation is not directed against third countries.’²³² Sergeev was instrumental in agreeing to assist in the development of China’s high-precision weapons systems and

transferring production licences. This is noteworthy in the sense that this action immediately followed the especially deleterious effects of the international financial crisis of 1998.

With Sergei Ivanov's appointment as Minister of Defence in 2001 and subsequent presidential vote of confidence in 2005 when Ivanov was appointed Deputy Chairman of the government, Russia's defence policy did not alter dramatically. Certainly, Ivanov was responsible for the initiation of the first Russian–Chinese military exercises in August 2005.²³³ He maintained that the exercises had proved 'the strategic character of our relations'.²³⁴ Moreover, Ivanov was just as vocal as his predecessor in defending Russia's right to engage in military cooperation with China. In response to challenges in 2006, Ivanov stated, 'Defence contacts between China and Russia have developed, are developing and will develop, I can assure you of that.'²³⁵

The Russian military–industrial complex's interest in Iran was also significant. Cooperation in the defence sphere began as early as 1992. Those groups seeking fewer complications in the Russian–American relationship supported the 1995 Gore–Chernomyrdin agreement. However, important figures in the Defence Ministry spent the intervening years pressuring the Kremlin to cancel the agreement and permit the resumption of arms sales.²³⁶ Thus, in January 1997, Mikhail Timkin, First Deputy General Director of *Rosvooruzheniye*, when asked about whether arms sales to Iran would continue after 1999, stated, 'Let's agree like this: the year 1999 will come and we will see. Priorities are changing. Let's not rush and discuss what will happen in 1999 during 1997.'²³⁷

The military–industrial complex was finally successful in November 2000 when Russia withdrew from the agreement. Even before this, however, the Defence Ministry was once again actively seeking to deepen cooperation with Iran. Thus, in June 2000 with the first visit to Iran by a Russian military delegation since 1991, Chief of the Russian Defence Ministry's Main Directorate for International Military Cooperation, Colonel-General Leonid Ivashov, stated, 'Russia and Iran have decided to make cooperation in the military field a routine practice.'²³⁸ By 2001, Iran had become the third largest importer of Russian arms.²³⁹ Yet, as previously mentioned, the Russian military was not always so unambiguously supportive of Russian relations with 'challenger' states. In December 1996, as Primakov was completing a successful diplomatic visit to Iran, Defence Minister Rodionov warned that Iran posed a potential military threat to Russia.²⁴⁰

Defence Minister Ivanov was far more unequivocal in his rhetoric with regard to Iran, notwithstanding the international uproar as to its

nuclear programme. In January 2007, Ivanov stated that, 'Moscow will consider further requests from Tehran for defensive weapons. Iran is not under sanctions and if it wants to buy defensive... equipment for its armed forces then why not?'²⁴¹

Russia's military cooperation with Iran (described in more detail in Chapter 4) was strongly opposed by the United States. As a result, the Russian Defence Ministry regularly attempted to defend Russia's right to engage in these relations. In November 2000, in response to a question about threats issued by Washington to introduce economic sanctions against Russia in the event of its resuming military deliveries to Iran, Defence Minister Sergeyev asked, 'what does America think it is – the Central Committee?'²⁴² First Deputy Chief of the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces, Colonel-General Manilov, put it more even bluntly when he asserted, 'Russia has a sovereign right to renew ties with Iran. Nobody can dictate what we should do in this case.'²⁴³

The case of Iraq was based on a more rhetorical approach given that the Russian military-industrial complex's relations were mitigated by the political and economic circumstances that faced Iraq. Despite declarations in support of Iraq by Russian defence officials,²⁴⁴ there was little in the area of military-technical cooperation that could practically be undertaken. This, however, did not preclude sabre-rattling on Russia's part. In response to American threats to conduct a military operation in Iraq, in January 2003, the Russian navy placed three war ships on standby to go to the Persian Gulf in defence of Russian 'national interests'.²⁴⁵ Demonstrating divisions within the government itself, this was immediately denied by the Defence Minister Sergei Ivanov.²⁴⁶ There is no doubt, however, that the Defence Ministry actively and vocally opposed any attempts by the United States to resolve the situation in Iraq militarily. The clearest example of this was in a February 1998 meeting with his American counterpart William Cohen, when Defence Minister Igor Sergeyev stated, 'If the US resorts to force to settle the Iraqi crisis, it would hurt and set back bilateral ties between Russia and the US.'²⁴⁷

Defence Minister Ivanov sought to link the US invasion of Iraq with problems in the international system more broadly. During his September 2002 visit to the United States, he warned that the military operations in Iraq could entail unpredictable consequences in other regions of the world. According to Ivanov, the war in Iraq 'whips up the arms race in North Korea and all over the world'.²⁴⁸

Notwithstanding the military's concerns, especially with regard to China and Iran which was reflected in their rhetoric at various points

during the period, the military–industrial complex was able to sway the Ministry of Defence towards engagement. These groups were significant in regularising interaction and deepening relations with ‘challenger’ states. The military came to use its relations with these states to pursue its policy of retaining Russian great power status and influence while ensuring the survival of important Russian industries.

Ministry of Atomic Energy

The Russian Ministry of Atomic Energy (Minatom) was established in 1992 on the foundations of the Soviet Ministry for Atomic Energy and Nuclear Industry. It is divided between civilian and military nuclear applications. Russia’s highly developed nuclear industry was another area which suffered severely with the end of the Soviet Union. The number of workers in the Russian nuclear weapons complex was cut by half between 1989 and 2000.²⁴⁹ In a dramatic departure from the past, when it was comfortably isolated from budgetary pressures, Minatom faced increasing budgetary shortfalls. In 1997–1998, for example, the Russian government paid only about 20 per cent of its operating expenses.²⁵⁰ In order to ensure the continued success of this important industry, this ministry emphasised the provision of civilian nuclear technology to foreign buyers.

Minatom was at the forefront of engaging ‘challenger’ states. These were states with an enormous interest in Russian atomic energy technology. Minatom went further than the Russian President at times in pursuing these relations. This freelancing and defiance on the part of Minatom resulted in American intervention at the highest levels. President Yeltsin was forced to step in to ensure that Russian–Iranian nuclear cooperation did not significantly harm Russian–American relations. The result was the signing of the Gore–Chernomyrdin agreement which Minatom actively sought to end. Minatom saw its relations with ‘challenger’ states as both a necessity and a sign of Russian sovereignty. Any attempts by the United States to interfere were countered based on the assumption that America merely sought to lessen Russia’s competitive advantage.

From the early post-Soviet period onwards, ‘challenger’ states were particularly eager recipients of Russian nuclear technology, presenting Russia with proposals for cooperation. Certainly, along with Turkey, China and Iran were some of the few countries with a large demand for Russian nuclear technology. As a consequence, Minatom became highly dependent on these markets.²⁵¹ Minatom’s Ministers, including Viktor

Mikhailov, Yevgeny Adamov and more recently Aleksander Rumyantsev, were all decidedly interested in increasing cooperation with China and Iran. Given the poor state of the Russian nuclear industry, Minister Adamov declared, 'It is up to those who are drowning to save themselves.'²⁵² The Ministers of Minatom have each sought to do just that through the sales of nuclear technology to those with the appetite and the funds.

Viktor Mikhailov, from 1992 to 1998, was deeply associated not only with the growth in Russia's exports of nuclear technologies and materials, but also with meeting 30 per cent of the world market's needs in this sphere.²⁵³ His approach to cooperation with 'challenger' states created tensions in the Russian–American relationship. He was known for his 'unyielding' reputation and was nicknamed the 'atomic hawk' in the United States. He was quoted as saying, 'We have no need of US charity, for we are not miserable supplicants. On the contrary, we are ready to compete freely and openly with the United States on world markets.'²⁵⁴ Some argued his removal was associated with his tough stance in negotiations with the United States. Notwithstanding, after being forced to resign, Mikhailov was brought back in March 1998 as First Deputy Minister of Minatom.²⁵⁵

Minatom developed a number of major agreements with China in the area of equipment, technology, and expertise. The Russian nuclear industry depended heavily on the Chinese market²⁵⁶ with Chinese purchases helping to reduce the severity of unemployment in the nuclear industry. Thus, Russia supplied China with reactors for the Lianyungang nuclear power plant and an entire uranium enrichment facility at Hanzhun, including a gas centrifuge plant for the production of low-enriched uranium. Russian experts also participated in the installation of an experimental thermonuclear fusion reactor at Hefei. Reports of varying credibility also indicate that Russian specialists extended technical assistance for China's fast-breeder reactor project and established a secret joint nuclear research centre at Shenzhen.²⁵⁷

The great fear was that the United States would become a major competitor in the nuclear market in 'challenger' states.²⁵⁸ Indeed, increasingly there was intense competition with America in China with regard to the building of nuclear reactors. Before March 1998, Mikhailov had a substantial lead against both the United States and the European Union. This was especially important given rumours that Minatom intended to help China build more than 50 nuclear power plants over the next 40 years. The US Vice-President Al Gore declared this would be 'a disaster, because then the two states are giving the economy priority

over safety and are not thinking about what they can do with the nuclear waste afterward'. Mikhailov flatly denied these accusations.²⁵⁹

Russian nuclear cooperation with Iran was just as active, yet consistently endured American opposition. It largely, though not exclusively, centred on the completion of the power station at Bushehr. Minatom was particularly receptive to Iranian initiatives. In 1998, Ministers Amrollahi and Mikhailov signed a secret protocol under which Russia agreed to open negotiations on providing Iranian specialists with training at Russian nuclear research centres, assist Iran in its efforts to mine uranium, and supply Iran with a gas-centrifuge uranium enrichment facility.²⁶⁰ This can be seen as a form of freelancing, defying Yeltsin's broader approach.

Nuclear cooperation with Iran was consistently exposed to American opposition. Various Minatom Ministers took differing approaches to the matter. Viktor Mikhailov took a rather hawkish approach to relations with the United States, consistently declaring that Russia would not give up relations with Iran.²⁶¹ Yet, he also sought to mitigate the impact, where possible, on the Russian–American relationship. Thus, in September 1997, during a meeting with United States Secretary of Energy Frederico, Mikhailov proposed that the American side should work out a joint system of control of the nuclear plant in Bushehr in order to dispel all American suspicions that Russia was handing over nuclear technologies.²⁶²

Yevgeni Adamov, the next Minister of Atomic Energy, consistently challenged the American position on Russian–Iranian nuclear cooperation.²⁶³ A clear example of his approach was a meeting with Al Gore in 1998, during which Adamov stated,

Produce specific information or fire the intelligence officers who are giving you false information. In my capacity as Minister, I know and can vouch officially that the Atomic Energy Ministry is not carrying out any work in Iran which has a military application. If you really have any information which I do not have, show it to me and we will get to the bottom of the matter.²⁶⁴

Incidentally, Adamov was arrested in 2005, accused of misappropriating American funds provided to Russia to improve the safety of Russian nuclear facilities.

The Federal Atomic Energy Agency was established in March 2004, replacing the Minatom. Sergei Kiriienko, Head of the Atomic Energy Agency, continued to pursue and emphasise Russia's right to pursue

nuclear cooperation with China and Iran. He proved an extremely vocal advocate of Russian relations with Iran with regard to Iran's proposed uranium enrichment. In this context, Kiriyenko asserted, 'Every country in the world, including Iran, has the right to develop nuclear energy peacefully. This is the first principle. The second principle is that the international community has the right to demand unconditional guarantees of compliance with the non-proliferation regime so that nuclear weapons are not built again.'²⁶⁵

The Minatom and its successor the Federal Atomic Energy Agency were important drivers of Russian policy towards China and Iran. Given the economic rewards to be reaped in these markets, Minatom Ministers freelanced, developing policy towards these states which was not coordinated or necessarily in line with state policy. As the Russian-American relationship declined, Minatom was once again released to drive forward its cooperation with China and Iran. Increasingly, the Ministry began to use this nuclear cooperation to demonstrate Russian independence in the face of American desires to push Russia out of crucial markets.

Ministry of Fuel and Energy and the oil and gas interests

In the post-Soviet period, the Ministry of Fuel and Energy (Mintopen-ergo) has primarily formulated policy rather than involving itself in the daily running of the energy sector. It focused its attention not on defining the parameters of the development of the fuel and energy complex, but on forming the environment and conditions in which this process would develop in the desired direction.²⁶⁶ The fuel and energy sector represented an important structural component of Russia's economy. It manufactured more than one quarter of Russia's industrial production, exerted an essential influence on the formation of the country's budget, and provided more than one half its export potential.²⁶⁷ As a result, some corporations (*Gazprom*, *Lukoil*, *Rosneft*, etc.) came to act as autonomous foreign policy actors, first within the Commonwealth of Independent States framework but also further abroad.²⁶⁸ The oil and gas bloc's autonomy was relative because it was far from completely detached from the state in the financial sense.²⁶⁹

It is necessary to note the important link between corporate and ministerial interests. In the case of the Mintopenergo, the government worked to promote corporate interests. In so doing, the Ministry sought to coordinate and prevent competition among Russian oil and gas actors in their relations with 'challenger' states. It also attempted to defend the

interests of Russian companies against American intervention. Finally, it actively encouraged the consolidation of Russian economic interests, especially in Iran and Iraq, in order to prevent the exclusion of Russian companies from highly lucrative areas of cooperation. It is important to note that the development of contacts with 'challenger' states in this sector was slow in coming. Coordinated cooperation with the states assessed in this study only began in the late 1990s.

Cooperation in this field was rather limited in the Chinese context for much of the period. The most important agreement was signed in 1997 with regard to joint economic programmes, including a major natural gas pipeline project. By March 2000, cooperation in oil and gas production had accelerated. This was facilitated by the visit of a Russian delegation led by Fuel and Energy Minister Viktor Kalyuzhny to China to take part in the Commission on Russian–Chinese Energy Cooperation.²⁷⁰

The first serious Russian attempt to engage Iran in long-term economic cooperation came through the Russian–Iranian Commission for Economic Cooperation, which by March 1998 had reached agreement on cooperation in the fields of oil and gas. The Mintopenergo hoped this agreement would be important in coordinating the activities of Russian companies in order to prevent potential rivalry.²⁷¹ Government support for deeper integration in the oil and gas industry continued with a 'Memorandum of Mutual Understanding', signed in April 1999 by Russia's Mintopenergo and Iran's Ministry of Oil.²⁷² The extent of cooperation increased exponentially with the entrance of *Gazprom* into the Iranian market.²⁷³ Soon after, other Russian energy companies such as *Yukos*, *Energomashexport*, and the *Energomashinostroitel'naia korporatsia* entered the Iranian market.²⁷⁴ Furthermore, *Zarubezhneft* and *Technopromexport* reached a protocol of cooperation with Iran's Ministry of Oil for joint Persian Gulf shelf drilling.²⁷⁵ By 2003, cooperation was proceeding in the development of proposals with regard to the construction of electrical power stations, modernising thermoelectric power plants, conducting drilling activities in oil and gas fields and supplying Russian oil and oil products to Iran's northern regions.²⁷⁶

This increasing collaboration, however, was threatened by American intervention. The United States challenged Russian companies engaging in cooperation with Iran with economic sanctions. The Mintopenergo sought to defend Russian economic interests. First Deputy Prime Minister and Fuel and Energy Minister Boris Nemtsov stated in November 1997, 'Russia will side with *Gazprom* if that gas monopoly comes under

attack over its participation in an international development of the Southern Pars field on the Gulf shelf near the Iranian coast.¹²⁷⁷

Russian oil and gas companies had great interest in Iraq as well. However, it is noteworthy that there was money to be gained both with sanctions and with the end of sanctions for this industry. On the one hand, sanctions prevented Russian oil companies from fully profiting from the Iraqi oil and gas industry. On the other, Iraq's absence from the oil market ensured that world oil prices remained high.²⁷⁸ The Russian oil and gas sector attempted to reap the rewards of support for the removal of sanctions by engaging Iraq in hopes of a post-sanction wind-fall. Russian policy responded to Iraqi initiatives in September 1994 with the formation of a joint Russian–Iraqi Commission on Trade, Economic, Scientific and Technical Cooperation. The meetings led to the signing of a protocol stating that immediately after the lifting of sanctions, Iraq would give Russia first priority in oil and gas contracts.²⁷⁹ In the interim period, the Mintopenergo was to facilitate Russian companies' entry into the Iraqi market.

Minister of Fuel and Energy Rodionov met with Iraqi deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz in November 1996. Rodionov, the Co-Chairman of the Russian–Iraqi Intergovernmental Commission on Trade and Economic Cooperation, discussed with his Iraqi counterparts the prospects for Russia to take part in the oil-for-food programme.²⁸⁰ The Ministry was significant in ensuring that Russian companies made use of the Russian advantage in the Iraqi market. Yuri Shafranik, Chairman of the Board of the Central Fuel Company and former Minister for Fuel and Energy, said, 'If the world community softens economic sanctions against Iraq, Russia must be the first country to resume economic cooperation with Iraq. Russia has outdistanced its main rivals, the United States and France, in the depth of its access to the Iraqi market.'²⁸¹

Despite American opposition, on the initiative of *LUKoil*, *Rosneft*, and *Zarubezhneft*, which are part of the Association of ARKARAB, a special Russian–Iraqi company was set up in 1996 to fund the work of Russian oil firms in Iraq following the lifting of United Nations Security Council sanctions.²⁸² This desire to have a pre-eminent place in post-sanction Iraq led the Russian Ministries of Economic Development and Energy in 2002 to reach agreement on a five-year plan of cooperation with Iraq as America prepared for war.²⁸³

Importantly, there was some confusion about the role Russia was to play in the energy industry in Iraq following the US invasion. In 2003,

Minister Igor Yusufov argued that it was not expedient for Russian companies to participate in a Washington tender for the distribution of contracts to restore Iraq's energy industry.²⁸⁴ Yet days later, he met with Iraqi officials to discuss an important role for Russian experts in the development of the Iraqi oil and energy sector.²⁸⁵

In a similar way to Iran, this Ministry sought to defend Russian oil and gas interests against American interference. An important example occurred in October 1999 when Viktor Kalyuzhny, Minister of Fuel and Energy, stated, 'Iraq remains Russia's strategic partner in implementing joint oil and gas projects. Our task is to prevent the ousting of *LUKoil* from the Iraqi market and to keep the Russian positions in Iraq strong.'²⁸⁶ In a number of important ways, the Mintopenergo facilitated the entrance and consolidation of Russian oil and gas interests in 'challenger' states. In so doing, it demonstrated how the government's practice was to promote commercial interests.

The oligarchs

It is impossible to discuss oil and gas interests while ignoring the infamous Russian oligarchs who had such an important role to play in influencing Russian policy. Oil was of overwhelming importance to Russia and the oligarchs.²⁸⁷ These men, including the likes of Boris Berezovsky, Mikhail Khodorkovsky, Roman Abramovich, Mikhail Fridman, and others, largely co-opted Yeltsin's government, silencing most opposition to their conduct.²⁸⁸ Under Yeltsin, the oligarch's relations with the state were not conducted on the basis of formal agreements, but personal ties and mutual assistance between entrepreneurs and bureaucrats.²⁸⁹ The oligarchs were dynamic individuals who carved business empires out of the chaos of post-Communist Russia and attempted to use their economic power to buy political influence. They largely bought their way into power under Yeltsin, increasing their influence.²⁹⁰

The oligarchs had an important impact on the manner in which Russian policy towards the 'challenger' states was conducted. On the one hand, they were instrumental in driving forward Russian engagement. Given their close links with the Kremlin in the Yeltsin period, there were few impediments to the achievement of their policy goals. However, following Putin's ascent to the Presidency, the oligarchs and particularly their oil interests in 'challenger' states have been constrained by Putin's desire to limit their political and economic influence.

The amount to which they determined Russian economic policy towards Iran and Iraq is difficult to ascertain. However, companies

such as *Gazprom*, *LUKoil*, *Yukos*, *Sibneft*, and *Rosneft* had much to gain from these relations. Furthermore, the men at the heads of these companies had Yeltsin's ear. In fact, a number of them came to take on important posts within government such as the Deputy Secretary of the Russian Security Council²⁹¹ and Presidential Adviser on the oil and gas industry.²⁹² Throughout Yeltsin's tenure, they remained among the strongest political and economic actors in Russia.²⁹³ However, with Putin's ascent to the Presidency, their fortunes were to change.

Putin consistently and aggressively pursued a policy to dismantle the power of the oligarchs. He did not want to share power with the oligarchs, whom he saw as putting their private interests before those of the state. Those that have not been imprisoned or exiled have increasingly fallen into line with Putin's policies. Putin himself believed his actions to have been successful in 'tidying up the relations of business and the power structures',²⁹⁴ as he considered the influence of the oligarchs on the political decision-making process to be inadmissible.²⁹⁵

This struggle for control ensured, at times, that Russian policy has suffered. This was evidenced in the cancellation of the Kremlin oil pipeline negotiations with China in December 2002. The Chinese government had approved technical and economic support to build an oil pipeline from Russia to China to be undertaken by the end of 2002.²⁹⁶ The Russian Ministry of Economic and Industrial Development was informed of this. However, Russian officials were unwilling to allow commercial interests, led by *Yukos*, to plan and execute the project on the Russian side. A compromise was reached permitting *Transneft* to take over the pipeline between Angarsk, in south-eastern Siberia, and Daqing, in northern China. *Transneft* was to be responsible for financing the Russian share of the \$1.8 billion dollar construction costs. *Yukos*, which had intended to raise money for the project, instead was to supply the oil to be pumped through to China, but nothing more.²⁹⁷

It seems that the oligarchs opposed Putin's position on Iraq. Oligarchs such as Khodorkovsky and Potanin urged Putin to continue his rapprochement with the United States and were in favour of the American-led war in Iraq.²⁹⁸ Khodorkovsky maintained,

Military operations against Iraq, for which the US is preparing, will lead to fluctuations in world oil prices. A positive scenario would be for the US to take care of Iraq quickly without any problems. In this case, the situation in Iraq would fully stabilise over a period of six months, foreign investment would arrive in the country and Iraqi oil supplies to the world market would increase.²⁹⁹

Russia aimed to become the world's largest oil producer within the decade. Certain Russian oligarchs aggressively courted the United States as a vital consumer. With the Gulf States cast in the role of anti-American Islamic militants, Russia emerged as a strong alternative supplier.³⁰⁰ However, this objective had to reckon with Putin's desire to decrease the power of the oligarchs and, in contrast with the Yeltsin regime, take actions that specifically undercut their interests.

Conclusions

Russian policy towards 'challenger' states reflected the institutional ambiguities inherent in the evolving Russian state. The development of Russian relations with 'challenger' states correlated with the lack of an institutional framework demarcating the hierarchy between various government actors and a more general absence of coordination in Russian foreign policy. As a consequence, competing ministries and economic groups pursued incongruent policies. In this sense, the cases examined in this study were in line with Russian foreign policy more generally with regard to institutional constraints. However, it has been possible to identify a number of distinctive trends in terms of the impact of the institutional context across the states examined in this study.

First, given the salience of economic concerns and the sporadic attention of the Kremlin and Foreign Ministry to 'challenger' states in the early post-Soviet period, economic groups had a considerable impact on Russian engagement with these states. Ministries and their 'client' groups with economic interests in 'challenger' states were at the forefront of relations. Consequently, economic groups were able to set the context of Russian relations with which state political actors subsequently had to contend.

Second, Russia's approach to 'challenger' states underscores the interaction between private commercial and public economic interests. Given the difficulties in determining what was public and private in the Russian context, what emerged was a government often working in the interests of Russian business. What is remarkable in the Russian sense was the extent to which there was a blurring of the lines between public and private interests. Ministries were, in a sense, so deeply linked with their client groups that it was difficult to ascertain where one ended and the other began.

Third, government/state priorities were developed largely independently of ministries. This resulted in incongruities in Russian policy

towards these states. The state tended to step in to create more strategic approaches to Russian engagement with 'challenger' states, disregarding ministerial prerogatives. Fourth, institutional interactions varied by period, which had an important impact on the conduct of relations with 'challenger' states. As previously mentioned, for much of the early period, with the exception of China, individual ministries pursuing their economic interests constituted Russian policy towards these states. However, in times of crisis in Russian–American relations, the Kremlin and the Foreign Ministry took charge of these relations to coordinate Russian policy.

This analysis has been informed by the governmental politics approach which was able to shed light on the bargaining which was an important factor within the Russian polity as a result of the lack of a distinct hierarchy among the foreign policy-making bureaucracy. Moreover, it unpacked the manner in which groups outside the governmental structure influenced policy decisions. Thus, the governmental politics approach was able to elucidate a number of significant institutional constraints on Russian policy towards these states.

3

The Wounded Bear and the Rising Dragon

Russia's complex and multifaceted relationship with China evolved significantly over the past decade. Russia's initial, tentative approaches to China largely focused on mitigating China's potential threat. These eventually gave way to a Russian policy of alignment premised on attempts to actively balance the United States. Peculiar to the Russian-Chinese relationship was the legacy of historic animosities, which weighed heavily on a weakened Russia. Only when Russia was able to overcome its reservations and accept both the necessity and the benefits of cooperation were ties able to considerably expand. The challenge posed by Russia's increasing impotence in the international arena strengthened China's appeal as a friend in Russian calculations.

Sino-Russian relations have a history rife with conflict and attempts at domination. These developments have been consistent from as early as the thirteenth-century Mongol conquest of Kievan Rus to the seizure of the Amur, Ussuri, and Central Asian border regions in the late nineteenth century.³⁰¹ Notwithstanding, these tendencies have been balanced by cooperation as well. From 1949 to 1960, there was a dramatic surge in relations as a result of both states' common communist ideological approaches. Consequently, the Chinese economy was radically transformed along Soviet lines, allowing a close meshing of economic aims and the direction of Chinese development strategy by the Soviet Union.³⁰² However, by the 1960s, the balance had tipped towards confrontation over issues of political direction, ideology, and security. This hostility remained from the early 1960s to the mid-1980s. Tensions flared to actual conflict in several instances, peaking with hundreds of casualties resulting from reciprocal border attacks across the Ussuri River in 1969.

Russian attempts at conciliation with China only gained ground in the mid-1980s. Mikhail Gorbachev asserted that tensions in the Sino-Soviet relationship contributed to Soviet insecurity.³⁰³ Gorbachev ignored China's conditions for the normalisation of relations,³⁰⁴ and began unilaterally taking action to reduce perceptions of threat between China and Russia, including withdrawing and lowering the readiness of Soviet divisions guarding the Sino-Soviet border, offering expert and financial aid to modernise Chinese industries, and most importantly suggesting strategic partnership.³⁰⁵

China contributed to improved relations by responding positively to these gestures. Eventually, this resulted in Gorbachev's 1989 visit to Beijing, which confirmed both rapprochement and normalisation of relations.³⁰⁶ With the collapse of the Soviet Union, however, Sino-Russian relations deteriorated in response to Russia's preponderantly Western focus.³⁰⁷ This meant that China occupied rather a low position in Russian foreign policy.³⁰⁸ In fact, on 25 February 1992, the Russian Foreign Ministry asserted that China was of little importance to Russian foreign policy.³⁰⁹

During Russian Foreign Minister Kozyrev's first post-Soviet visit to China in March 1992, to which he dedicated a mere 30 hours, he maintained there was no need to conclude a large number of agreements with China as Russia's China policy should be a continuation of Soviet policy with regard to China.³¹⁰ Furthermore, during the press conference following the meetings Kozyrev stated, 'One can't pick one's neighbours. Whether we like the current Chinese leadership or not, we must cooperate with them. There is no other way.'³¹¹

As a consequence of this initial approach, Russian policy towards China focused largely on domestic security. By the mid-1990s, Russia and China were able to resolve their border disputes. The importance of this factor should not be underestimated. The issue of Russian border security is intimately connected with Russian concerns with its territorial integrity and sovereignty. The ability to come to agreement on this vital issue allowed for the possibility of deeper Russian-Chinese cooperation.

A new regional focus began to emerge in this period. Russia sought a greater role in the Asia Pacific region by joining the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). China was key in facilitating these memberships. This occurred against the backdrop of American attempts to limit Russian participation in the region. Both the resolution of border issues and Russian integration into Asia 'through

the Chinese door' served to buttress Russian relations with China and set the tone for increased coordination of policy in other areas.

As Russian–American relations deteriorated, Russia's relations with China were guided by global concerns. Consequently, China began to occupy an even more central role in Russian foreign policy. By the end of the 1990s, Russia's approach to China starkly highlighted the deliberate and conscious balancing behaviour Russia exhibited through its alignments. Russian use of China to balance the United States was largely a response to the evolution of American policies, which Russia saw as detrimental to its interests. Active balancing occurred when relations with the United States were experiencing significant difficulties.

The Chinese case is important in demonstrating the salience of domestic security and regional factors in Russian alignment considerations. First, given the potential threat China posed to Russian interests through the issue of border demarcation and illegal immigration, Russian cooperation with China sought to overcome these impediments and reduce Russian insecurity. Second, China proved instrumental in reinforcing Russian conceptions of sovereignty and territorial integrity. This factor was especially vital given American military interventions in the 1990s as well as proliferation of bases in the areas surrounding Russia. Through engagement with China, Russia was able to address different aspects of its domestic security agenda.

Factors in Russian policy towards China

China is the clearest example of state-led alignment policy. The Presidential administration was at the forefront of relations. Political considerations drove Yeltsin to ensure that Russian–Chinese relations were, at a minimum, consolidated on positive grounds. This state-led approach was far different from that of Russian relations with Iran and Iraq. It ensured that Russia and China were able to come to agreement on issues of Russian security such as border issues and illegal immigration.³¹² As a result of the intense interest of the state in the conduct of Russian–Chinese relations, politics occupied a central role in the relationship. Furthermore, the good state of Russian–American relations in the early post-Soviet period ensured that Russian cooperation with China was limited to border issues and economic gain. Russia did not want engagement with China to impinge on its 'rejoining civilization'.

Increasingly, however, Yeltsin and his administration were under pressure by Russian industrial lobbies to create favourable conditions for economic collaboration with China. Economic groups, both public and

private, sought to capture the Chinese market. Economic cooperation in the Chinese case was largely public economic and military rather than commercial.

The Russian military-industrial complex, seeing the potential for enormous rewards in the Chinese market, was quick to engage with China. The state was eager to facilitate this cooperation as well as increase ties in the field of atomic energy. Though the economic dimension of Russian-Chinese relations was important throughout the period examined, it seemed, however, to occupy a less important role. There were continual attempts by the state to bring economic relations to the same levels as political ties; however, economic cooperation continued to underachieve. Even Yeltsin's agreement to expand trade to \$20 billion by the year 2000 did little to significantly augment economic cooperation.³¹³

Gradually Russia responded to and sought out avenues for deepening political cooperation. Meetings between the states' leaders occurred in June 1995, April 1996, April 1997, November 1997, November 1998, September 1999, December 1999, July 2000, September 2000, November 2000, July 2001, October 2001, June 2002, November 2002, May 2003, October 2003, June 2004, October 2004, February 2005, May 2005, July 2005, November 2005, March 2006, June 2006, July 2006, and November 2006.

Over this period, descriptions of the relationship evolved from good neighbours to constructive partners to strategic partners. Russia's approach to China evolved from merely friendship and mutually beneficial cooperation³¹⁴ to the July 2000 summit in which Putin and Ziang Zemin declared, 'Our countries are friends forever and will never be enemies.'³¹⁵ The heads of state of China and Russia now hold annual talks, meeting each other at least three times a year, including on such occasions as the Economic Leaders' Meeting of the APEC forum and the SCO summit.

What this political partnership meant in practical terms was increasing political coordination on major international issues. By the mid-1990s, the decline in Russian-American relations permitted Russia to align with China on issues of great relevance to Russia. Both states concurred that the system of international security had been developing with unfavourable tendencies.³¹⁶ The Russian state's response was to increasingly use China to actively balance against the United States thereby demonstrating its status as a great power and defiance against American unilateralist and interventionist policies.³¹⁷ As a result of progressively more active Russian defiance against the United States,

Russia and China were able to come to agreement in 1997 on the issue of multipolarity, an open challenge to American hegemony. Both parties agreed to take steps towards the construction of a multipolar and more fully international community.³¹⁸ Therefore, notwithstanding the importance of economic factors in expanding Russian–Chinese relations, political factors continued to hold a central place.

The following section examines four elements driving Russian foreign policy towards China: economic, domestic security, regional, and global. The economic section considers the main sectors of Russian–Chinese economic engagement unpacking the manner in which both public and private economic actors were able to consolidate bilateral relations. The domestic security dimension brings together a variety of threats to the Russian state which have impacted upon Russia's alignment policy with regard to China. The regional dimension of Russian–Chinese cooperation reflects Russian concerns with entry into the Asia-Pacific that held significant economic and political interest for the Russian state. Finally, the global dimension clusters together those international political factors influencing Russian alignment policy towards China. This section focuses on the manner in which the evolving international system was a key driver of Russian alignment policy. Each of the following chapters will examine these dimensions.

The economic dimension

Given the potential importance and depth of this relationship, the Yeltsin government undertook to provide it with a strategic framework from the outset. The state's agenda ensured that Russian policy was proactive with the military–industrial complex, Minatom, and fuel and oil interests vigorously endorsing the deepening of economic relations.

The state was extremely active in putting forth the interests of these groups. At this point, it is necessary to distinguish between purely economic and military-economic actors. As mentioned earlier, the military–industrial complex held a special place in terms of its influence on the Russian government given the sensitivity of this sector. It is not surprising then that from the outset the state vigorously supported the interests of the military–industrial complex in China. Though the state sought to facilitate increasing economic cooperation between Russia and China in other sectors, nowhere was it as fervent or successful as in the area of the sale of military technology.

The United States played an important role in influencing the conduct of Russian economic relations with China. First, American pressure on

its allies to end sales of weapons and military technology to China placed Russia in an admirable competitive position in the Chinese market. Second, as in the cases of Iran and Iraq, Russia feared the potential entry of the United States into the Chinese market. Third, economic cooperation was vital in demonstrating Russian defiance. In permitting itself to engage in military-technical cooperation with whomever it chose, Russia sent a message of independence to the United States.

From the outset, China was a strong potential partner in economic terms given the history of Sino-Soviet economic ties. The state-run sector of Chinese industry was built with Soviet aid in the 1950s. Moreover, in the post-Soviet period, China confirmed its interest in modernising these factories with Russian industrial equipment and technical assistance. This was rather a unique situation for Russia because it had experienced difficulty in selling high-technology products abroad.³¹⁹ Notwithstanding these positive preconditions, attempts by the Russian state to expand ties had little impact and were ever more constrained by international competition and the regulations of international economic institutions.

The initial period of trade from 1992 to 1993 was characterised by cross-border exchanges, largely conducted in barter. Yeltsin's state visit to China in December 1992 had a significant impact on altering trade ties, moving away from the 'suitcase' traders predominating in the early post-Soviet confusion, towards the initiation of coordinated large-scale projects. For example, \$2.5 billion in credit was extended under a 1992 agreement which led to the construction of a two million kilowatt nuclear reactor complex in China's Jiangsu province.³²⁰ Following this summit, both China and Russia agreed to increase their economic cooperation in order to create favourable conditions for trade ties.³²¹ These concrete actions saw bilateral trade increase from \$5 billion in 1992 to \$7.68 billion by 1993.³²²

Russian concerns with domestic security issues and the threat of illegal Chinese immigration into the Russian Far East, however, resulted in measures that stunted economic cooperation. Prior to 1994, there were no visa requirements for Chinese citizen's travelling between China and Russia. This gave rise to tens of thousands of small Chinese speculators inundating the Russian market with low quality goods.³²³ In order to curb speculation and end illegal immigration, Russia strengthened its border controls, tightened its export control laws, and laid down import and export taxes.³²⁴ Consequently, border trade, which accounted for a high proportion of bilateral trade, was dramatically reduced by over one-third.³²⁵

As they were to do on a number of occasions, the September 1994 summit in Moscow saw Presidents Jiang Zemin and Boris Yeltsin place considerable emphasis on reversing these economic trends and raising the level of economic cooperation.³²⁶ Despite great hopes for increased trade, however, Russia expressed deep disappointment in real progress in this area. During the April 1997 summit, a conviction was articulated that the most urgent assignment in the area of bilateral relations was reducing the rift between their political and economic components.³²⁷ Chinese Prime Minister Li Peng and Yeltsin sought to rectify the problems in trade by setting yet another improbable goal for the increase of trade volume to \$20 billion by 2000.³²⁸

The situation in the economic sphere was rather complicated. Russians found it progressively more complex in 1997 to export metals and chemical fertilisers (these comprised nearly half of Russian exports to China) because of changes in the Chinese market. Moreover, both states sought to join the World Trade Organization (WTO), which resulted in the reduction of barter trade in addition to the visa requirements mentioned previously.³²⁹ Furthermore, neither country was prepared to trade in hard currency because of poorly developed infrastructure. Also in 1997, the United States removed unilateral limitations on the supply of nuclear power station equipment, becoming a powerful competitor with the Russian nuclear industry in China.³³⁰ Competition for the Chinese market became an area of contention in Russia's relations with China. This fact was most evident when Russian companies failed to win a tender for energy-producing equipment for the Three-Gorges Hydropower Station project.

Notwithstanding the difficulties, by 1998, China was Russia's third largest trade partner after Germany and the United States.³³¹ Problems persisted as throughout 1999, economic relations continued to stagnate, far underachieving the goal set for the year 2000.³³² The Beijing declaration of 18 July 2000 signified a desire for the development of comprehensive, complex economic cooperation between Presidents Putin and Zemin as one of the central directions for the deepening and widening of Russian–Chinese relations.³³³

With Putin's intense concentration on economic progress, the tide indeed turned in Sino-Russian economic cooperation. Though in November 2005, Russia and China still held out the hope of doubling trade within five years, the historical mark of \$20 billion in trade had already been reached.³³⁴ As of the end of 2004, the volume of trade amounted to \$21.23 billion. In the first three months of 2006, bilateral trade between Russia and China exceeded \$12 billion up 53 per cent

from the previous year. Certainly, Russia had become one of the top destinations for China's overseas investments.³³⁵ China was now Russia's fourth largest trade partner, and Russia China's eighth largest trade partner, a far cry from the early days of Russian–Chinese economic cooperation. Much of this increase was based on military technology transfers from Russia to China.

Military technology and weapons sales

Political sensitivity to the military–industrial complex meant this group was able to bring about state support for the increase of Russian military-technical sales to China to ever-greater levels.³³⁶ Chinese purchases facilitated the maintenance of production lines, allowing for economies of scale and lower procurement costs for the Russian military itself. Moreover, they provided hard currency to finance imports by enabling Russia to sell one of the only manufactured products in which it continued to have a comparative advantage.³³⁷ Demonstrating the Russian state's interest in the maintenance of this politically sensitive area, in a November 1993 speech at a defence plant in Tula, Yeltsin emphasised the importance of recapturing Russia's position in the global arms trade, noting China's importance as a key market.³³⁸

For Russia, China's commitment to military modernisation and the desire for Russian arms were an extremely lucrative proposition. Moreover, Russia had a comparative advantage given that much of China's military hardware arose from earlier Soviet models acquired during the 1950s. China sought out Russian products especially as international sanctions had barred it from a number of other military markets. Russian and Chinese observers and officials agreed that this complementarity provided a convincing basis for Sino-Russian relations in the field of military technology transfers.³³⁹

The political groundwork for resuming the relationship was laid by Gorbachev as discussions began as early as 1990, but the move from negotiation to transactions occurred only under Yeltsin.³⁴⁰ In August 1992, a Russian–Chinese Intergovernmental Commission was established to enable Russia and China to facilitate potential deals and speed transactions in the military-technical field.³⁴¹ During Yeltsin's visit to Beijing in December 1992, these relations were formalised in a 'Memorandum of Understanding on Sino-Russian Military Equipment and Technology Cooperation'.³⁴² During this visit, Yeltsin made clear that arms sales would be 'an important component for developing bilateral relations based on economic benefit, not ideology'.³⁴³ They were

further entrenched during Defence Minister Grachev's visit to China in November 1993 where the 'Five-year Cooperation Agreement Between the Russian and Chinese Defence Ministries' was signed.³⁴⁴ As a result, weapons and technology transfers between Russia and China grew appreciably. From 1992 to 1996, the total volume of arms sales to China amounted to \$4.49 billion. This made China by far the most significant importer of Russian arms. By 1996, China accounted for approximately 42 per cent of all Russian arms exports.³⁴⁵

The Russian Defence Ministry had an important role to play. While in office, Defence Minister Pavel Grachev established autonomous sales agencies under his control, and in 1995 military space authorities under his authority sold China three of Russia's most advanced upper-stage rocket engines. The sale violated the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR) and circumvented *NPO Energiyamash*, the only Russian body licensed to sell these engines.³⁴⁶ Conventional weapons sales followed similar patterns. Major arms sales to China included two *Sovremenny* destroyers with SS-N-22 'Sunburn' cruise missiles and SA-N-7 ship-to-ship missiles; four Kilo-class submarines type-636 with the possibility of the purchase of another six; SA-10 'Grumble' surface-to-air defence missiles; SA-15 surface-to-air missiles; fire control and surveillance radar; 72 Sukhoi-27S Flanker-B air superiority aircraft equipped with 'Archer' air-to-air missiles.

Notwithstanding state and institutional desires to reap rewards in the Chinese marketplace, it should be noted that China was extremely proactive in initiating increased cooperation and utilising the desperation of the Russian military-industrial complex to its advantage. Increasingly, China demonstrated interest not only in simple hardware purchases but also in the acquisition of Russian manufacturing technologies in a variety of weapons categories.³⁴⁷ In July 1996, the Russian *Sukhoi* agency signed a contract for supplying Beijing with production lines to manufacture up to 200 Russian Su-27 interceptor fighters as well as preparing Chinese personnel. Military experts estimated the cost of this contract at between \$2.2 and 2.5 billion.³⁴⁸ It was believed it would tie the Chinese aircraft-building industry to numerous Russian defence factories for decades.³⁴⁹

Whole factories were, in fact, transferred to China to make parts for the Topol-M (SS-27) mobile Inter-Continental Ballistic Missile. In 2005, China renegotiated this agreement to produce the multi-role Su-27SMK for the remainder of the production run. According to the Defense Intelligence Agency, there were also indications that China plans to organise a combat air wing for a future aircraft carrier, possibly based

on the Russian Su-33/FLANKER D. This deepening of relations is likely to continue in the medium term.³⁵⁰

The Russian military also progressively sought to move beyond mere technology transfers. Thus, in August 1998, Colonel General Manilov, Deputy Chief of the General Staff, stated, 'Russian-Chinese military and technological cooperation is to get fresh momentum. Steps will be taken to extend cooperation from simple arms exports to joint research and development projects in military and technological spheres as well as joint development of armaments and military equipment.'³⁵¹

Increased cooperation in the military-technical field was undeniably influenced by the American factor. As previously mentioned, Russia's position in the Chinese marketplace was unassailable given that the US and Western Europe refused to supply, and placed significant pressure on allies to stop supplying, high-technology weapons to China.³⁵² Consequently, between 1991 and 1992, an increasing number of Western states and their companies started refusing to implement previously signed contracts with China.³⁵³ One example is the cancellation of an Israeli sale of advanced aircraft to China under severe American pressure.³⁵⁴ The United States sought to place similar pressures on Russia. The United States Congress warned Moscow that if they sold Beijing low-flying missiles intended to attack ships, American aid to Russia would be discontinued.³⁵⁵ These threats had little effect on the activities of the Russian military-industrial complex, but go some way in explaining how the military and its clients were able to use arms sales to demonstrate independence against American interference.

Russia had little incentive to end its military cooperation with China. There was a certainty that were Russia to leave the Chinese market, others including the United States would fill the vacuum.³⁵⁶ Head of Russian Armaments for the Russian Armed Forces, Mikhail Sitnov, declared,

Under no circumstances should we curtail military and technical cooperation with China. Russia already knows quite a few negative examples of it having been forced out of some sectors of the world armaments market and immediately replaced by its competitors as soon as Russia relaxed its stand.³⁵⁷

In a number of instances, having deterred competitors in the military-technical field from supplying weapons to a country, US arms exporters entered into the space opened up. The visit to China of Andrei Kokoshin, Secretary of the Defence Council, in February 1998 sought to neutralise the potential consequences of United States Secretary of

Defence William Cohen's visit to China. Cohen departed Beijing a day before Kokoshin's arrival.³⁵⁸

Similar to the defiance evidenced by the Russian military in opposing efforts to end military transfers to China, military sales came to be closely tied with the Russian state's attempts to demonstrate defiance against American policy decisions with which it did not agree.³⁵⁹ A clear example was the June 1999 announcement of the sale of 72 Su-30 fighter-bombers to China which was considerably hastened by NATO's bombing of Serbia.³⁶⁰ Incidentally, it was also in June 1999, that for the first time in the history of Russian–Chinese military cooperation, a delegation of top Chinese military representatives visited a unit of Russia's Strategic Rocket Forces.³⁶¹

The intensification of contact with regard to the transfer of military technology as well as the emergence of American policies of concern to Russia led to increased military to military cooperation. Russia and China participated in anti-terrorist military exercises in Kazakhstan in the fall of 2003 as well as the 'Peace Mission – 2005' involving 10,000 troops, which was the first operation involving the defence ministries of China and Russia since the Korean War.³⁶² The United States, which was not invited to attend the exercises as an observer, expressed some concerns. A US State Department spokesman noted, 'We expect that [the exercise] will be conducted in a manner that supports some mutual goal of regional stability shared by the United States, China and Russia.'³⁶³ US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld had completed a visit to China days earlier during which he expressed concern about Beijing's military build-up.³⁶⁴ Within a month of these exercises, Russia and China agreed to expand military cooperation.

This sector is important in demonstrating the balancing hypothesis. As the Russian–American relationship declined, the state as well as the military and its 'client' group came to see the value of using this key sector to demonstrate defiance against the United States. Thus, this seemingly economically driven relationship came to be intertwined with Russian global aspirations.

Nuclear technology sales

As with Russian sales of nuclear technology to Iran, Minatom was extremely active in driving policy in order to reap the economic benefits of cooperation with any states with an interest in Russian technology. In accordance with the new emphasis on a more diversified foreign policy, Russia and China signed an agreement 'On the Civilian Use

of Nuclear Energy' in April 1996. The two countries' nuclear cooperation encompassed about 30 fields, including dual-purpose technologies, the conversion of the nuclear defence industry to civilian use and thermonuclear synthesis research.³⁶⁵ Both sides had been in prolonged negotiations over the construction of a nuclear power plant in Liaoning in northeastern China.³⁶⁶

By the end of 1996, the Russian–Chinese Sub-committee on Nuclear Issues held its first meeting. As a result, Prime Minister Chernomyrdin and Li Peng signed a protocol defining the principles of a framework contract to build the Lianyungang nuclear power plant in the province of Jiangsu (the plant that was to have been built in Liaoning).³⁶⁷ This was the biggest Chinese–Russian project at the time.³⁶⁸ Russia was to assist in constructing two generating units equipped with two VVER-1000 reactors, estimated to cost \$2 billion.³⁶⁹ The first reactor block was to become operational in 2007. In October, Minatom Minister Mikhailov and Chinese Prime Minister Li Peng signed a deal to speed up the plant's construction.³⁷⁰

Minatom hoped Russian cooperation with China would keep Russian atomic engineering enterprises busy and stimulate new development programmes in the atomic energy complex.³⁷¹ Even more importantly, there were hopes that the completion of this project would set Russia in good stead to compete internationally against American firms. Thus, Foreign Ministry spokesman Vladimir Rakhmanin noted, 'The successful realization of this project, will prove that Russia is ready to compete with major world producers of energy equipment.'³⁷²

Another major area of nuclear cooperation was that of nuclear conversion. In June 1997, Minatom announced that it would cooperate with China in the conversion of the Chinese military nuclear complex for civilian purposes.³⁷³ Minatom was to help the Chinese in converting enterprises manufacturing nuclear warheads to peaceful production.³⁷⁴ During Chernomyrdin's visit to Beijing in June 1997, the two countries signed the 'Protocol on Cooperation in the Conversion of Nuclear Weaponry'.³⁷⁵

Similar to military technology sales to China, the intensity and speed with which Russia pursued China in this sector was influenced by Russian fears of international competition. Viktor Mikhailov, Minister of Atomic Energy, made this point in October 1997. He declared, 'Yeltsin during his upcoming visit to China should speed up a planned deal to build a nuclear power plant in China to forestall the United States, which might decide to step up nuclear cooperation with China.'³⁷⁶ Minatom adamantly objected to American efforts to impede

Russian–Chinese cooperation in this sector arguing that it would ‘not yield the conquered positions’.³⁷⁷ By late 2006, Russia and China were on the brink of signing an agreement on mid-term and long-term cooperation in nuclear power industry.³⁷⁸

The United States had banned nuclear technology exports to China notwithstanding the 1985 Sino-American Agreement on Nuclear Cooperation.³⁷⁹ Russian fears were justified as the United States did re-enter the Chinese market in October 1997.³⁸⁰ President Clinton announced he would approve the export of advanced nuclear technology to China following a Chinese pledge not to conclude any new nuclear deals with Iran.³⁸¹

In a similar manner to the military–industrial complex, the nuclear energy sector demonstrated the importance of institutional motivations combined with the efforts to defy American influence. However, different from the transfer of military technologies, the American factor in this industry dealt almost exclusively with economic rather than political issues.

Oil and gas cooperation

The oil and gas sector was of increasing importance in the Russian–Chinese economic relationship. Any real attempts at cooperation in this sector came only in the late 1990s at approximately the same time that major Russian oil and gas companies began to engage Iran. This engagement signified the importance of purely economic factors in driving forward bilateral cooperation in some areas. Given the significance of the oil and gas industry for Russian coffers, these relations were pursued quite vigorously. Fuel and Energy Minister Viktor Kalyuzhny announced, ‘China must become Russia’s strategic energy partner in the twenty-first century.’³⁸² This sector is particularly significant in demonstrating the interaction between public economic and private commercial actors in driving forward relations with China. It is important in reinforcing how the state acted to prevent confusion and conflict between the various actors as well becoming a significant exponent of the Russian oil and gas industry.

In June 1997, *Gazprom* and the Chinese National Oil and Gas Corporation signed a ‘Treaty on Cooperation in the Prospecting for and Production of Gas’, and agreed to the construction of a main gas pipeline in China with Russian participation.³⁸³ Within a few months, in November 1997, Deputy Prime Minister Boris Nemtsov and Chinese Vice Premier Li Lanqing signed a ‘Memorandum of Mutual

Understanding and Fundamental Principles' for preparing a joint project to develop the Kovyta gas deposit and gas supplies to China.³⁸⁴ This pipeline was to enable China to receive 30 billion cubic metres of gas annually over a ten-year period.³⁸⁵ By January 1999, the Russian-Chinese Sub-Commission on Cooperation in the Power Industry agreed to step up cooperation.³⁸⁶ The Sub-Committee incorporated Russian officials from the Energy and Foreign Ministries, *Gazprom*, *Sidanko*, and *Yukos* oil companies, and leaders of the Irkutsk region and Yakutia.³⁸⁷ Russian Fuel and Energy Minister Sergey Generalov stated, 'Development of the Kovykta gas condensate field in Irkutsk region is a priority in Russian-Chinese cooperation.'³⁸⁸ The Russian Petroleum Company in which *Sidanko* had a 60.5 per cent stake developed the Kovykta gas field.³⁸⁹

Despite progress, it was necessary for the Russian state to intervene in order to facilitate relations. Thus, in September 1999, Putin signed ordinance no.1376-r telling the Ministries of Fuel and Energy, Trade, Foreign Affairs, and Natural Resources and the State Customs Committee to step up supplies of Russian crude oil and products to China in line with an agreement between *Yukos* oil company and the Chinese National Oil and Gas Corporation.³⁹⁰ In March 2000, Russia became even more proactive in offering China joint development of some oil deposits in Russia as part of the Russian-Chinese Sub-Committee on the Power Industry.³⁹¹ The most significant breakthrough came in March 2006 with the signing of an agreement to transfer significant amounts of gas from Siberia to China. These pipelines would deliver up to 80 billion cubic metres of gas annually. The agreement came as part of a raft of economic deals signed during President Putin's visit to Beijing.³⁹²

As with the Iranian and Iraqi cases, the Chinese case is significant in revealing the interconnections between state and private interests in this field. Cooperation and coordination between the responsible ministries, the Presidential administration, the oil and gas corporations, and the oligarchs were instrumental in providing the basis for accelerated engagement. Improved economic cooperation between China and Russia could not have been envisaged, however, without overcoming serious problems in the area of domestic security. It is this sector to which we now turn.

Russian domestic security

Domestic security is taken to mean issues relating to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Russian state. Russia faced a long-term security problem with an increasingly powerful China on its borders. Certainly,

concerns over the potential for Chinese economic, and potentially even territorial, expansion into Russia's Far East were significant aspects of the debate over how to properly engage China. Russian concerns for its long-term security were fundamental in laying the groundwork for amicable cooperation between the two states. Russian engagement with China to resolve border issues and in pursuit of bi- and multilateral military confidence building measures (CBMs) were significant to Russian alignment policies.

Domestic security had a minor role to play in the development of Russian policy towards China. However, its importance lay in the fact that it conditioned engagement with China. In this context, China played a dual role for Russia. On the one hand, Russia sought to use its relations with China to reinforce its sovereignty and address issues of border security. On the other, China posed significant challenges to Russian security. The ability to overcome these threats was vital to the evolution of Russian–Chinese relations. Were Russia and China unable to come to agreement on issues of domestic security, it is unlikely they could have found such common ground on economic and global issues. Nonetheless, these concerns continued to plague Russian policy-makers, especially those focused on Russian national security.

The Chinese threat

Increased cooperation and alignment occurred against the backdrop of significant constraints. The question of Chinese 'expansion' and potential future Chinese security threats weighed heavily on Russian policy-makers, especially in the early post-Soviet period. This section goes some way towards explaining divisions within the Russian military as to the proper approach to China.

The balance of power in the Asia-Pacific region altered with the Soviet collapse and Russian decline. Since the late seventeenth century, when the two states first came into contact, Russia had not lagged so far behind in power or influence.³⁹³ For the first time in the history of their relations, China was in the ascendant and Russia in decline. This became even more challenging given the weakness of Russia's federal system, which gradually opened the Russian Far East and Siberia to Chinese influence. The emigration of ethnic Russians and the growth of separatist trends in the region further undermined the authority of the centre.³⁹⁴ Moreover, the sheer geographic distance of the Russian Far East and Siberia from western Russia and the poor transport links meant that the economically hard-pressed region came to depend on Chinese

consumer goods and food products.³⁹⁵ This resulted in the Russian Far East's reorientation towards its Far Eastern neighbours and away from Moscow.³⁹⁶

Residents of the Russian Far East became gradually more dependent on economic ties with China's Manchurian provinces. According to one study, the Russian Far East conducted about 80 per cent of its trade with northeast China. China exported more than 4000 different products to Russia (compared with approximately a dozen in 1987) and Chinese capital composed approximately half of the foreign capital used in joint production enterprises.³⁹⁷

Chinese economic expansion into the Russian Far East was not the only threat to Russian interests. There was increasing concern over illegal Chinese immigration into this region.³⁹⁸ In 1994, the Russian media, with the support of local officials in the Russian Far East, issued a number of reports about Chinese 'expansion', claiming that an estimated two and a half million Chinese entered the Russian Far East in search of jobs and business opportunities. General Pavel Grachev, then Russian Defence Minister, even asserted Chinese nationals were conquering the Russian Far East by peaceful means.³⁹⁹ One study forecasts that by the mid-twenty-first century, there will be seven to ten million Chinese living in Russia, thereby becoming the second largest ethnic group in Russia after Russians themselves.⁴⁰⁰

It is, however, extremely difficult to make accurate assessments given the illegal nature of much of the immigration and the inability of local governments to measure the inflow of immigrants. Notwithstanding, with only eight million Russians in the Russian Far East, Russia felt the weight of Chinese demographic superiority. The situation was made even more fragile by the fact that the Chinese have historically laid claim to some Russian territories.⁴⁰¹ Nationalists, particularly in Siberia and the Far East, used the Chinese threat to gain support given fears of a 'silent' Chinese expansion.⁴⁰² As mentioned earlier, in response to high levels of Chinese illegal immigration, Russian authorities in 1994 instituted new controls making it more complicated for Chinese citizens to enter the Russian Far East without a visa.⁴⁰³ Nonetheless, illegal immigration persisted and continued to grow.

Another concern which inhibited Sino-Russian cooperation was the issue of border security, which demonstrated the importance of Russia's relations with 'challenger' states in mitigating threats to Russia itself. Through cooperation with China in delineating the border, Russia was able to ensure its security interests and minimise tensions with China. This, in turn, facilitated increased cooperation in other areas.

The resolution of border issues, as well as agreements to decrease military units in the vicinity of the Sino-Russian border, can be seen as 'necessity in the guise of virtue'. The end of border disputes with China was vital as Russia could no longer afford enmity with China or the threat of it. Given Russia's collapsing military, border demarcation was an issue with which Russia had to come to terms. Russian negotiators recognised that time was not working to Russia's advantage and leaving the territorial issue open into the future was not in Russia's long-term strategic and security interests.⁴⁰⁴

The Sino-Soviet border has been among the world's most important strategic frontiers.⁴⁰⁵ Disputes over border territories dated back to the 1858 Aigun treaties and the 1860 Beijing Treaty, which formed the original legal basis for the boundaries between the two countries.⁴⁰⁶ The Japanese occupation of Manchuria in 1931 prompted the Soviet Union to assume control over all the islands on the Amur and Ussuri rivers, effectively pushing the border to the Chinese bank.⁴⁰⁷ The border issue, ignored by both countries during their alliance in the 1950s, came to a head as a consequence of their split in the 1960s. The Chinese demanded that Moscow recognise the existence of the territorial dispute whereas the Soviet Union refused to give up full control of the border rivers. For Russia, the dangers of border insecurity with China were confirmed with the Ussuri River clashes of March 1969 which demonstrated the potential for escalation to major conflict.⁴⁰⁸

The end of the Cold War led to the conclusion of a border agreement between Russia and China on the eastern section of the border, which was signed on 16 May 1991. This agreement covered the 4250 kilometre border from North Korea to Mongolia. Under the terms of the agreement the 2444 islands along the Amur and Ussuri rivers were divided between both sides according to the Thalweg principle, by which the main river channel is used as the demarcation line.⁴⁰⁹ An agreement on the western section of the border followed in September 1994.⁴¹⁰ By 1997, the entire length of the border was not only delimited but also marked, leaving only a 21 kilometre stretch in dispute.⁴¹¹

The eradication of these major obstacles to Sino-Russian partnership paved the way for a closer relationship on other security measures.⁴¹² Russia and China increasingly participated in CBMs on their borders. These not only limited the threat of conflict on the border but also reduced Russian expenditures on military forces stationed in this area. CBMs essentially allowed Russia to make its military more defensive and withdraw troops it could no longer afford to keep. The agreement to pull back formations from both sides of the border was signed in December

1992.⁴¹³ In this context, offensive weapons including tanks, strike aircraft, artillery, and tactical nuclear weapons were reduced in the resulting 200 kilometre zone.⁴¹⁴

Efforts at force reductions and CBMs became gradually more multilateral, with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan participating.⁴¹⁵ At the end of the negotiations in Moscow in January 1996, guidelines were drafted on troop reductions and CBMs along China's border with Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan.⁴¹⁶ These provisions were incorporated into the Shanghai Agreement of April 1996.⁴¹⁷ The Treaty regulated the deployment of military forces within a 100 kilometre stretch of both sides of the border between China and the Central Asian states, limited the number and scope of military exercises, provided for mutual verification of major force deployments as well as limiting the ability of the signatories to concentrate forces along the border region.⁴¹⁸

During the April 1997 Shanghai-5 summit, meant to build on the confidence-building agreement signed in Shanghai, Presidents Yeltsin and Zemin, together with the leaders of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan, signed a further agreement on the reduction of troops within 100 kilometres of their common borders.⁴¹⁹ Following 'Peace Operation 2005', Russian media ran an announcement by the Chief of Russia's General Staff that a second set of Russian–Chinese combined military exercises would be held in 2007, this time under the oversight of the SCO.⁴²⁰

The five-country group held annual summits from 1996 onwards. With each year, the joint statements emerging from these summits signalled greater cooperative efforts in security affairs. Moreover, they devoted more space to the group's view of the international security situation. The joint declaration following the 2000 Shanghai-5 meeting in Dushanbe announced satisfaction with the 'increased level of mutual trust in the military sphere in border areas of the Shanghai-5 countries...deepening of cooperation in political affairs and the security sphere, and increasing mutual understanding on regional and international issues...'.⁴²¹ Putin spoke clearly of the organisation's role in facilitating other Russian goals.⁴²²

The aftermath of the events of September 11, 2001 saw America's increasing presence in the form of military basing in Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan, which posed grave concerns for both China and Russia. Both countries used the SCO as a venue to express their concerns though not successfully. Thus, in July 2005, the SCO meeting in Astana, Kazakhstan, saw a resulting statement urging these Central Asian countries to set a timetable for withdrawing US troops from

member states. During the June 2006 SCO summit in Shanghai, no comments were made about US bases.

A third constraint on Russian–Chinese relations was the concern that widening military-technical cooperation would have long-term ramifications for Russian security. There was a concern that no matter how beneficial arms transfers were to individual defence enterprises or the military–industrial complex as a whole, they worked against Russia’s own long-term strategic interests.⁴²³ Sergei Kortunov, former National Security Advisor to the Russian President, argued,

Under no circumstances must our relations with China be idealised. Russia must be careful in military deals with China, maintaining technological independence from it and accelerating the connections of Chinese military production to Russian developers and companies.⁴²⁴

Post-Soviet Russia walked the precarious line between contemporary cooperation versus future threat.

Some circles rationalised this trade off with explanations of Russian weapons sales serving to ‘domesticate’ the Chinese military, making them dependent on Russia for spare parts and ammunition, and creating within that constituency a kind of constructive disposition towards Russia.⁴²⁵ Another rationale was that China’s modest defence capabilities and significant domestic problems ensured that in the short-term Russia had no reason to fear China.⁴²⁶ These were, however, rationalisations made in light of the fact that in many senses relations with China were not a luxury for Russia, but rather a necessity.⁴²⁷ Notwithstanding contentions to the contrary, fears of Chinese intentions surfaced frequently in Russian policy-making circles.

Regional dimension

As in the case of Russian domestic security, the regional objectives Russia was pursuing through cooperation with China can only be described as subordinate to other Russian interests. Nevertheless, they did set the context in which Russia formulated its policy towards China and are therefore important. The regional factor is helpful in demonstrating two intents of Russian alignment policy. First, it elucidates Russia’s desire to deepen its role in Asia-Pacific integration processes. Second, it reveals how Russia did so against the backdrop of American and Japanese objections, which Russian–Chinese cooperation sought to balance.

Initially, the Asia-Pacific region ranked rather low on Russia's hierarchy of priorities. It occupied only sixth on the Russian government's list of 15 priorities (the Asia-Pacific following the Commonwealth of Independent States, arms control and international security, economic reform, the United States and Europe).⁴²⁸ Increasingly, the rewards of both political and economic engagement with the region grew for Russia. By 1996, the Asia-Pacific ranked third in the government's list of interests, following the CIS and Eastern Europe. Yet, given its initial neglect of this area as well as rather entrenched American and Japanese interests, Russia's ability to penetrate the region was limited.

Russian policy demonstrated a belief that multilateral approaches to security in Asia ensured that its voice was still heard, particularly during its period of weakness.⁴²⁹ China was central to Russia gaining acceptance as an Asia-Pacific power. Certainly, Moscow's Asia-Pacific policy has been described as Moscow 're-entering the Asia-Pacific region through the "Chinese door"'.⁴³⁰ China was not averse to supporting a stronger Russian role in the Asia-Pacific region.⁴³¹ In the Sino-Russian joint declaration of 3 September 1994, agreement was reached on the issue of enhancing 'mutual trust and cooperation among Asia-Pacific countries through dialogue and consultation so as to develop peace, security, stability, and sustained economic development'.⁴³² By November 1997, both states came to view their positions not only as a means of developing cooperation in the region but also as 'an important component to ensure the security, stability and economic prosperity of Eurasia and the Pacific Region'.⁴³³

China more than rhetorically assisted in Russia's integration into the Asia-Pacific region. It supported and facilitated Russian entry into major regional multilateral organisations. Russia set joining regional structures, wherever possible, as an important goal of its foreign policy. These efforts culminated in its formal admission to APEC as a full member in November 1998.⁴³⁴ Its application for membership to APEC was first made in 1995. As early as the Sino-Russian Joint Declaration of 25 April 1996, China offered support for Russia's admission to APEC.⁴³⁵ Li Peng in explaining Chinese support for Russia's joining APEC declared, 'We wish Russia and the CIS would play a bigger role in the world today.'⁴³⁶

Russian entry into APEC was considered a notable accomplishment, not only because APEC was the largest trading bloc in the world, accounting for about 50 per cent of world trade turnover and about 20 per cent of Russia's foreign trade, but also because membership improved Russia's political status as an Asia-Pacific country.⁴³⁷ Moreover,

joining APEC allowed Russia to overcome more effectively the barriers to trade it had previously been obliged to address independently.⁴³⁸

Russia also gained Chinese support for its participation in ASEAN. Promotion of closer relations with ASEAN started to play a considerable role in Russian policy, this organisation being one of the most important in the Asian political and security landscape. The annual ASEAN Post-Ministerial Conferences (PMC) and the ASEAN Regional Forums (ARF) were deemed by Moscow to be an important contribution to building an atmosphere of trust in the region and working out concrete CBMs in relations between regional countries.⁴³⁹

Russia's policy of increased emphasis on integration with the Asia-Pacific region increasingly brought Russia into conflict with the United States, as America had little desire for Russia to make gains in the region. The 1997 Russian National Security Blueprint outlined Russian concerns with 'isolation from the integration processes under way in the Asian and Pacific region'.⁴⁴⁰ This was exacerbated by the security threat posed by attempts by other states, read the United States, 'to weaken Russia's position in the Asia-Pacific region'.⁴⁴¹

It was obvious that both America and Japan were reluctant to support an increased Russian role in the region.⁴⁴² Thus, Russian attempts to gain a foothold were only to be accomplished through balancing American interests. Russian Security Council Secretary Sergei Ivanov stated, 'any attempts at bringing forcible pressure to bear on the Asia-Pacific region should be resolutely neutralised, regardless of what party is seeking to exercise pressure in the region. Russia's position in this respect is backed by China, India and a number of ASEAN member countries.'⁴⁴³ As Russia sought to gain greater influence in the region, this sector became intertwined with Russia's broader attempts to defy American objectives in the late 1990s. Notwithstanding American policy towards Russia in the region, China was instrumental in facilitating Russian entry and thereby reinforcing Russian conceptions of its continued great power status.

Global dimension

This section addresses the geopolitical and diplomatic dimensions of Russian alignment with China. In so doing, it moves away from the domestic and regional in order to examine the role the United States played in Russian alignment with China. It elucidates the manner in which Russian great power aspirations, American foreign policy decisions, the Chechnya issue, and multipolarity intertwined in the Russian–Chinese–American triangle to spur Russia to align with China.

From a policy premised on consolidating Russia's great power status in the face of American challenges in the mid-1990s, Russian foreign policy evolved to actively challenge the United States through partnership with China. Initially, Russia used its partnership with China to throw off the sense of being a 'junior partner'. With an increasing sense of its national interest, Russia began to increasingly align its policies with China's on major international issues. This affected a more proactive form of defiance against American actions. The policy of multipolarity further consolidated Russia's use of alignment with China to actively balance the United States.

The Sino-Russian relationship has often been described as being used as a tool against American hegemony in the unipolar world.⁴⁴⁴ In this context, bilateral relations were seen as a response to the developing post-Cold War international order. Numerous authors depict increasing cooperation between Russia and China in the context of both states' resentment,⁴⁴⁵ opposition,⁴⁴⁶ hostility,⁴⁴⁷ resistance,⁴⁴⁸ attitude,⁴⁴⁹ and challenge⁴⁵⁰ to American unilateralism. However, this oversimplifies the evolution of the American influence on the Sino-Russian relationship. China has indeed provided Russia an important partner in challenging American predominance. Yet it was over time that this partnership came to respond to Russia's ostensible weakness in challenging American policies which posed a threat to Russian interests.

America initially acted as a deterrent to this partnership. Given the Russian democratic inclination, which pervaded the Russian foreign policy-making establishment in the early post-Soviet period, America influenced Russian relations with China in two ways. First, the United States was rhetorically willing and able to provide Russia with both economic and political assistance, thereby discouraging relations with states such as China. Second, America symbolically deterred Russia from deeper cooperation with a state deemed a pariah following the Tiananmen Square massacre and its history of human rights abuses.⁴⁵¹ As a result, Russia sought only an amelioration of tensions with China, demonstrating its continued desire to join the West and pursue deeper partnership with the United States. Foreign Minister Kozyrev's first visit to Beijing in March 1992 illustrated how much Russian foreign policy had moved to the West as issues such as Taiwan and Chinese human rights abuses occupied a central place on the agenda similar to the Sino-American agenda.⁴⁵²

Russia soon came to experience disappointment in the pace of economic reforms and America's contribution to its failures, the paucity

of Western assistance, and Russia's treatment on the world stage.⁴⁵³ This disillusionment mitigated the force of the American deterrent. In fact, the decline in Russian–American relations contributed to greater Sino-Russian cooperation, which corresponded with the desire to use Russian foreign policy to entrench Russian great power status. Russia moved from using its relations with China to consolidate its great power status to openly challenge the United States. Certainly, Sino-Russian cooperation became ever more proactive rather than merely responsive to particular American policies. Russia used its relations with China to demonstrate its defiance in two ways: Russia had great power partners capable of challenging attempts to diminish Russia's status and it would use these partnerships to challenge America's right to hegemony.

Russia sought to utilise China to resist the perception of Russia as a 'junior' power. Great powerhood for Russia was neither merely symbolic nor a relic of past glory. Rather, at a practical level, great power was equated with influence without which Russia was unable to guarantee its security. Frequent invocations of Russian and Chinese nuclear status and permanent membership in the United Nations Security Council reinforced Russia's right to such great power status.⁴⁵⁴ Furthermore, Primakov declared that friendship with China was 'indispensable to Russia, which resists the notion that there were winners and losers of the Cold War'.⁴⁵⁵

Russia did not view its loss of status as a natural evolution, but rather as a conspicuous attempt by other states to harm Russian interests. The 1997 Russian National Security Blueprint emphasised, 'Threats to the Russian Federation's national security in the international sphere are manifested via the attempts of other states to counter Russia's consolidation as an influential centre of the multipolar world that is taking shape.'⁴⁵⁶ One of Russia's responses to these threats was its close relationship with China. China supported Russia's maintenance of great power status. Despite what some might call simply sparing Russia's injured vanity,⁴⁵⁷ China unremittingly described Russia as an equal partner and an international great power.⁴⁵⁸ Unquestionably, each bilateral summit included such phrases as, 'China and Russia both are great powers.'⁴⁵⁹ Bilateral cooperation not only emphasised notions of great powerhood but also increasingly accentuated the equality of Sino-Russian relations,⁴⁶⁰ helping to mitigate the sense of Russia's declining status.

Russia sought not only to entrench its position as a great power through cooperation with China, but also to challenge the United

States' right to disregard Russian interests. As Russian–American relations deteriorated, Russia firmly asserted its intention to oppose any possible recurrences of imperialist manifestations in Washington's policy or efforts to realise the policy of turning the United States into the sole superpower.⁴⁶¹ The solution proposed, given Russia's weakened state, was the creation of partnerships and alliances to counter harmful international trends. According to individuals like Vladimir Lukin, former Russian Ambassador to the United States, the only option was to balance Russia's relations with the West by intensifying ties with such important regional actors as China and India.

The purpose of cultivating better relations with Russia's other neighbours is, of course, to realise such direct benefits as mutual gains from trade; it could also, however, provide [Russia] with much-needed leverage in its dealing with the West by demonstrating [Russia's] willingness to look elsewhere for friends.⁴⁶²

Gradually, the deterioration of Russian–American relations and American actions seen as threats to Russian interests exemplified the need for a more cogent Russian policy response. By 1994, the Yeltsin government began to focus more actively on relations with China in the context of the Russian–American relationship. Initially, Russia's approach was rather ad hoc, with a number of rhetorical statements being issued to demonstrate a joint commitment to oppose issues which threatened Russia's status. The Russian–Chinese Declaration that followed the summit of September 1994 was a good example, declaring joint support for 'equal cooperation, non-discriminatory participation in international affairs, the inadmissibility of expansionist tendencies, hegemonism, power politics and the creation of antagonistic blocs...'.⁴⁶³ Increasingly, Russia and China undertook a more strategic approach to the American question.⁴⁶⁴

It is noteworthy that within a month of every meeting that Yeltsin carried out with Western representatives, Russian officials met and signed significant economic and political agreements with China. It is difficult to factor in the salience of this for Russian negotiations with the United States. However, the aforementioned 1994 Russian–Chinese declaration was signed a mere three weeks before President Yeltsin met with President Clinton on an official visit to the United States. It is interesting that this period also saw a hastening of American support for Russian ascension to the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and

the WTO⁴⁶⁵ perhaps reflecting American concerns that they were 'losing' Russia.

On 14 July 1994, a mere four days after the G-7 Summit in Naples, Yeltsin stated that Russia was 'firmly and immovably heading to the East' and would 'establish closer relations' with Eastern countries, including China.⁴⁶⁶ Russia was increasingly willing to use its relations with China to sabre-rattle against the United States. Thus, in December 1999, after meeting with President Jiang Zemin, and in connection with the bombing of Kosovo, Yeltsin sent a warning to Clinton:

Yesterday, Clinton took the liberty of putting pressure on Russia. It seems he has forgotten for a few seconds, a minute or half a minute what Russia represents, and that Russia has at its disposal a full nuclear arsenal... That means that as agreed with Chinese President Jiang Zemin, it is us who will dictate how the world should behave and not him alone.⁴⁶⁷

Russia and China found their stances coalescing on more international issues. One of the issues, which gradually gained salience in the relationship, was that of sovereignty. There is a clear linkage between Russian concerns over sovereignty and the American connection. Concerns over American unilateralism intertwined with Russian anxieties over the preservation of the centrality of notions of Westphalian sovereignty. These issues were most emphatically invoked on a number of occasions with respect to American actions in the former Yugoslavia and Iraq. Consequently, rhetoric and joint declarations took on a relevance that might not otherwise have been the case.

Protection of national sovereignty and territorial integrity were fundamental to Russian thinking from the very inception of the state's first post-Soviet military doctrine.⁴⁶⁸ The basic provisions of the 1993 Russian Military Doctrine stated that the country would use all means at its disposal for the protection of its sovereignty and territorial integrity.⁴⁶⁹ Moreover, the very first Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation in 1993 placed 'providing political means of security for Russia in all dimensions, including sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity'⁴⁷⁰ as the foremost priority for Russian foreign policy.

Given both Russia's declining capacity to project power internationally and domestically, Russia found itself with a potentially debilitating dilemma. It simultaneously faced secessionist tendencies threatening Russian territorial integrity and international condemnation of

the manner in which it dealt with this internal conflict. It would be unwise to negate the importance of this issue in Russian policy-making throughout the post-Soviet period. Whereas in the past, Russia considered its sovereignty sacrosanct, its ability to defend against an increasingly interventionist American foreign policy in the post-Cold War era depended on allies. In its role as a great power and regional leader in the Asia-Pacific region, China proved an important partner in challenging threats to Russian sovereignty.

Both Russia and China had common interest in controlling nationalist tendencies and preventing foreign involvement within their territories.⁴⁷¹ Secessionist and irredentist challenges faced both Russia in the Buryat-inhabited areas of the Baikal region and Chechnya and China in Xinjiang and Inner Mongolia.⁴⁷² The Chechnya conflict began in December 1994; however, its roots lay in the unilateral proclamation of independence in the fall of 1991. In the following three years, Chechnya was inundated with lawlessness and criminal activity.⁴⁷³ By the late 1990s, Russian policy-makers feared that Chechnya was turning into a radical Islamic territory, a haven for international terrorists, and an incitement for the rest of the North Caucasus to seek secession.⁴⁷⁴ These events had serious ramifications for Russia in the world community. Russia was unwilling under any circumstances to permit international involvement in an issue that it considered to be entirely domestic in nature.

Given their similar fears, it is not surprising that Russia and China came together to oppose intervention and support the eradication of threats to the state.⁴⁷⁵ In a move meant to demonstrate not only solidarity on these issues but also increasingly consistent political positions, Russia used its relationship with China to oppose Western objections to its behaviour in Chechnya and any international attempts at involvement in Russia's military operations in Chechnya.⁴⁷⁶

China repeatedly supported Russia's position that Chechnya was strictly a Russian matter. The Sino-Russian summit of April 1996 resulted in a declaration affirming, 'The People's Republic of China supports the measures and actions, being taken by the Russian Federation with the objective of the defence of its unity, and considers the Chechen problem a Russian domestic issue.'⁴⁷⁷ In response to the negative reaction from the West with regard to Russia's second Chechen campaign in late 1999, in a meeting with Chinese legislative chairman Li Peng, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Zhang Qiyue supported Russia's position, when she stated,

The Chinese side understands and supports the efforts made by Russia to maintain its national unity and territorial integrity. China has always been opposed to interference in other countries' internal affairs by any country in any name. We think that the Chechnya issue is the internal affair of Russia.⁴⁷⁸

This position was further reinforced in a multilateral setting with the Dushanbe statement following from the Shanghai-5 summit in July 2000, which pledged that the five participating countries would jointly crack down on liberation movements, terrorism, and religious extremism in their borders and, in a veiled reference to the United States, oppose intervention in other countries' internal affairs on the pretexts of 'humanitarianism' and 'protecting human rights'.⁴⁷⁹

Both Russia and China shared a strong distaste for external interference anywhere in the world, as they themselves feared the prospect of American intervention in their territories.⁴⁸⁰ Though it is unlikely that serious challenges would have emerged threatening Russian sovereignty, American and European opposition to Russia's actions in Chechnya in addition to NATO's out-of-area operations were seen as posing a threat to Russian interests.

As Russian discontent with American policy grew by the mid-1990s, so too did Russian–Chinese cooperation on these issues. Their coordination was premised on particular American policy decisions rather than pre-empting or inciting American actions. Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov stated, 'Russian-Chinese foreign policy cooperation relies on the coincidence or proximity of our approaches to fundamental questions of world development and concrete international problems.'⁴⁸¹ Li Peng further clarified this coincidence when declaring, 'the strategic partnership of China and Russia helps to correct the balance of forces in the world'.⁴⁸²

By 1994, Prime Minister Chernomyrdin and Chinese President Jiang Zemin agreed that, 'Russia and China have close or the same opinions on the fundamental international issues.'⁴⁸³ In broad terms, Russian and Chinese positions on the development of the international system strongly coincided. They actively coordinated their policies on three particular issues in opposition to the United States: NATO expansion and military intervention; abrogation of the ABM Treaty; and the bombing of Iraq.

Both states felt that NATO expansion as well as NATO intervention in Yugoslavia threatened their interests. For this reason, they joined

together to jointly express their opposition. In October 1998, Defence Minister Igor Sergeev stated in Beijing, 'Russia and China are categorically against NATO's eastward expansion and a forcible solution to the Kosovo problem.'⁴⁸⁴ In January 2000, Chinese and Russian Defence Ministers Chi Haotian and Igor Sergeev agreed that the essence of NATO's new strategic concept was to turn NATO into an interventionist and offensive political and military bloc. Incidentally, at the end of the meeting, the Defence Ministers signed a 'Memorandum of Mutual Understanding Between the Defence Ministries on Further Strengthening Cooperation in the Military Field'.⁴⁸⁵ The connection between anti-American sentiments and improved military cooperation should not be underestimated given Russian fears of potential American threats to Russian security interests.

Russian policy coordination with China on NATO expansion became even more proactive and aggressive with the decline in Russian-American relations. Accordingly, in December 1999, on an official visit to China and in response to NATO bombing of Yugoslavia, Yeltsin reminded the United States that Russia 'possesses a full arsenal of nuclear arms', while at the same time vowing 'to deepen the Sino-Russian strategic partnership'.⁴⁸⁶ Moreover, in December 1999, Presidents Yeltsin and Zemin issued a joint declaration denouncing American attempts to violate the ABM Treaty as unacceptable⁴⁸⁷ which was symbolic of the more proactive approach to balancing taken in the Sino-Russian relationship. Russia along with Belarus and China drafted a UN 'Resolution on the Preservation of and Compliance with the ABM Treaty'. In November 1999, the Resolution was approved by the First Committee of the UN General Assembly in Charge of Disarmament and International Security Problems.⁴⁸⁸ On the interrelated issue of National Missile Defence (NMD), Russia and China came to speak with one voice. During the Sino-Russian summit of July 2000, Putin and Zemin issued a joint statement. The Beijing Declaration maintained,

China and Russia believe that the nature of NMD is to seek unilateral military and security advantages which will pose the most grave adverse consequences not only to the national security of Russia, China and other countries, but also to the security and international strategic stability of the United States itself. In this context, China and Russia have registered their unequivocal opposition ...⁴⁸⁹

They even persuaded the Shanghai-5 to issue a joint statement criticising the proposed American NMD system.⁴⁹⁰ Furthermore, Presidents Putin

and Zemin consulted on 14 December 2001, immediately prior to America's withdrawal from the ABM Treaty. They called for closer cooperation between their countries to prevent international instability.⁴⁹¹

Another issue, which has seen more active Sino-Russian cooperation in response to American actions, was that of Iraq. Both countries opposed American military intervention in Iraq.⁴⁹² Cooperation with regard to the Iraq issue is discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.

The crisis surrounding North Korea's pursuit of nuclear capabilities is an important case of Russian–Chinese cooperation in the international sphere to balance the United States. In the summer of 2006, a crisis broke out after North Korea tested a number of long-range missiles, violating a moratorium on missile launches. China and Russia resisted United Nations Security Council attempts to impose sanctions, arguing that only diplomacy could halt the isolated regime's development of such programmes.⁴⁹³ Japan, backed by the United States and Great Britain, circulated a resolution that would ban any country from transferring funds, material, and technology that could be used in North Korea's missile and weapons of mass destruction programmes.

China and Russia favoured a less unequivocal statement without any threat of sanctions.⁴⁹⁴ Within a few days of the crisis erupting, China, backed by Russia, submitted its own draft statement in order to avoid a resolution imposing sanctions which could possibly lay the groundwork for military action as it did in the case of Iraq.⁴⁹⁵ After numerous drafts, stringent economic and weapons sanctions were imposed.⁴⁹⁶ As a result of Chinese and Russian efforts, the final resolution dropped the threat of the use of Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter, which makes sanctions mandatory and suggests the possibility of military enforcement.⁴⁹⁷ Both countries continue to play a significant role in the resolution of tensions in the region.

Incidentally, demonstrating a continuing confusion within Russia with regard to the issue of North Korea, Russia was facing criticism after secretly offering to sell North Korea technology that could help the state to protect its nuclear stockpiles and safeguard weapons secrets from international scrutiny.⁴⁹⁸

Russian attempts to balance against the United States largely responded to the evolution of a post-Cold War order more and more reflecting a unipolar system, at the head of which stood the United States. This relegated Russia to what it perceived to be an inferior role, one that was unacceptable. More frequent and active policy coordination with China was Russia's response.

Russian emphasis on multipolarity is especially illustrative of its developing recognition that it was incapable of balancing the United States independently.⁴⁹⁹ Consequently, Russia came to align itself with China, among others, to pursue multipolarity. It was a policy of engaging strategic partners to give Russia flexibility in dealings with the outside world at a time when its economic and military capabilities were seriously weakened.⁵⁰⁰

Primakov argued that Russia, like any great power, needed a diverse foreign policy cultivating strong ties not only with the West but also with a variety of countries.⁵⁰¹ By promoting this multipolar model Primakov was recognising that not only was Russia's status as a great power in jeopardy, but also its ability to respond to threats emanating from the international system, and more specifically from the United States. The concept of multipolarity was a substantial, though not directly confrontational, challenge to American hegemony.⁵⁰²

China reinforced Russian calls for multipolarity on a multitude of occasions, with both sides agreeing to 'regard each other as major powers that have an important role to play in safeguarding peace and stability in a world that is heading towards multipolarity'.⁵⁰³ Furthermore, they agreed that the new world order should be 'balanced, stable, democratic and non-confrontational... which would benefit the principal interests of all countries'.⁵⁰⁴ These conceptions coalesced in April 1997 with the signing of the Russian–Chinese Joint Declaration on a Multipolar World and the Establishment of a New World Order.⁵⁰⁵ In an indirect reference to the United States, the declaration noted, 'No country should seek hegemony, conduct a policy based on force and monopolise international affairs.'⁵⁰⁶

Though diplomats generally avoided references to any specific blocs or particular countries, President Yeltsin noted at the signing ceremony, 'Somebody pulls us, all the time, to a unipolar world and wants to dictate his will, but we like the multipolar principle.'⁵⁰⁷ The United States welcomed cautiously the results of the talks. Clinton remarked that the agreements concluded by Russia and China conform to the spirit of positive partnership and are not spearheaded against their neighbours.⁵⁰⁸ However, the White House, Department of State, and the Pentagon generally demonstrated a marked lack of interest in this 'insignificant' event.⁵⁰⁹

Though much of the rhetoric around the concept of multipolarity lessened under Putin, by the mid-2000s the rhetoric was reinvigorated. On 2 June 2006, Foreign Minister Lavrov met with his Indian and Chinese counterparts. During discussions, he highlighted the concepts

of multipolarity and multilateralism. Moreover, Lavrov stated, 'Russia, India, and China have joint approaches to global issues, based on international law and principles of multipolarity.'⁵¹⁰

China has become an integral part of Russia's multipolar policy. The declaration on multipolarisation was a rarity in the history of bilateral relations.⁵¹¹ It was an expression of the assessment that not only was the world moving towards multipolarity, but also that the Sino-Russian partnership would have an important role to play in the process.⁵¹² The use of the Sino-Russian alignment to further the ideals of multipolarisation continued with the Beijing Declaration, where Putin stressed that 'solidifying the strategic partnership between China and Russia will also help to strengthen the... promotion of a multipolarised world and the building of a just and fair new international order'.⁵¹³

Conclusions

The Chinese case demonstrates the background importance of domestic security and regional factors in Russian alignment considerations in the early post-Soviet period. Given the potential threat China posed to Russian interests through the issues of border demarcation and illegal immigration, Russian cooperation with China sought to reduce Russian insecurity. Moreover, China proved instrumental in reinforcing Russian conceptions of sovereignty and territorial integrity. This factor was especially vital given American interventions in the 1990s and Russian concerns over Chechnya. Limited cooperation in the areas of domestic security set the tone for improved cooperation in economics and global issues.

Economics played an important role in the relationship though never reaching the objectives set by both states. Notwithstanding the interest of Russian economic actors, both public and private, economic engagement seriously lagged behind the Russian government's political aspirations for the bilateral relationship.

As confidence was established through successful Russian–Chinese engagement and as Russian–American relations deteriorated, Russia's relations with China were increasingly guided by global concerns. By the mid-1990s, Russia's policy towards China starkly highlighted deliberate balancing. The Chinese case is important in illustrating the responsiveness of Russian balancing behaviour. Active balancing occurred only when relations with the United States were experiencing significant difficulties and often in response to particular issues that Russia viewed as threatening to either Russian great power status or its national interests.

Russian cooperation with China in the pursuit of multipolarity was highly indicative of Russian uses of China to balance the United States. Given China's influence and growing power, its agreement to be a party to a joint declaration on a multipolar world and the establishment of a new world order was a significant boost to Russian attempts to challenge American hegemony. Over the course of the post-Soviet period, the threat of the fire-breathing dragon ebbed in the face of more immediate threats to Russian interests. As such, Russia sought to engage its neighbour in a partnership serving its short-term interests while postponing the inevitable re-evaluation of this partnership as the dragon grew in strength.

4

Partnership with Iran: The Lynchpin of the Axis of Evil?

From a policy largely premised on responsiveness to Iranian initiatives, Russia came to use its alignment with Iran to actively challenge the United States. Peculiar to the Russian–Iranian relationship in the post-Cold War period has been the fact that these relations occurred almost entirely in the shadow of American interference. Russia frequently examined its policy towards Iran through the lens of American suspicions of Iran.⁵¹⁴ The Iranian case was the clearest illustration of how the American factor played into Russian alignment policy.

The strong cooperation between Russia and the United States in the early post-Soviet period created a permissive environment for economic drivers of Russian policy to flourish in relations with Iran. Iran was able to manoeuvre Russian enterprises into deepening cooperation thereby consolidating Russian–Iranian relations in the absence of a strategic Russian policy.

By the mid-1990s, regional concerns were a major factor motivating Russian policy towards Iran. Given the enormous challenges Russia faced with Islamic fundamentalism, Iran's cooperation and restraint was important in encouraging increased ties. The period between 1995 and 1996, when Russian–Iranian cooperation at the regional level was consolidated, coincided with a strong progression in the relationship more generally. At the time, Russian–American relations were sufficiently strong that regional relations could underpin Russian policy. Though Russia and Iran did not necessarily see eye to eye on every issue, these interactions were considerable in providing a deeper basis for relations.

Increasingly, Russia's relations with Iran were guided by global concerns. Iran's value rose as it came to play a more important role in the Russian–American relationship. When Russian–American relations were favourable, Russia was willing to use its relationship with Iran as

a bargaining chip in the Russian–American relationship. The increased stress in Russian–American relations and the concurrent shift in Russian foreign policy brought about a change in Russian calculations. By the end of the 1990s and early 2000s, Russia’s policy towards Iran was predicted on the deliberate and conscious balancing of the United States. Russian policy was largely reactive to the negative developments in the Russian–American relationship. This is indicative of Russia’s overall willingness to bandwagon. Only when this proved impracticable did Russia actively choose the balancing option. Though Russian policy for most of the period was largely responsive to Iranian initiatives, Russia became more proactive as a result of Russian relations with the United States.

Iran came to signify a means of responding to Russian discontent with the evolution of the international system, and particularly American hegemony. It is important to note that Russian policy towards Iran maintained moderation and constraint at most times. The use of Iran was not meant to create a serious strain on Russian–American relations. Rather, it sought to ensure Russia’s status in light of American expansion into Russian spheres of interest.

Factors in Russian policy towards Iran

Russian economic ministries and commercial lobbies drove relations in the initial period by responding to numerous economic proposals. These ministries, including the Ministries of Atomic Energy, Fuel and Energy, and Defence, and their ‘clients’ set the tone for relations which the government then had to reconcile with Russia’s broader strategic goals.

The Russian government, however, remained sensitive to American concerns. Russia’s early unambiguously pro-Western inclination allowed the United States to constrain Russian engagement with Iran. Thus, the United States was able to induce Russia to cancel a major submarine sale in 1992. The United States Senate also introduced an amendment linking foreign aid to Russia limiting its military cooperation with Iran. The economic ministries and lobbies, however, continued to press for partnership.

By 1994, economic engagement provided the basis for increased cooperation in other fields. Notwithstanding these efforts, increasing pressure by Washington on Russian–Iranian cooperation resulted in the signing of the secret Gore–Chernomyrdin agreement. This was the high tide mark of Russian acceptance of American constraints on its relations.

As more serious strains in Russian–American relations developed, the Russian government not only weakened American constraints but increasingly became proactive in using alignment with Iran to actively balance the United States. By the mid-2000s, Russia’s global interests were at the forefront of Russian relations with Iran. As the international crises erupted in response to the Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad’s bellicose approach to Israel and to the nuclear question, Russia sought to maintain its role as key intermediary between Iran and the Western nations.

The economic dimension

The economic dimension was central to Russia’s pursuit of closer cooperation with Iran, most evidently in the early post-Soviet period. The economic sector of the Russian–Iranian relationship was continually and thoroughly influenced by the American factor. The United States undertook a variety of measures to impede and prevent Russian–Iranian cooperation in the nuclear and military-technical fields. The clearest example was the signing of the Gore–Chernomyrdin agreement. The Iranian case highlights the reactivity of Russian policy more generally. Neither the Russian government nor private economic actors drove economic interaction with Iran. Rather, they largely responded to Iranian initiatives. It was only when the Iranian relationship became politicised did Russian economic cooperation with Iran really take on greater salience.

Similar to the Chinese case, Russia’s economic relationship with Iran was premised on Russia’s comparative economic advantage in the Iranian market. There already existed a strong basis for economic cooperation. The Soviet Union had assisted Iran in building its first steel mill in the 1960s and was party to many important Iranian industrial projects.⁵¹⁵ Moreover, from the mid-1960s, Iran transferred considerable amounts of gas at below market prices to the Soviet Union.⁵¹⁶ In the post-Soviet era, Russia sought to increase its hard currency export earnings but had few opportunities to do so. Iran, in turn, desired products which a Western trade embargo prevented it from obtaining elsewhere.⁵¹⁷ Though some Russian technologies and industrial products were not necessarily as advanced as those of the West, they were in high demand in Iran.⁵¹⁸ However, the development of economic ties had to contend with the legacies of the Soviet past.

Moscow adopted a new foreign trade policy towards Iran in 1992, demanding payment for goods and services rather than the old Soviet

system of credits and barter.⁵¹⁹ In the past, the Soviet government sometimes turned a blind eye to non-payment for the sake of securing political gains. As a result, overdue debts by Iran were approximately \$582 million by the end of July 1995. Of this sum, \$383 million was owed to *Rosvooruzhenie*, the Russian state arms producer.⁵²⁰

On the eve of May 1995 talks with Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Mahmud Va'ezzi, Russian Deputy Prime Minister Davydov revealed that Iran had requested a rescheduling of its debt to Russia, but asserted that the Russian economy could not provide its resources on credit based on uncertain guarantees.⁵²¹ The days of Soviet-style cooperation had ended and financially sound agreements had to be reached if economic links were to continue. It was only in December 1995 that both countries signed a protocol on settling reciprocal financial obligations and an inter-bank agreement on payment procedures, setting a more solid foundation for economic cooperation.⁵²²

Russian–Iranian economic cooperation continued to expand with the signing of a protocol on long-term economic cooperation in April 1996. This document sought to achieve an increase in trade turnover from \$400 million in 1996 (the figure was \$200 million in 1995) to \$4 billion by 2000.⁵²³ Though this was a rather improbable goal, by 1997 the process of decline in trade had ended. Even with severe tensions between Iran and the United States over Iran's development of nuclear technology, Russia proceeded with trade negotiations in Tehran in December 2006, through the Russian–Iranian economic commission.⁵²⁴ There were three key areas, which drove Russian–Iranian economic cooperation: nuclear technology, military-technical ties, and oil and gas projects.

Nuclear technology sales

Nuclear energy was a field in which Russia had an important advantage at a time in which Russia had fewer and fewer competitive technologies. For this reason, Minatom as well as companies such as *Tekhnopromexport* which had long delivered power equipment and built power stations in Iran⁵²⁵ were eager to sell their technology abroad. Minatom was to become one of the most proactive sectors of the Russian government in engaging Iran.

Russian provision of nuclear technology to Iran was a particularly sensitive area, as it attracted consistent and intense criticism from the United States. This emphasis served to raise the salience of nuclear technology transfers to Iran in Russian foreign policy calculations.

First Deputy Atomic Energy Minister Valentin Ivanov declared, 'Russia's nuclear collaboration with Iran has been blown up out of all proportion by the US for purely political reasons and without any real justification.'⁵²⁶

The United States influenced Russian nuclear cooperation with Iran in three ways. First, the imposition of economic sanctions and other financial deterrents to Russian–Iranian nuclear cooperation set the tone for increased resistance to American extraterritorial legal measures and political interference in Russian decision-making. Second, in response to increasing tensions in the Russian–American relationship, Russia undertook a policy in the nuclear energy field of active balancing. That is not to say that this was the primary motivation. Russia was to reap enormous economic benefits from such cooperation. However, Russia also manoeuvred to use sales of nuclear technology to demonstrate independence and defiance against American policy objectives. Third, the United States sought to create and exacerbate divisions within Russia over cooperation with Iran.

In August 1992, Russia and Iran signed an agreement on cooperation for the peaceful use of nuclear energy and an accord to build a nuclear power plant at Bushehr in Iran.⁵²⁷ From the outset, America sought to end this nuclear cooperation. The United States used a number of means to achieve this end. They conditioned aid and imposed sanctions on Russian institutions believed to be facilitating the development of Iranian nuclear weapons. Thus, in November 1997, the United States attached the condition of stopping the sale of nuclear technologies to Iran to a \$200 million aid package for the former Soviet republics.⁵²⁸ Furthermore, in May 1998, the United States Senate imposed sanctions against 20 Russian organisations for assisting Iranian missile technology development. In response, Yevgeny Adamov, Minister for Atomic Energy, stated, 'Russia will continue to cooperate with Iran in the construction of nuclear power plants, in spite of the "huge" problems arising in this connection with the US.'⁵²⁹

In December 1998, the American Central Intelligence Agency issued a report stressing that Russian assistance had accelerated Iranian development of the Shihab-III missile.⁵³⁰ Within a month, on 12 January 1999, Sandy Berger, the President's National Security Adviser, announced punitive measures against the Scientific Research and Design Institute of Power and Technology (NIKIET), the Mendeleyev Chemical Technical University, and the Moscow Aviation Institute along with eight other organisations.⁵³¹ This action was seen by Russia to be in contravention of understandings reached between the Presidents of Russia and the United

States in September 1998 on the promotion of bilateral cooperation over non-proliferation, including export controls.⁵³²

In addition to economic sanctions, the United States attempted to make nuclear cooperation with Iran more difficult for Russia with regard to international financial institutions. In April 1999, International Monetary Fund representatives, as an additional condition for allocating a credit of \$4 billion, allegedly demanded a serious review of Russian foreign economic policy in the nuclear energy sphere. In particular, there was apparently a stipulation that Russia curtail its sales of nuclear technology to Iran, India, and China. By the end of the talks, however, when it became clear that the credit would be allocated regardless, this demand was lifted. Minister of Atomic Energy, Yevgeny Adamov, stated, 'We believe that this is a pure "canard". After all, the IMF's standard demands concern the most general budget parameters and the feasibility of tax policy.'⁵³³

These American actions did not achieve their objectives. American policy led initially to Russian attempts to limit American constraints. Certainly, the Russian nuclear sector had little desire for American sanctions. Thus, despite harsh criticism of American sanctions, in the short-term the Russian government actively sought their withdrawal. As mentioned earlier, given the enormous pressure the US was placing on Russian officials with regard to the Bushehr power station, Russia sought to assuage American concerns. Viktor Mikhailov proposed that the US develop a joint system of control for Bushehr. The objective was to dispel American suspicions that Russia was handing over nuclear technologies to Iran and end any threats of sanctions against Russian organizations.⁵³⁴ Moreover, a Russian delegation of experts headed by Anatoli Bulochkin, head of the Russian Export Control Centre, and including representatives from the Duma, the Security Council, the Foreign Ministry, and the Russian Defence Ministry travelled to Washington in October 1998, and before sanctions were announced, in order to assuage American concerns. Bulochkin revealed the main task of the visit was the conduct of talks with American Congressmen who frequently 'fired broadsides at Russian-Iranian relations in the nuclear sphere'.⁵³⁵ These attempts at conciliation were indicative of Russian caution in its foreign policy more broadly.

The more enduring outcome for Russian officials was the desire to defy American constraints. Thus, as Russian economic actors were more and more impacted by American constraints, the state came to react to these in a more politicised manner. As the Russian-American relationship deteriorated, exacerbated by the imposition of sanctions, Russia

came to use these transfers to demonstrate independence of the United States. The clearest case can be seen in the Bushehr issue.

Post-Soviet nuclear relations with Iran were truly initiated with the March 1993 agreement on the sale of two 440 MW nuclear reactors to Tehran, signed by Russian Foreign Minister Kozyrev and his Iranian counterpart.⁵³⁶ American opposition was harsh. A high-ranking spokesman for the Clinton administration spoke almost immediately about Washington's determination to get the deal cancelled.⁵³⁷ Moreover, the United States Congress engaged in criticism verging on threats.⁵³⁸ Presidents Yeltsin and Clinton reached a compromise, with Yeltsin promising that Russia would deliver equipment for none but peaceful applications of nuclear power.⁵³⁹ However, this was not much of a compromise from the American perspective, given its desire to prevent Iran from obtaining any and all nuclear technology.⁵⁴⁰

It is noteworthy that successive Ministers of Atomic Energy were extremely active in pursuing cooperation in the field of nuclear technology. In early 1995, Minatom announced that it would be using income from sales of nuclear reactors to Iran, India, and China to finance an ambitious plan to build new nuclear facilities and modernise existing ones within Russia.⁵⁴¹ Thus, the complications that these relations caused for Russia's relations with the United States were subordinated to financial need in the Minatom's calculations.

The most controversial agreement was signed in January 1995 by Minister of Atomic Energy, Viktor Mikhailov, and the head of the Atomic Energy Agency of Iran, Reza Amrollahi. Russia formally agreed to complete the construction of the first unit of an unfinished nuclear power station at Bushehr by installing a 1000 MW light-water reactor. Incidentally, Amrollahi and Mikhailov also signed a secret protocol under which Russia and Iran would conduct talks on a wide range of nuclear assistance beyond the power reactor. Under this protocol, Russia agreed to open negotiations on providing Iranian specialists with training at Russian nuclear research centres, assisting Iran's efforts to mine uranium, and supplying Iran with a gas-centrifuge uranium enrichment facility.⁵⁴² The protocol also discussed the possibility of Russia providing Iran with 2000 metric tons of natural uranium and a research reactor.⁵⁴³

Despite American protests, Russia argued the deal broke no international laws as Iran was a signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), extensive International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspections had found no problems, and the reactor being built was

the same prototype as the nuclear reactor the United States had offered North Korea.

Given serious points of contention in Russian–American relations by the late 1990s, the Russian government was increasingly vocal in its opposition to American interference. Yevgeny Adamov, Minister of Atomic Energy, made this clear on a number of occasions: ‘Attempts to restrict us to American grants and to handouts are humiliating for our industry and for our country.’⁵⁴⁴ Furthermore, the nuclear arena was gradually coming to be one in which issues of Russian sovereignty and independence came to play an important role. The Russian ambassador to Iran, Sergei Tretyakov, while raising the possibility of further nuclear projects in Iran, stated, ‘Russia is an independent country and is entitled to choose its friends for itself.’⁵⁴⁵ This rhetoric was accompanied by practical measures. By February 1996, Russia began to fulfil its contract worth \$800 million with Iran for the first power unit in Bushehr.⁵⁴⁶

Increasingly, this defiance came to occupy a significant place in ensuring Russia’s continued engagement in Iran. In February 1998, Atomic Energy Minister Mikhailov announced that the *Atomstroieksport Company* would build the nuclear power plant at Bushehr not partially as was proposed but on a turnkey basis since Iran was not able to cope with its part of the work.⁵⁴⁷ Given strains in the Russian–American relationship, American protests against these contracts were answered with boldness. Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov vehemently maintained, ‘The construction of the Bushehr nuclear power plant concerns only Iran and Russia.’⁵⁴⁸

In early March 1998, during the second session of the Russian–Iranian Inter-Governmental Commission on Economic Cooperation, co-chaired by Deputy Prime Minister Vladimir Bulgak, an agreement was reached on the construction of the third and the fourth sets of the Bushehr nuclear power station.⁵⁴⁹ Demonstrating the confusion within the government itself, a day later, a Minatom spokesman declared that Russia would wait to commit to building any more nuclear power facilities in Iran until the first stages of Russia’s commitments at the Bushehr plant were completed, arguing that any new deals would be at least two years away.⁵⁵⁰ At the same time, the Russian–American Intergovernmental Commission for Economic and Technological Cooperation was meeting in Washington. First Deputy Atomic Energy Minister Lev Ryabov reiterated Russia’s defiant approach to American protests against Russian cooperation with Iran.

In the aftermath of the bombing of Kosovo and in the midst of American efforts to abrogate the ABM Treaty, the Russian government

used its relationship with Iran to balance the United States, making it easier to facilitate nuclear transfers. In May 2000, President Putin changed the 1992 Presidential decree 'On Controlling the Export of Nuclear Materials, Equipment and Technologies from the Russian Federation'. In so doing, Russia permitted itself to supply nuclear technologies and materials to countries whose nuclear programmes were not fully monitored by the IAEA.⁵⁵¹ Incidentally, at the same time, Moscow and Iran were in talks for the construction of three additional nuclear facilities valued at \$2 billion.⁵⁵² Most noteworthy is that this action was taken the week preceding President Clinton's visit to Moscow, demonstrating the more active approach to balancing Russia was undertaking.

By October 2000, the Russian Foreign Ministry declared that it had taken a step closer to signing a long-term economic deal with Iran that would ensure continued cooperation in the nuclear sector despite American concerns. Within a month, Russia announced its decision to withdraw from the 1995 Gore–Chernomyrdin agreement.⁵⁵³ Iranian overtures to Russia influenced Russian desires for economic gains. However, more importantly, the action was taken against the backdrop of a more overtly unilateral American foreign policy and the American labelling of Iran as part of the 'axis of evil'.

Following the April 2006 announcement by President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad that Iran had successfully enriched uranium, Russia sought to counteract US demands for a severe international response. In September 2006, Russia agreed to provide Iran with low-enriched uranium fuel for the Bushehr reactor by March 2007. At the same time, a number of significant delays plagued the Bushehr project. Though Russian officials characterised these delays as resulting from technical problems, officials from other nations have insinuated that Russia may have been dragging its feet, perhaps to exert pressure on Iran to ameliorate tensions.⁵⁵⁴

Notwithstanding Russia's economic interests in Iran, Russia acted in a cautious manner, pursuing its interests while ensuring that it did not unduly harm relations with its Western partners. Protracted negotiations over the text of UN Resolution 1737 continued until December 2006. Russia had learned a number of important lessons from the US invasion of Iraq. In October 2006, Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov declared that, 'We cannot support and will actively oppose any attempt to use the Security Council to punish Iran or to use Iran's nuclear program in order to promote the idea of regime change.'⁵⁵⁵ As a result, Russia would not back down on its position on Resolution 1737. The final version

which was unanimously agreed upon was watered down in response to Russian and Chinese demands, softening some proposed sanctions and deleting others.⁵⁵⁶ Furthermore, the Resolution exempted construction of Bushehr and allowed Russians to continue working at the site.

Given the lack of success of American sanctions in altering Russian policy, the United States turned to other forms of financial threat which challenged the cohesion of Russian policy from within. Russian nuclear policy towards Iran was affected by a significant conflict between various sectors of the government. Notwithstanding the enormous profits to be made by the nuclear power industry, the Russian space industry faced grave threats and became a pawn in America's Iran policy. In March 1998, shortly before the imposition of sanctions on Russian companies for nuclear cooperation with Iran, Western media agencies alleged the United States might increase Russia's quota on the launch of foreign commercial satellites with American components with the use of Russian rockets if Moscow gave up the supply of dual-use goods to Iran.⁵⁵⁷ Each launch was worth between \$40 and \$100 million.⁵⁵⁸

In January 1999, again the United States sought to link the two issues. James Rubin, Department of State spokesman, reported that the American administration intended to consider the question of continuing to grant Russia the right to launch American satellites on the basis of actions by Moscow to stop Russian enterprises cooperating with Iran in the sphere of missile and nuclear weapons development. He stated, 'Unless we have made progress in solving the problem of non-proliferation we will be unable to support an increase in the quota.'⁵⁵⁹ Furthermore, in August 2000, the American State Department delayed declaring quotas for commercial launches of foreign satellites by Russian Proton rocket boosters. This had a seriously unfavourable effect not only on the proton manufacturer, the Khrunichev Space Centre, but also on the contractors of communication satellites.⁵⁶⁰

Russia continually sought to counteract American attempts to link the development of bilateral cooperation in space exploration and satellite launching with Russian-Iranian nuclear cooperation.⁵⁶¹ Yuri Koptev, the Chief of the Russian Space Agency, denied accusations that Russian companies and scientific institutions sold missile technologies to Iran. However, he recognised the doubtlessly negative effect on Russian-American relations.⁵⁶² Thus, the pursuit of nuclear cooperation with Iran brought about highly deleterious results for the Russian space industry as a result of the United States coupling the two issues.

The nuclear power industry was important to Russian maintenance of high-technology exports. The nuclear sector is significant in shedding

light on the movement from a mere weakening of American constraints as the Russian–American relationship declined to a policy of actively using nuclear transfers to Iran in order to balance the United States. Many of the same issues were at play with regard to Russian military sales to Iran.

Military technology and weapons sales

Sales of military technology and weapons are particularly useful in indicating a combination of motivations for engaging Iran. For Russia, this was a highly sensitive sector given how important an export earner military technology was for the Russian economy. As in the case of China, the policy of arms and technology sales show clearly the sensitivity of Russian policy to the institutional interests of the military and the military–industrial complex. This sector sheds light on the American connection in Russian alignment policy. When relations with the United States were favourable, Russia sought to limit the types of engagement with Iran as well as cushion American concerns over Russian military ties with Iran. Russia went so far as to commit to limiting military-technical cooperation with Iran. However, when the Russian–American relationship deteriorated, the constraints on Russian engagement faded and increasingly Russia came to use this sector to demonstrate its displeasure with the United States.

The Soviet Union had a long history of weapons sales to Iran, and thus the Iranian armed forces had a considerable amount of Soviet-made weapons and military equipment. These included armour (tanks, combat vehicles, and armoured personnel carriers), field artillery systems, anti-aircraft equipment (anti-aircraft artillery systems, anti-aircraft missile complexes, and portable anti-aircraft missile complexes), combat aircraft, submarines, small arms, and so on. In the post-Cold War era, the Iranian military demonstrated a stable demand for new military supplies, deliveries of spare parts, ammunition, and maintenance and repair facilities. Russia's capabilities for meeting this demand were, in principle, unlimited.

The importance of the military-technical relationship should not be underestimated. Iran was one of the few countries with a large demand for Russian technologies.⁵⁶³ In February 1992, the Americans asserted that the Soviet Union had sold Iran \$1 billion worth of Su-24 fighter bombers, MiG-29s, T-72 tanks, and other modern equipment. The Russian Foreign Ministry acknowledged that Russia and Iran had established cooperation in the defence sphere but sought to soothe American concerns.

Accusations surfaced again in July 1992 when Russia was reproached for holding negotiations with Iran on selling 110 military aircraft. In another instance of confusion and subterfuge within Russian government circles, the Ministry of Foreign Economic Relations maintained that these negotiations had never been held. However, Major General Karaoglanov, Chairman of the Russian Defence Export Foreign Trade Association, *Oboroneksport*,⁵⁶⁴ acknowledged that Russia was engaging in military-technical cooperation with Iran.⁵⁶⁵ This was yet another example of the lack of coordination in Russian policy-making. Furthermore, it was symbolic of the continued desire of the military sector to pursue its interests, in ways which threatened the integrity of Russian foreign policy.

When relations between Russia and the United States were good, these sectors were open to American interventions. Notwithstanding Foreign Minister Kozyrev's claims in May 1992 that, 'We have created a huge military-industrial complex. And now we need to find profitable markets for selling Russian armaments,'⁵⁶⁶ Russia was still open to American influence. In September 1992, Russia concluded an agreement to sell Iran several Kilo class submarines.⁵⁶⁷ Almost simultaneously, the United States Senate was debating the 1993 foreign aid programme. The United States threatened to prevent Russia from receiving aid unless it stopped selling arms to Iran.⁵⁶⁸ Given the strong state of Russian-American relations and the desire to retain American aid, American constraints proved successful in achieving the suspension of the contract.

Yet, by March 1993, the inclination to pursue greater cooperation had increased. Thus, Russian and Iranian Foreign Ministers announced that both states were able and willing to continue military-technical cooperation while maintaining that this collaboration would not threaten the security and stability of the region.⁵⁶⁹ Foreign Minister Kozyrev confirmed Russia's intention to continue selling arms to Iran, emphasising that bilateral ties in this sphere were of a defensive nature. Within two months, the Iranian navy announced that Russia was to sell Iran two diesel-powered submarines.⁵⁷⁰

American opposition remained pronounced and the American government soon sought out an agreement facilitating tangible commitments from Russia on ending military-technical engagement with Iran. What resulted was the secret Gore-Chernomyrdin agreement of 1995, which ensured that Russia would conclude no new arms contracts with Iran and would fulfil its previous agreements by 2000.⁵⁷¹ This agreement reflected Foreign Ministry policy which sought to cushion the impact of Russia's Iran policy on Russian-American relations. This was a result of

the Presidential administration's desire to address American concerns over the interests of particular ministries and their allies. Though it was more an act of mollification than a concerted intention to end military cooperation with Iran, it demonstrated that there was still enough concern over relations with the United States to reduce the irritant value of such relations.

This blatantly proved to be the case, as military cooperation seemed to accelerate rather than slow in pace. At the end of January 1997, Mikhail Timkin, First Deputy General Director of *Rosvooruzheniye*, announced that Moscow and Tehran had concluded military contracts worth \$1 billion.⁵⁷² The Gore–Chernomyrdin agreement was not documented in any international agreements. Consequently, there was little to keep Russia from renegeing at the end of 1999.⁵⁷³

Russia endeavoured to weaken American constraints as much as possible while ensuring it did not compromise Russian–American relations. Thus, in April 1997, Primakov and Iranian Parliamentary speaker, Ali Akbar Nateq-Nuri, signed a 'Memorandum of Mutual Understanding on Export Control'.⁵⁷⁴ Furthermore, in January 1998, Russian government Decree 57 was issued, a directive of Chernomyrdin's, on 'Enhancing Control Over the Export of Dual-Use Goods and Services Related to Weapons of Mass Destruction and Missile Delivery Systems'. Essentially, this was a 'catch-all' clause ensuring there was a legal basis for preventing the export of goods and services if there was reason to suspect they would be used to facilitate the development of weapons of mass destruction.⁵⁷⁵

Though Iran was not singled out in the text of the decree, there had been intensified American pressure in the preceding period for Russia to strengthen its export control system. It appears to have occurred in the aftermath of a telephone conversation between Prime Minister Chernomyrdin and the American Vice-President Gore in which the two leaders considered stronger measures against the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.⁵⁷⁶ The United States through a number of channels, including negotiation between Gore and Chernomyrdin, Wisner and Koptev, and Primakov and Talbott, were threatening that unless the Russian government acted, the United States Congress would impose sanctions on Russia.⁵⁷⁷ Incidentally, Decree 57 was issued less than two weeks before the Iranian Foreign Minister Kamal Kharrazi's visit to Moscow in February 1998, which was sure to antagonise the United States.

Given the increased influence of the military and defence sectors under President Putin and the numerous attempts at US interference mentioned above, Russian arms sales to Iran have more and more

come to be used as a demonstration of Russian independence against American interference in Russian policy. As a result, Russia came to deepen and broaden military cooperation with Iran disregarding entirely American concerns. Thus, Defence Minister Igor Sergeyev, who was regularly an obdurate element in Russian–American ties, at a meeting with Secretary of the Iranian Security Supreme Council Hassan Rouhani stated, ‘Third elements’ interference in bilateral ties is unacceptable.⁵⁷⁸

The Defence Ministry sought to deepen cooperation with Iran in June 2000 with the first visit to Iran by a Russian military delegation since 1991. Chief of the Russian Defence Ministry’s Main Directorate for International Military Cooperation, Colonel General Leonid Ivashov, stated, ‘Russia and Iran have decided to make cooperation in the military field a routine practice.’⁵⁷⁹ By December, Defence Ministers Sergeyev and Shamkhani reached agreement on starting a new stage of cooperation between the military departments and the armed forces of the two countries.⁵⁸⁰ By early March 2001, Russian officials announced that Iran would like to buy the S-300 air defence missile system as well as parts for fighter jets and armoured vehicles reaching a total of \$7 billion.⁵⁸¹ Importantly, at the same time, Security Council Secretary Ivanov was visiting Washington to explain Russia’s position on cooperation with Iran.⁵⁸² The partnership was firmly consolidated on 2 October 2001, when Defence Minister Sergei Ivanov and Iranian defence Minister Ali Shamkhani signed a bilateral intergovernmental agreement on military-technical cooperation.⁵⁸³

As a result, in November 2005, Russia reached agreement for the sale of 29 TOR-M1 short-range anti-aircraft systems to Iran in a deal valued at more than \$700 million.⁵⁸⁴ In response to questions about this sale, Defence Minister Ivanov stated that Moscow might supply Tehran with more weapons in the future. ‘If Iran wants to buy defensive, I underline defensive, equipment for its armed forces, then why not?’⁵⁸⁵ Incidentally, during the previous spring, the United States had called on all countries to stop arms exports to Iran.⁵⁸⁶

Russian sales of arms and military technology to Iran responded to the need and demands of the Russian military–industrial complex. Russia came to use its cooperation with Iran to gain leverage in its relations with the United States and later to demonstrate its right as a sovereign actor to cooperate with whomever it chose. An area of cooperation between Russia and Iran which experienced less overt opposition from the United States, but constituted an important dimension of Russian–Iranian economic cooperation, was the oil and gas sector.

Oil and gas cooperation

State economic and private corporate actors clearly had much to gain from cooperation with Iran in the oil and gas sector. However, it was only with the entry of *Gazprom* into the Iranian market in September 1997 that Russian engagement really took off. This section will address two different forms of oil and gas cooperation. The first, the development of oil and gas within Iran, saw a less than coordinated effort on Russia's part. This was an area in which Iran regularly attempted to draw in Russian interest. As in other sectors, Russia was merely a responsive actor. As a result of the lack of coordination, numerous opportunities for deeper cooperation were lost. The driving factor in the oil and gas industry was that of bilateral economic interests. The American factor was only secondary. The United States did, however, have some influence as it threatened sanctions against Russian oil companies investing in Iran.

The second area of cooperation was that of the Caspian Sea, which saw a far more coordinated policy on Russia's part. America's influence in this sector of Russian-Iranian oil and gas cooperation was far greater. First, Russian-Iranian cooperation sought to exclude the United States from negotiations on oil and gas exploration in the Caspian Sea. Second, their policies were meant to ensure that the United States was not able to gain a foothold through other Caspian littoral states. Russian-Iranian interests did not always coincide as they were in many senses competitors in the Caspian Sea. Nonetheless, what was able to bring them together was the greater threat of American penetration in this area.

Russia was interested in lucrative cooperation in Iran's energy, petrochemical, gas production, oil transit, and refinery industries. However, it was only in December 1996 that the Iranian Minister of Industries Morteza Mohammad-Khan in meetings with Russian Industry Minister Yuri Besspalov declared that the Iranian government planned to earmark \$40 million for purchasing foreign technology and equipment.⁵⁸⁷ This was the first definitive step in consolidating Russian activities in this field.

Russian companies became seriously active in Iran's energy market in 1997.⁵⁸⁸ Cooperation in this field had largely been haphazard, with little political leadership in this sector. In September 1997, *Gazprom* agreed to participate in the development of the Southern Pars gas reserves along with French and Malaysian companies. Their participation in this and other projects amounted to billions of dollars.⁵⁸⁹

Furthermore, *Gazprom* concluded more than 20 agreements with the Iranian Ministry of Petroleum.⁵⁹⁰

The American administration frowned on the contract, arguing this deal was covered by D'Amato-Kennedy amendments which laid down sanctions against companies that invested over \$20 million in Iran's energy projects.⁵⁹¹ *Gazprom* announced shortly thereafter that it fully endorsed the stance of France's *Total* which declared that the United States should not interfere in other countries' energy projects in Iran. The head of *Gazprom*, Rem Vyakhirev, pointed out, 'In the estimate of *Gazprom* experts, even with due account taken of possible US sanctions, Russia and *Gazprom* will receive a much greater benefit from implementing this project alone.'⁵⁹²

The government firmly supported *Gazprom* against American constraints. First Deputy Prime Minister Nemtsov stated, 'Russia will side with *Gazprom* if that gas monopoly comes under attack over its participation in an international development of the Southern Pars field.'⁵⁹³ Furthermore, the Duma International Affairs Committee, led by Vladimir Lukin, called American pressure on Russian oil and gas companies and related threats to impose sanctions against them if they expanded their business contacts with other countries 'impermissible'. His Committee decided to 'additionally discuss possible steps to prevent US sanctions against Russian companies, if need be'.⁵⁹⁴

Soon after, other Russian energy companies such as *Yukos*, *Energomashexport*, and the *Energomashinostroitel'naia korporatsia* entered the Iranian market.⁵⁹⁵ *Zarubezhneft* and *Technopromexport* reached a protocol on cooperation with Iran's Ministry of Oil for joint Persian Gulf shelf drilling.⁵⁹⁶ It was only then, following the entry of Russian companies into the Iranian oil and gas market, that the Russian government made any serious attempts to coordinate long-term economic cooperation. Thus, the Russian-Iranian Commission for Economic Cooperation was established.

By March 1998, *Gazprom* and *Zarubezhneft* reached agreement with the National Iranian Oil Company on joint implementation of several oil and gas projects in Iran.⁵⁹⁷ A draft 'Inter-governmental Agreement on Cooperation Between Russia and Iran in the Oil and Gas Sector' was prepared on the results of the talks. The Mintopenergo hoped this agreement would assist in coordinating the activities of Russian companies in order to prevent potential rivalry between them.⁵⁹⁸ Government support for deeper integration in the oil and gas industry continued with a 'Memorandum of Mutual Understanding', signed in April 1999

by Russia's Mintopenergo industries and Iran's Ministry of Oil, which envisaged 11 lines of cooperation.⁵⁹⁹

Notwithstanding efforts at the management of Russian oil and gas interests in Iran, Russian companies squandered a number of opportunities proffered by Iran. For example, in November 1997, Iran proposed that Russian companies take an active part in the development of oil fields in Iran. First Deputy Prime Minister and Fuel and Energy Minister Boris Nemtsov noted, 'Unfortunately, Russian oil companies, unlike the country's *Gazprom* gas company, have not so far been especially active with regard to this idea.'⁶⁰⁰ Moreover, in March 2001, the Head of the Centre for the Coordination of Russian-Iranian Programs, Radzhab Safarov, said that Russian oil companies had failed to respond to some 40 offers of Iranian projects on advantageous terms. Iran had committed not to announce international tenders if Russian companies, including *Gazprom* and *LUKoil*, had agreed. However, Russian companies did not promptly react to these offers, and when Iran put them up for international tender, Russian companies succeeded in winning only two projects.⁶⁰¹

Despite these disappointments, Russia and Iran signed an important agreement on cooperation in the retooling of the Iranian oil and gas complex in July 2001. It was signed by the Russian Union of Producers of Oil and Gas Equipment, together with the *Stankoimport* State Enterprise and the Association of Producers of Equipment for the Oil and Gas Industry of Iran, which was created with the participation of the state for the purpose of modernising the Iranian raw materials production industry.⁶⁰² In the same month, the Russian pipeline monopoly *Transneft* with its Kazakh counterpart, *KazTransOil*, announced a feasibility study for a pipeline to Iran. The plan was the latest in a series involving Iran and Caspian oil swaps.

Ideally, swaps would save hundreds of kilometres in transit by letting Iran refine Caspian oil for use in its northern cities. By March 2003, Russia and Iran came to an agreement on the creation of a joint venture for the development of gas production facilities in Iran and the supply of Iranian gas to international markets. This decision was made at the fourth meeting of the Russian-Iranian Commission for Trade and Economic Cooperation with the participation of *Gazprom*.⁶⁰³

By June 2006, *Gazprom* chief executive Alexei Miller and Iran's Deputy Oil Minister Nejad Hosseinian agreed to study the possibility of forming a joint enterprise to develop oil and gas deposits. President Ahmadinejad, speaking at a meeting with President Putin in Shanghai, went further by proposing that Moscow and Tehran determine prices

for natural gas together.⁶⁰⁴ Though this OPEC-like proposition has yet to go further than rhetoric, substantial cooperation in the field of oil and gas has continued with the December 2006 meeting of the Intergovernmental Commission, during which Iran invited Russian companies to set up new joint ventures for oil and gas extraction in Iran and third countries.⁶⁰⁵

Iran provided a multitude of opportunities for Russian companies, and these groups were responsive. This sector demonstrates the lack of coordination in areas of Russian policy with government policy following behind the actions of economic actors. The desire for economic gain was far more salient in this area than American influence.

Russian oil and gas concerns in the Caspian Sea region were far more susceptible to American influence. Negotiations as to the status of the Caspian Sea had been ongoing. Given the inability to find consensus, there was major anxiety that if the littoral states failed to adopt suitable policies for the exploitation of oil and gas reserves, Western powers would gain a foothold.⁶⁰⁶ Russian–Iranian cooperation in this area sought to counteract American objectives.

By March 1998, opposition to American encroachment into this area became a regular theme. Russia and Iran issued a joint declaration noting that any decisions on the legal status of the sea must be made without the ‘interference of non-littoral states’.⁶⁰⁷ American efforts to promote the Baku–Ceyhan oil pipeline and the Trans-Caspian gas pipeline brought Iran and Russia closer together as both became increasingly concerned about Azerbaijan and Georgia’s willingness to cooperate with the United States. This development was reinforced by the decision, at the meeting of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in Istanbul on 18 November 1999, to move forward with the construction of the Baku–Ceyhan pipeline. The governments of Turkey, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Kazakhstan officially agreed to back the pipeline which would transport oil from Baku through Georgia to Turkey’s Mediterranean port of Ceyhan.⁶⁰⁸

Soon after the OSCE agreements were signed, Russia and Iran sought to undermine the economic rationale for the projects. After two fruitless years of negotiations, *Gazprom* swiftly reached agreement with Turkmenistan in December 1999 to buy Turkmen natural gas, and to purchase a large share of Turkmenistan’s gas in the year 2000. The aim was to deter Turkmenistan from moving ahead rapidly with the Trans-Caspian pipeline. Moreover, in an effort to persuade major oil companies not to proceed with the Baku–Ceyhan pipeline, Iran cut the

cost of its oil swaps with Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, and Azerbaijan by 30 per cent, beginning in 2000.⁶⁰⁹

Russia and Iran had common interest in pooling their efforts to preserve influence on the general evolution of the situation in the area of the Caspian.⁶¹⁰ Consequently, Russia coordinated its policies with Iran in order to maximise its influence on the development of the legal status of the Caspian Sea. Their long-term interests in Caspian energy resources were far different. Russia sought transport routes to pass through its territory to help it retain influence in the states of Transcaucasia and Central Asia.⁶¹¹ Iran, conversely, continued to profess that it could supply the cheapest and safest route for the shipment of Caspian oil and natural gas. As Iranian Foreign Minister Kamal Kharrazi repeatedly stated, 'We believe in diversity of routes for the transfer of energy, but consider Iran as the best route to the south, east and west.'⁶¹²

Tensions over these varying objectives ensued. In early 1995, Iran gained a share in a contract involving Azerbaijan and a number of Western oil companies for the development of three major fields on the Caspian shelf off the coast of Azerbaijan. Known as the 'contract of the century', this \$7.4 billion deal also included a 10 per cent share for the Russian oil company *LUKoil*. Nonetheless, it prompted an outcry in Moscow over Azerbaijan's unilateral and illegal action.⁶¹³ Conflict was averted when Moscow and Iran signed a bilateral agreement in the autumn of 1995 circumventing efforts to convene a multilateral conference of legal experts on the Caspian issue. An international consortium was formed with Kazakhstan for the development of the Tengiz oil fields on the Kazakh shore of the Caspian.

For three years, financial problems delayed the laying of a new pipeline to transport oil from the Tengiz fields through Novorossiisk to Europe. Kazakhstan began to seek alternative routes, including one through Iran. In April 1996, President Yeltsin signed an agreement in Almaty expanding the Caspian Pipeline Consortium and ensuring continued use of the Russian route. While this appeared to solve the problem, it was only part of a broader issue that had emerged over pipelines and the possibility that Iran might be a strong competitor for the routing of Caspian oil.⁶¹⁴ By early 2007, Kazakhstan had announced that the Caspian Pipeline Consortium was ready to expand the Tengiz–Novorossiisk oil pipeline by threefold, a decision which Russia opposed.⁶¹⁵

In the Caspian Sea, the threat of American incursion was instrumental in bringing Russia into alignment with Iran. Notwithstanding their

disparate interests in oil and gas in the region, they feared American intervention far more. In a broader sense, the oil and gas sector is indicative of Russian efforts to consolidate Russian gains and ensure that the United States was unable to force out Russian economic and political interests.

Russian domestic security

Similar to the Chinese case, the Iranian case illustrates the importance of domestic security issues entangled with regional factors in Russian alignment policy. Given the enormous challenges Russia faced with Islamic fundamentalism, Iran's cooperation was important in encouraging increased policy coordination. The salience of the domestic security issue was particularly strong in Russian policy towards Iran during Russia's wars in Chechnya. Relations significantly improved during the first and second wars. With the exception of America's war on terror, the United States interacted little with this facet of Russian-Iranian relations.

With the break-up of the Soviet Union, the newly independent states of Central Asia and Transcaucasia became a central focus for Russian policy-makers. Given the importance these states held in Russian calculations, Russia often saw the Middle East through the lens of its policy towards them.⁶¹⁶ Though religious extremism was not a pressing issue in Russia, with a few notable exceptions it would be wrong to presume that Russia was entirely immune in this regard. Articles appearing in the Russian press at times regarded Islam as a 'citizenship' rather than a religion and there were calls urging Muslims not to submit to 'infidelity and leaders of infidelity'.⁶¹⁷ Especially, in the unstable early post-Soviet period, Moscow genuinely feared the possibility of Islamic fundamentalist revolutions in Central Asia and the Caucasus, and for that matter, within Russia itself.⁶¹⁸ With the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia remained a multi-cultural, multi-denominational state where Muslims numbered some 20 million. This made the Islamic factor a significant political reality.⁶¹⁹

Russia had a genuine fear that a power vacuum in Central Asia and the Caucasus could lead to competition among a variety of states for influence.⁶²⁰ Moscow's policy had to take into account the potential for the Muslim republics to reorient themselves towards the Muslim countries of the Middle East and Asia.⁶²¹ The fact that a hostile Iran could trigger significant conflict in the Caucasus or Central Asia was a concern.⁶²² It is noteworthy that the Muslim populations within Russia and Iran have ethnic, linguistic, and religious similarities

with Caucasians and Central Asians. Hence, there was fear that Iran would have great influence over these regions. Moreover, the possibility existed for Islamic groups within Russia to be radicalised through fundamentalist movements elsewhere.

In the early years following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russian policy-makers expressed great scepticism about Iran's intentions in the predominantly Muslim areas of Central Asia and the Caucasus.⁶²³ There were initial misgivings over calls in some Iranian circles for spreading Islamic radicalism.⁶²⁴ However, moderation in the Iranian position served to allay Russian fears. Iranian policy towards the Central Asian republics indicated that Iran sought to promote economic development in the region more than Islamic fundamentalism. For instance, Iran was instrumental in bringing the republics into the Economic Cooperation Organization, a developmental body whose original members were Turkey, Pakistan, and Iran. Also, the visits to Iran by the heads of state of various Central Asian republics and the visit of the Iranian President Rafsanjani to the ex-Soviet republics were conspicuous for their economic emphasis rather than for Islamic solidarity.⁶²⁵ In Russian terms, Tehran's policy towards the Central Asian states and the Caucasus was constructive and non-ideological.⁶²⁶ Iran had both maintained good relations with these regimes and acquiesced with Russian efforts to retain influence in them.⁶²⁷

Iran also earned appreciation for expressing only muted opposition to Russian actions in Chechnya during the first war. Iran maintained that the question of Chechnya should be decided within the framework of Russian norms and within Russia. The Iranian government neither condemned Russian military intervention in Chechnya nor portrayed the war as one between Christian Russia and Muslim Chechnya. Thus, Iran's policy with reference to the conflict in Chechnya can be viewed as relatively agreeable considering Iran's self-perception as the defender of the Islamic faith.⁶²⁸ As a consequence, the 1994–1996 period witnessed a number of breakthroughs in the Russian–Iranian relationship. At the rhetorical level, this was the first time that Iran was referred to as Russia's strategic partner. This was further reinforced through the signing of major agreements on the Caspian Sea and military-technical cooperation.

As reports of human rights abuses in Chechnya became known, Iran weighed its financial and military interests in Russia against its position in the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), which demanded it speak out. Consequently, while emphasising that Chechnya was an internal Russian affair, Iran gradually increased its criticism of

Moscow's behaviour.⁶²⁹ As Iran's stance became harsher, Russian protests increased. For example, President Yeltsin complained to Velayati about the presence of an Iranian citizen at the ceremony in which Dzhokhar Dudayev took the oath of office as President of Chechnya.⁶³⁰ There were also rumours of Iranian activities in support of the Chechens beyond humanitarian aid.⁶³¹ Iran's standpoint during the second war in Chechnya resurrected Russia's fear of Iran's Islamic ties with Central Asia and the Caucasus.

Moscow's policy towards Iran during the second Chechen war reinforced the importance of this relationship for domestic security reasons. From the very beginning, Moscow's engagement with Iran sought to play a moderating role and reinforced Iran's reformist policies under Rafsanjani. Foreign Minister Kozyrev declared, 'There is no doubt that Rafsanjani and Foreign Minister Velayati represent the moderate wing and are trying to move away from strict Islamic fundamentalism. However, we must not forget that there is a second layer, a shadow stage on which completely different forces are operating.'⁶³²

A moderate Iranian position influenced Russia's desire to align with Iran in addressing difficult regional questions. This was especially important in the early post-Soviet period when uncertainty was still rife in Russia as to what role Iran would seek in Central Asia and Transcaucasia and what dangers this would pose. There is an overlap between domestic and regional security issues in the Iranian case. Iran's role in the region was shaped by its status as a leader of the Islamic cause. Its capacity to facilitate Russian regional objectives should be viewed through the lens of its leadership role. This status, however, also had the potential to pose a threat to Russian interests. Thus, Russia's policy towards Iran in terms of the domestic security dimension was marked by caution and constraint. It was only when Russia was assured that Iran would not use its influence to spread Islamic fundamentalism in the region that Russia chose to more fully engage.

Regional dimension

For Russian–Iranian relations, there were coinciding long-term interests in the settlement of regional and inter-ethnic conflicts, and the prevention of future security threats in the region.⁶³³ Both states expressed their mutual interest in the 'provision of security and stability in the strategically important region of Central Asia and the Caucasus'.⁶³⁴ This section addresses the three main sectors of regional cooperation, focusing on Russian–Iranian diplomatic efforts to find peaceable solutions to

regional conflicts. Russia and Iran jointly tackled three major areas of regional tension: Tajikistan, Afghanistan, and the Caspian Sea. On the first two issues, Russia hoped that Iran would take a moderate position on the Islamic question and facilitate resolution to the conflicts. On the third, economic concerns were at play. Ensuring that the United States had as little influence as possible over the Caspian Sea region became a goal of Russian–Iranian regional policy.

Russia's early policies towards Central Asia strongly mirrored traditional Soviet claims about the strategic proximity and the potential threats posed by this region.⁶³⁵ Consequently, Russia placed increasing emphasis on issues relating to regional security.⁶³⁶ Russia sought partners towards this end given its inability to achieve its goals alone. In this context, Iran came to take on greater significance.⁶³⁷ Although many predicted in 1991 that there would be inevitable conflict between Russia and Iran, the opposite held true, with cooperation being the dominant characteristic of the relationship.⁶³⁸ Iran's importance in Central Asia though considerable should not be overestimated, as it faced competition particularly from other regional and international powers such as the United States, China, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia.⁶³⁹

The period between 1995 and 1996, when Russian–Iranian cooperation regionally was consolidated, coincided with a strong general progression in the relationship more generally. Moreover, within a couple of months of Russian–Iranian successes in agreeing a ceasefire in Tajikistan, Russia had finally resolved economic disputes with Iran and agreed to move forward with the construction of the Bushehr reactor. Iran's desire to cooperate on the Afghanistan issue corresponded with the signing of major agreements on the Caspian Sea and an acceleration of military-technical cooperation. This came against the backdrop of the imposition of far-ranging American sanctions against Iran, which both Russia and Europe deplored.

The Tajikistan conflict

Tajikistan exemplified for Russia the threat of Islamic radicalism. It also highlighted the importance of regional issues in Russian–Iranian cooperation. The civil war in Tajikistan in May 1992 did not begin with a radical Islamic attempt to seize power, but rather with a loose alignment of Western-style democrats and moderate Islamists, ousting an old-line Communist leader. When the Communists came back into power with the help of Uzbek and Soviet military forces, many Islamists fled across the border into Afghanistan, where they became radicalised,

and then mounted attacks across the border into Tajikistan.⁶⁴⁰ In the process, they killed some Russian soldiers guarding the Tajik border and drew Moscow into the fighting.⁶⁴¹ Under these conditions, a diplomatic settlement became an important objective for President Yeltsin. Since many Tajik Islamic opposition leaders, including Akbar Turajanzode, had taken refuge in Iran, it became necessary to bring Iran into the diplomatic process. Both Russia and Iran collaborated in seeking to bring the warring parties to a settlement.⁶⁴² Iran's strong cultural, linguistic, and racial links with the Tajiks enabled Tehran to help bridge the gap between the Dushanbe government and the opposition.⁶⁴³ Iran not only did not tilt towards the Islamists, but in fact acted as an honest broker between the two factions. By the spring of 1994, with Iran's assistance, Russia managed to get talks started between the opposing sides.

Russia welcomed negotiations and expressed its willingness to cooperate with Iran and all parties towards a resolution.⁶⁴⁴ Russia and Iran, however, did not hold entirely similar positions on the conflict given their disparate political objectives. In June 1996, some parties to the conflict accused Iran of supplying arms to the Islamic opposition. Deputy Foreign Minister Viktor Posuvalyuk stated,

Both Moscow and Tehran agree that there is no reasonable alternative to dialogue, that one must not let things go so far as a breakdown in the agreement on a cease-fire. Naturally, it is naïve to look for identical positions from Russia and Iran. The main thing is to find and consolidate points of contact.⁶⁴⁵

In August 1995, Tajikistan's President Imamali Rahmanov and Addullah Nouri, the leader of Tajikistan's Islamic movement, were invited to Tehran where an agreement to settle their differences peacefully was signed.⁶⁴⁶

Consultations continued and by December 1996, a political agreement was signed between the Tajik government and the opposition. According to Foreign Minister Primakov, it was Russian-Iranian cooperation that helped achieve this agreement.⁶⁴⁷ With Iran's help, Russia brokered an agreement between the government and the Islamic forces in February 1997. Russian influence over the Tajik government and Iran's direct contact with the opposition leaders and particularly the Islamic militia allowed for the signing of an agreement and the establishment of a National Reconciliation Commission.⁶⁴⁸ Tajikistan provided an example of converging Russian and Iranian regional interests. With Iran's assistance, the conflict on Russia's borders was eventually

resolved, demonstrating the benefits of such cooperative partnership for regional security. Russia also greatly appreciated Iranian moderation in other potentially destabilising areas of the region.

Afghanistan

Afghanistan was an issue on the Russian–Iranian agenda from December 1991 onwards. Both states actively sought the peaceful resolution of the conflict.⁶⁴⁹ Cooperation over Afghanistan clearly demonstrated the importance of regional issues in facilitating increased cooperation. Both states had much to lose from a Taliban victory. Russia, which feared that the Taliban's influence could penetrate Central Asia or even Russia, had a strong interest in opposing the Taliban. In addition, the fact that Afghanistan, under the Taliban, became a haven for growers and purveyors of opium concerned both Iran and Russia.⁶⁵⁰

The Russian President's Special Representative for the Middle East, in conjunction with Iranian representatives, agreed in June 1996 that the continuing conflict within Afghanistan had become a destabilising force in the region. The swift military victories of Taliban forces in September 1996 encouraged greater Russian–Iranian policy coordination.⁶⁵¹ By December 1996, both sides declared that their views coincided on the need for a peaceful settlement in Afghanistan taking into account the interests of all ethnic and religious groups.⁶⁵² Given that the Sunni Taliban were an enemy of the Iranian-backed Shiite forces in Afghanistan, Iran sought to build a coalition to stop the Taliban offensive. It organised a regional conference in Tehran, which Russia attended, to address the situation.

Afghanistan was another example of Russian–Iranian cooperation in attempting to resolve regional disputes. However, it was not just conflictual situations that encouraged Russian–Iranian cooperation within the region. These states also came together to advance their own regional and economic objectives on Caspian Sea issues. Given that neither state was able to independently achieve their aims, their collaboration provided them with added leverage in negotiations.

The Caspian sea

Cooperation in this sector sought to institutionalise the Russian and Iranian position that the Caspian Sea is the common property of littoral states. This was particularly crucial as both states attempted to ensure that the increasing American economic and political penetration of the region was limited.

The history of Russian–Persian exchanges over the Caspian Sea goes back to the early nineteenth century and the conclusion of the Golestan Treaty of 1813, following Iran’s defeat in the Russian–Persian War. Under the Treaty, Iran was barred from deployment of its naval forces in the sea. The second war between the two countries ended once again in Iran’s defeat and brought about the Turkomanчай Treaty of 1928. The latter Treaty did not change the limitations put on Iran in the first Treaty. After the Bolshevik victory, Iran and the Soviet Union signed the 1921 Friendship Treaty, which recognised the two countries’ border in the Caspian Sea. The 1921 Treaty, in addition to the Treaty of March 1940, provided the legal status of the Caspian Sea until 1989. The break-up of the Soviet Union increased the number of Caspian Sea littoral states from two to five. When Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, and Kazakhstan joined the littoral states, they began to actively explore the resource potentials of the Caspian Sea, necessitating the institution of a legal status for the Sea.⁶⁵³ Resolution of the legalities became even more urgent as a result of the discoveries of vast offshore mineral reserves in the early 1990s.⁶⁵⁴

According to experts, total Caspian oil reserves are estimated at approximately \$4 trillion. American interests have focused on lobbying for routes for oil exports that were both profitable and strategically useful to the United States. Their efforts focused on an oil pipeline arc, dubbed the new ‘silk road’, designed to ensure that Kazakh oil was pumped along a route that bypassed both Russia and Iran.⁶⁵⁵ At the same time, Russia and Iran worked together to assure their interests remained at the forefront of Caspian Sea development to the exclusion of American interests.

After an initial period of uncertainty over Iran’s approach to the Caspian, Russia stepped up cooperation on energy projects with Iran. In October 1994, the Russian Foreign Ministry sought to entrench the fact that the Caspian Sea was the interest of only the littoral states: ‘Russia and Iran share very close views on the issues relevant to the Caspian Sea. . . . Its resources belong to the states bordering the lake.’⁶⁵⁶ This was a less than obscure reference to American political and economic forays into the region and Russia’s desire to exclude the United States from any decisions on the future of the Caspian Sea.

Russia and Iran further established their common positions in a joint declaration in early November 1995 in which they opposed unilateral action by the littoral states to exploit the resources of the Caspian Sea. This declaration insisted on the indivisibility of mineral resources as the ‘common property’ of the littoral states.⁶⁵⁷ One month later, both sides

reaffirmed this point, noting that only the five Caspian states possessed a legal decision-making voice in negotiations.⁶⁵⁸

As tensions grew in the Russian–American relationship, Russia took an even more vocal stance on excluding American involvement in the Caspian Sea. In December 1996, a meeting of Foreign Ministers from the five littoral states was held in Ashgabat. Foreign Minister Primakov consolidated Russia’s position on the Caspian and unexpectedly signed a tripartite ‘Memorandum on Cooperation Between Iran, Russia, and Turkmenistan in the Development of the Caspian Sea’s Mineral Resources’.⁶⁵⁹

It is necessary to note that in light of the American ‘War on Terror’ which followed the September 11 bombings at the World Trade Center in New York, Russia, China, and Iran were anxious to ensure that America’s involvement not only in the Caspian but in Central Asia more generally was limited. They were outspoken opponents of American military basing in Central Asian states.⁶⁶⁰ Moreover, military exercises organised by Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan under the Collective Security Treaty Organisation coincided with exercises held by Iran in late August 2006. Incidentally, this was the period when tensions over Iranian nuclear aspirations in the United States were reaching a high point.

Regional issues were vital in building trust between Iran and Russia. Russia saw that Iran could be an ally in facilitating stability on its borders. The issue of the Caspian Sea served to hinder American intentions to gain a stronger foothold in the region. In the short-run, Moscow and Tehran cooperated on the Caspian Sea issue and both benefited from the sharp rise in oil prices that took place in 1999, made possible by the increased cooperation between Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Venezuela.⁶⁶¹ However, in the longer term, the Caspian Sea was likely to be a major area of tension in the Russian–Iranian relationship.

Global dimension

The Iranian case offers significant support to the balancing thesis given the extensive American connection. The fact that the Iran issue was consistently on the Russian–American agenda allowed Russia to use its alignment with Iran to achieve five primary objectives: demonstrate its independence against the United States; address concerns with the development of the international system; prevent American penetration of the region; thwart a rapprochement between Iran and the United States; and develop a role as an intermediary between Iran and

the Western world. These were unintended consequences of America's emphasis on Russian–Iranian relations, yet factors which came to play a significant role in colouring Russia's approach to partnership with Iran.

Given American concerns with Iran, it is unsurprising that the United States sought not only to mitigate Iranian influence but also to prevent other states from aligning with Iran.⁶⁶² At times, American opposition was framed in anti-proliferation rhetoric; at others it emphasised the Islamic fundamentalist character of the Iranian regime. The United States employed both incentives and threats of political and economic repercussions for Russia to end its partnership with Iran. On the surface, these can be viewed to have been effective. The Russian government undertook commitments and rhetorical pledges to reduce its cooperation with Iran. However, the unintended consequence of American emphasis on the Russian–Iranian cooperation was to lend it increased salience in Russian calculations. When Russian–American relations were strong, Russia was willing to cushion its partnership with Iran. Yet, when relations with the United States deteriorated, Russia's relationship with Iran became a strong lever in balancing American interests.

Too many sticks, not enough carrots: American deterrence policy

While achieving a few notable successes, for the most part, the American agenda generated a more independent and defiant Russian position.⁶⁶³ The American government took a two-pronged deterrence approach: tying aid to encourage good behaviour and imposing economic sanctions to punish bad behaviour. In the early post-Soviet honeymoon period, the United States had the capacity to place effective political pressure on Russia. As mentioned earlier, Russian unwillingness to cease its ties with Iran resulted in the adoption by the United States Senate of an amendment linking aid to Russia to an end to Russian–Iranian military-technical cooperation.⁶⁶⁴ In Russia, this action was received with foreboding.

This was the third time Washington had threatened Russia with suspending economic aid. It was hinted at in connection with the Russian space contract with India, and with the withdrawal of Russian troops from the Baltic states.⁶⁶⁵ At these times, Russia had acceded to American wishes and mollified American concerns. Russia had made numerous commitments with regard to its military and nuclear cooperation with Iran. The true question arising is the value of these in practical terms.⁶⁶⁶ It was unsuccessful in truly curtailing Russian cooperation with Iran but it was a show of Russian good faith.

American pressure continued with a bill in the United States House of Representatives in 1996, envisaging the application of economic sanctions against foreign firms cooperating with Iran and Libya in the field of oil and natural gas extraction. Demonstrating the more defiant Russian approach towards the United States coming to the fore with the decline in Russian–American relations, Foreign Ministry spokesman Vladimir Andreyev declared that the bill infringed ‘upon the legitimate economic interests of a number of countries including Russia. In the event of its coming into force, we would be compelled to take measures for the defence of our interests.’⁶⁶⁷

In April 1998, the United States again sought to put pressure on Russian foreign policy-makers. Strobe Talbott (American Deputy Secretary of State), John Holum (Under Secretary of State for Arms Control), and Robert Gallucci (Special Representative of the American President) arrived in Moscow to discuss the Iran issue. It should be noted that the visit coincided with a leak from the American State Department that it planned to impose sanctions on several Russian institutions cooperating with Iran in missile-related projects.⁶⁶⁸ As Russia’s position in the international system weakened and the spectre of unipolarity rose, American threats were ineffective in achieving anything more than rhetorical assurances from Russia. In fact, with the increasing use of sanctions diplomacy, Russian responses grew more openly defiant.

James Rubin, Department of State spokesman, declared that the American government had compiled an unofficial list of Russian defence companies and research institutes suspected of having given missile technology to Iran.⁶⁶⁹ Given that the threats of sanctions and tied aid had proven less than effective in ending Russian–Iranian cooperation, the United States moved from threats to sanctions against specific Russian organisations. The American Congress adopted a bill in May 1998 providing for sanctions against Russian companies suspected of delivering rocketry to Iran. However, President Clinton vetoed the bill in order to avoid a dramatic deterioration of relations with Russia.⁶⁷⁰ Congress’ move was bolstered in July 1998, by a successful Iranian test of the Shihab-III intermediate-range missile.⁶⁷¹ In the same month, the American administration introduced sanctions against a number of Russian organisations accused of missile cooperation with Iran.

By December 1998, the American Central Intelligence Agency issued a report which stressed that Russian assistance had ‘accelerated Iranian development of the Shihab-III’.⁶⁷² Following this report, in January 1999, the United States imposed sanctions against two major Russian institutions, the NIKIET and the Mendeleyev University of Chemical

Technology, along with eight other Russian organisations.⁶⁷³ The Russian Foreign Ministry responded harshly, arguing, 'any attempts to speak with us in the language of sanctions and pressure are absolutely unacceptable for the Russian side. Of course, they will not be left without an answer.'⁶⁷⁴

Once again, in September 1999, the American House of Representatives voted through a bill for sanctions to be imposed on Russian organisations for nuclear cooperation with Iran. The Russian Foreign Ministry pointed out that the

sanctions bill taking effect will mean for us a necessity to reassess the whole situation in the sphere of the Russian-American cooperation in the fields of non-proliferation and some other military and political issues which now make the axis of our joint work aiming to ensure strategic stability and international security.⁶⁷⁵

With the decreasing impact of the threat of sanctions on Russian cooperation with Iran, the United States attempted to condition the rescheduling of Russia's debt. Russia would have to abandon any cooperation with Iran and publicly punish those organisations that the United States claimed were violating export legislation regarding Iran.⁶⁷⁶ A Russian Foreign Ministry spokesman maintained, 'The fulfilment of these conditions would mean a refusal to carry out an independent foreign policy and would undermine high-tech export potential of the country.'⁶⁷⁷

The American government went even further in ensuring that there were political and economic ramifications for Russian–Iranian cooperation, with the adoption of a United States Senate bill in February 2000 referred to as the 'Iran Non-proliferation Act'. The sense in Moscow was that this act was directed above all against Russian organisations.⁶⁷⁸ One of the key aspects of the bill was the suspension of American financial aid to Russian enterprises that took part in the building of the International Space Station.⁶⁷⁹ Incidentally, demonstrating the pragmatism of Putin's policy, Russia chose to cautiously cancel a meeting with the Iranian Foreign Minister that was to be held that week. Within a month, Washington decided to lift trade and economic sanctions imposed in 1998 against the Russian INOR Scientific Centre and Research Institute Polyus for their alleged contribution to an Iranian missile programme.⁶⁸⁰ The United States lifted its sanctions imposed in July 2006 against Sukhoi in mid-November.⁶⁸¹

In January 2007, the Bush administration imposed new sanctions on three Russian companies – Rosoboronexport, the Tula Instrument-Making Design Bureau, and the Kolomna Machine-Building Design Bureau for allegedly selling missiles and weapons to Iran and Syria.⁶⁸² Russian officials condemned in the strongest possible way the decision of the US State Department to introduce sanctions and continued to deny any wrongdoing.

As demonstrated by the fact that America needed to continually cajole and threaten Russia to cease its cooperation with Iran, the policy of deterrence was less than effective. The United States achieved largely rhetorical commitments from the Russian government. Both Presidents Yeltsin and Putin took steps to assure the United States that Russian–Iranian relations posed no threat to American interests. Yeltsin made commitments to limit economic relations with Iran at the 1993 Russian–American summit in Vancouver and the July 1994 G-7 Naples Summit.⁶⁸³ During his visit to Washington in late September 1994, referring to Russian–Iranian relations, Yeltsin noted, ‘this cooperation is not extensive, nor does it threaten regional stability’.⁶⁸⁴ However, a mere month later, Iran and Russia signed 13 documents covering a wide spectrum of commercial, scientific, technical, and cultural ties.⁶⁸⁵

By 1996, Russia sought to further reassure the United States of its interests in non-proliferation when Iran and Russia signed a ‘Memorandum of Understanding’, which defined export controls.⁶⁸⁶ Coming only a few months after the imposition of sanctions on Russian organisations, Foreign Minister Primakov stressed that the Memorandum was evidence that Russia and Iran adhered to ‘civilised principles of behaviour’.⁶⁸⁷ Interestingly, the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) caught an Iranian embassy employee, Reza Teimuri, attempting to buy classified documents dealing with missile technology from a Russian defence research institute, which sought to emphasise its counter-proliferation commitments. Moreover, in January, three Iranians attempted to place an order with the *Trud* Association for components for a liquid-fuel rocket engine; however, counter-intelligence agents were able to prevent the deal.⁶⁸⁸ It is noteworthy that this occurred a few months after the previously mentioned CIA report claiming that Russia had assisted Iran’s missile programme. These actions can be seen as Russian attempts to assuage American opposition to Russian–Iranian economic cooperation.

An increasingly defiant Russian stance was evident in November 2000 with the public release of the Gore–Chernomyrdin agreement. Moscow notified Washington three days before the American presidential election that it was annulling this agreement. Russian government circles

maintained that the decision to resume arms sales to Iran was dictated by positive changes in Iran's domestic policies and by the American breach of the confidentiality clause. Notwithstanding renewed threats of the imposition of trade sanctions, Russia continued and expanded military-technical cooperation with Iran.⁶⁸⁹

Russia took a moderate position towards Iran with the inception of the George W. Bush administration. After George Bush Jr. described Iran as part of the 'axis of evil', Iranian Foreign Minister Kharrazi's official visit to Moscow was cancelled. Though there was no explanation for the postponement it is noteworthy that American Under Secretary of State John Bolton was in Moscow at precisely the same time engaging in talks on strategic stability issues. It appears that Russia decided not to antagonise the new American administration.⁶⁹⁰ The meeting was, however, eventually rescheduled.

In no other case had American antipathy towards Russia's partnership been so blatant. On the whole, Russia's response was one of moderation, seeking to allay American concerns. Nonetheless, as the Russian-American relationship became more complicated, Russia began to use its policy towards Iran as a symbol of its independence.

Rejecting junior partnership: defying America

As discussed in Chapter 1, perceptions played an important role in the evolution of Russian alignment policy. Russia's perceived treatment as a 'junior partner' to the United States crucially highlights how identity issues interacted with Russia's Iran policy. It reveals an evolution in the uses of Iran, as the Russian-American relationship went into decline. Iran came to be used as an expression of Russian defiance in balancing American hegemony. By the mid-1990s, as Russia turned towards a moderate nationalism encapsulated in the concept of *derzhavnost'* (aspirations of a strong state and great power status), Iran came to be a means of responding to Russia's perceived lack of respect in its relations with America.⁶⁹¹ Iran was a means of demonstrating Russia's right to align with whomever it chose, placing the burden on the United States to prove Russia's relations with Iran were in any way illegitimate.⁶⁹²

Russia used its relations with Iran to defy the United States in three ways. First, Russia sought to demonstrate its sovereign right to engage in partnership with Iran. However, Russia continued to place this within the context of its international commitments and legal obligations. Second, Russia challenged the United States' right to interfere in Russian foreign policy. Third, following a serious decline

in the Russian–American relationship, Russia sought to throw off all constraints on its engagement with Iran.

In December 1996, Deputy Foreign Minister, Viktor Posuvalyuk made clear Russia's right to engage in partnership with Iran.

The US administration must understand that we have a sovereign right to build our relations with Iran so as to promote our interests. On the other hand, the United States should know that Russia as a permanent member of the UN Security Council wants links with any country to stay within a civilised framework and never to harm the international community or third countries.⁶⁹³

Furthermore, Russian officials such as Deputy Foreign Minister Grigory Mamedov, an important proponent of the Russian–Iranian relationship, in reference to Iran, reflected the growing view among Russians that 'Russia is not a colony and its decisions will be made on the basis of its national interests.'⁶⁹⁴

One of the most unambiguous instances of Russian defiance occurred in February 1998 when consultations between Russian and American officials resulted in private statements made by Russian officials to the effect that Moscow was prepared to renounce its commitment to refrain from selling weapons to Iran if the United States ultimately launched a strike against Iraq.⁶⁹⁵ In addition to rhetoric, Russia increasingly sought to demonstrate its right to interact with Iran. The most blatant example was the visit of Iranian Foreign Minister Kamal Kharrazi, who flew into Moscow in April 2002; just days before the Russian–American summit and after America placed Iran in the 'axis of evil'.⁶⁹⁶ Increasingly, Russia placed the onus on the United States to prove breaches in law on Iran's part. As such, in April 2002, Foreign Minister Ivanov declared,

Russian-Iranian relations are built on an obvious lawful basis in accordance with all of our international responsibilities. Iran's entire nuclear program, I have in mind, those being constructed with the assistance of Russian specialists, is under international control. If anyone has concerns, we are prepared to investigate them. However, these concerns must be presented not with words but with concrete facts. I would like again to emphasise that we are building transparent relations with Iran, on a legal basis, in strong compliance with all of our international commitments.⁶⁹⁷

Russian defiance was premised on three challenges to American interference. First, Russia opposed the notion that the United States had a legal or ethical basis for intervention in Russian foreign policy. Thus, the Duma frequently issued statements citing attempts by third nations 'to interfere in mutually advantageous cooperation between Russia and Iran' as 'illegal and inadmissible'.⁶⁹⁸ Second, Russia saw American attempts at intervention in the Russian–Iranian relationship as opportunistic ploys. Russia adamantly opposed the issue of Russian–Iranian cooperation being turned into an instrument for political pressure or a means to squeeze Russian companies out of international markets.⁶⁹⁹ Third, American actions were interpreted as reflections of American hegemonic policy in the post-Cold War period. Sanctions were seen as yet another attempt at the extraterritorial application of American laws against foreign states that maintain normal relations with a country that features on American 'blacklists'. A Russian Foreign Ministry spokesman stated, 'Such an approach runs counter to generally accepted world practice and will not be accepted by the international community.'⁷⁰⁰

As previously mentioned, the visit of Iranian President Khatami to Moscow and Russian Security Council Secretary Sergei Ivanov to Washington occurred essentially at the same time in March 2001.⁷⁰¹ This was not overlooked in American circles. On the same day that Putin was meeting with Iranian President Khatami, George W. Bush extended the law imposing sanctions against Iran, prohibiting American investment in the Iranian economy.⁷⁰²

As Russia's conception of the international order evolved, increasingly Russia felt itself treated as a declining power. American attempts to pressure Russia were greeted with mounting disdain. Some argued that Iran provided Russia with the potential to act as a leader of those opposing American hegemony.⁷⁰³ This is a rather crude reading of Russia's Iran policy as well as Russian–American relations. Russia engaged in a reactive policy, corresponding with conceptions of itself as a great power. Russia and Iran had common cause on a number of international issues, many of which pivoted on American promulgation of its hegemony.

Iran and the international context

This dimension of Russian alignment policy towards Iran sheds light on three aspects of Russia's balancing policy towards the United States. First, it demonstrates Russian rhetorical uses for Iran in the pursuit of Russia's global agenda. As Russian–American relations declined, Russia vocally used its relations with Iran to actively challenge the

United States' right to hegemony. Second, it demonstrates how Russia's approach to Iran parallels European political stances thereby challenging the American approach of isolating Iran. Third, the international context of Russian relations with Iran exhibits the interaction between Russian alignment policy and the US/Israeli relationship.

The first joint Russian–Iranian declaration on international issues outside the region occurred at a time when Russian–American relations were in serious trouble. In June 1996, the Russian President's Special Representative for the Middle East, Viktor Posuvalyuk and Iranian Minister of Foreign Affairs Velayati expressed their concerns with the revival of bloc politics, including plans for NATO's eastward expansion.⁷⁰⁴ Direct connections were drawn between NATO expansion and Russian partnerships. Sergei Yastrzhembsky, Russian Presidential spokesman, stated at the Helsinki summit of March 1997:

If NATO expansion is going to continue under a scenario that is the toughest and most negative one from our standpoint, Russia will be confronted with a need to reconsider its foreign policy priorities in certain issue areas. Our relations with China, India and Iran are developing well.⁷⁰⁵

By 1999, Iran showed open support for Russia's conception of a multipolar international system. During Foreign Minister Ivanov's visit to Iran in November 1999, both states expressed their opposition to 'the idea of a unipolar contemporary world...'. This meeting established Russian–Iranian agreement on President Yeltsin's proposition for the world in the twenty-first century.⁷⁰⁶

The second aspect of Russian policy towards Iran in the international context was the confluence of approaches between Russia and Europe. The European Union since 1992 had been involved in a 'critical dialogue' with Iran. As with many issues in the European context, there existed significant divisions within Europe. European policy, similar to Russian policy, rested on the assumption that Iranian behaviour could be influenced through communication and incentives as compared with an American approach focused on sanctions and isolation. This reflected a transatlantic divide in foreign policy approaches to Iran.

The European approach was confined to political relations. It did not affect the evolution of economic relations between Iran and individual European countries. With respect to economic relations, the EU shared a core consensus that no sanctions be applied beyond export controls for dual-use technologies. When the Clinton administration imposed

comprehensive sanctions in May 1995, the major European countries were quick to denounce their effectiveness and stress the importance of continued dialogue.⁷⁰⁷

In January 2006, Iran decided to restart its nuclear programme after a two-year suspension while it conducted talks with European countries. The United States, Britain, France, and Germany called for Iran to be referred to the United Nations Security Council and called for an emergency IAEA meeting.⁷⁰⁸ It should be noted that whereas France and Germany held a common position with Russia on the issue of Iraq, they had grave concerns with regard to Iran's potential development of nuclear capabilities.

In order to defuse the crisis, Russia proposed to set up a joint venture on Russian territory to enrich uranium.⁷⁰⁹ However, Russia was unable to reach agreement with Iran on uranium enrichment.⁷¹⁰ European Union negotiators also sought some sort of peaceful resolution of the conflict. During the crisis, Russia's traditional confluence of opinion with Europe continued with both groups attempting to ensure that the resolution to the conflict was diplomatic and left no room for military intervention.

In March 2006, Russia's Foreign Minister firmly rejected a draft United Nations Security Council statement aimed at pressuring Iran to stop enriching uranium, despite a new offer of amendments by Western powers.⁷¹¹ By the end of March, the United Nations Security Council was able to issue a much watered down and not legally binding statement demanding that Iran suspend uranium enrichment.

Notwithstanding the inability to reach agreement with Iran, Russian pressure did seem to have an impact on Iranian behaviour. In June 2006, Iranian President Ahmadinejad called a package of international incentives aimed at persuading Tehran to abandon nuclear activities 'a step forward'. The comments came one day after Ahmadinejad met with Russian and Chinese presidents on the sidelines of a Eurasian summit in Shanghai.⁷¹² Though no final resolution was reached with regard to Iran's nuclear programme, Russia continued to occupy a central role given its relationship with the Iranian government.

Israel had a far different take on the bellicose nature of the Iranian regime than Russia. Israel and the United States held largely analogous perceptions of the threat Iran posed through the development of weapons of mass destruction. Israel consistently accused Russia of involvement in the creation of Iranian missiles.⁷¹³ Foreign Minister Primakov posited, 'The pro-Israeli lobby in the United States is a source of fanning passions. It is dissatisfied with the balanced US approach to the settlement in the Middle East and wants to set the US against us and Iran.'⁷¹⁴

In the case of the crisis around Iran's uranium enrichment which erupted in 2006, Israel's position was clear. Acting Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert maintained that Israel could not allow Tehran to acquire nuclear weapons under any circumstances. Israeli diplomats visited Russia on a number of occasions during the crisis to discuss their deep concerns about Iran's nuclear facilities.⁷¹⁵

In the context of the Russian-Iranian relationship, Israeli Trade and Industry Minister Natan Sharansky made clear 'Israel's desire to influence any process whereby a country whose political leaders view the destruction of Israel as a legitimate goal tries to acquire weapons of mass destruction'.⁷¹⁶ It was no coincidence that in September 2001, Iranian Defence Minister Vice Admiral Ali Shamkhani arrived in Moscow within three days of the arrival of Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon. Sharon's task was the prevention of any arms sales to Iran. In a statement before his departure, Sharon noted, 'like Iraq, Iran is the most dangerous strategic enemy of Israel and we cannot stand with our hands tied while the crazy ayatollahs lay their hands on weapons of mass destruction'.⁷¹⁷

There is evidence to show that the United States may have sought to undermine Israeli economic cooperation with Russia in order to place increased pressure on the Russian administration to end its ties with Iran. In early 1997, American intelligence sources leaked to the Israeli press that Moscow and Tehran had practically concluded secret negotiations on the development of a new ballistic missile with a range of up to 2000 kilometres. This missile had the capacity to carry a nuclear warhead to the territory of Israel. It is especially significant that the leak occurred precisely during the preparations for Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu's March visit to Moscow. Netanyahu was an advocate of strengthening Israel's economic cooperation with Russia. According to rumours, Netanyahu even proposed an alternative to Iranian sources of hard currency for Russia with draft economic agreements worth \$3 billion.⁷¹⁸

The international context is extremely useful in elucidating the manner in which Russia came to use its relations with Iran in order to challenge the United States' leadership of the international system. It also demonstrates the way in which the Russia-Iran-United States triangle interacted with Russia's aspirations.

Keeping the Iranians in and the Americans out

Russia was seriously apprehensive about the possibility of the cessation of tensions between Iran and the United States. There were

fears in Moscow that a friendlier American policy towards Iran might dissuade Tehran from allying with Moscow. Given that Russia was Iran's main supplier in the nuclear arena, the emergence of a 'pro-western' leadership in Iran could have led the United States to become a serious competitor with Russia's nuclear industry.⁷¹⁹ The fear of Russia losing many multi-billion dollar contracts was strong.⁷²⁰ An Iranian-American rapprochement also had the potential of altering the balance with regard to the Caspian and Central Asia, and not to Russia's benefit.⁷²¹

This section elucidates another manner in which Russia sought to balance the United States through cooperation with Iran. First, it undertook a policy that protected against a possible reconciliation between Iran and the United States which would likely have threatened Russian interests. Second, Russia actively sought to ensure that the United States did not gain yet another foothold in the region through cooperation with Iran. As in the Iraqi case, Russia attempted to entrench its relationship for fear of losing ground to the United States.

Following the election of Iranian President Mohammad Khatami in May 1997, Russia was confronted with the possibility of a rapprochement between Iran and the United States. President Khatami began to promote a policy of domestic reform and liberalisation, and rapprochement with Europe and the United States. The rapprochement began in December 1997 with President Khatami's speech on CNN offering improved relations to the American people. A subsequent speech by President Clinton reciprocated Khatami's offer. Gestures followed: a visit by an American wrestling team to Tehran; the waiving of American sanctions against foreign companies planning to develop Iran's South Pars gas field; and a major speech by Madeline Albright offering Iran a path of reconciliation. President Khatami, however, did not respond to the offer because of a conservative attack in the Majlis (the Iranian Parliament) in the summer of 1998, which continued until the February 2000 Majlis elections.⁷²² Consequently, the Iranian leadership did not perceive its interests as being served through friendlier ties with America.⁷²³

It is noteworthy that on the eve of a potential breakthrough in Iranian-American relations, Russia took measures to entrench its own relationship with Iran including the conclusion of a series of agreements in the oil and gas and nuclear industries, and the Caspian Sea. Moreover, Russian-Iranian cooperation was reinforced through a summit in Moscow. Although the thaw in relations between Iran and

the United States was aborted in the summer of 1998, the possibility of rapprochement continued to weigh heavily on Russian–Iranian relations.⁷²⁴

With the election of Mahmood Ahmadinejad to the Presidency in June 2005, it was unlikely that any détente with the United States would be forthcoming. He had certainly shown himself to be more extreme in his opposition to the United States and Israel than his predecessor. This left much political room for Russian ambitions in Iran.

Given that Central Asia and the Gulf region were declared zones of vital interests to the United States, Russia and Iran held a common fear that their influence would be narrowed.⁷²⁵ Moreover, they did not wish to see the power of Turkey and others grow in these regions.⁷²⁶ The development of closer ties with Iran, at least in part, was an attempt by Russia to find regional partners that could alleviate the threat of an external actor seizing control of this area.⁷²⁷ Consequently, in early 1997, Foreign Minister Primakov and his Iranian counterpart, Ali Akbar Velayati, issued a joint statement calling the American presence in the Persian Gulf ‘totally unacceptable’.⁷²⁸

Russian policy-makers saw an American military presence in their vicinity posing a considerable threat of encirclement to Russia.⁷²⁹ In fact, a series of military exercises, ‘CentrasBat-97’, were carried out in September 1997 by the Central Asian Battalion, with troops from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and the United States. These were strongly opposed by both Iran and Russia. Furthermore, a proposal by Azerbaijan to invite America to establish a base on the Caspian Sea was another incentive for Russia and Iran to confirm their decision to respect their 1921 Treaty of Friendship banning the presence of foreign troops in the region.⁷³⁰ Both Russia and Iran had legitimate interests in ensuring that the United States was prevented from gaining greater influence in Central Asia and the Caucasus, which were reinforced by the desire of their neighbour’s for partnership with the United States.

Conclusions

At the outset, economic actors seeking to reap the rewards of the Iranian market guided Russian policy towards Iran. The Iranian case is particularly useful in highlighting the role of economic actors in driving Russian alignment policy. The policy of arms and technology sales shows the sensitivity of Russian policy to the institutional interests of the military and the military–industrial complex.

This case also sheds revealing light on the reactivity of Russian actors. Neither the Russian government nor private economic actors drove economic interaction with Iran. Rather, they responded to Iranian initiatives. Iran was quite adept at playing on both Russian economic need and geopolitical aspirations to achieve its ends.

By the mid-1990s, regional concerns were a major factor in driving Russian policy towards Iran. Given the enormous challenges Russia faced with Islamic fundamentalism, Iran's moderation was important in encouraging increased ties. Iran repeatedly proved itself a reliable partner in Russian attempts to resolve regional questions. This interaction set the tone for increased policy coordination, as the spectre of a unipolar international system emerged. Increasingly, Russia's relations with Iran were guided by global concerns. Iran's value rose as it came to play a more important role in the Russian–American relationship.

By the mid-2000s, Russian economic and geopolitical aspirations were once again intertwined. Russia sought to take advantage of a bellicose Iranian leadership to obtain economic gains. Furthermore, as a result of its relationship with Iran, Russia was able to play an important intermediary role in the crisis around Iran's nuclear aspirations which broke out in 2006, thereby maintaining its self-perception as a great power.

The Iranian case is particularly useful in demonstrating the evolution of Russian uses of alignments to balance the United States. This partnership presents the strongest example of American involvement in any of the relationships addressed in this study. The Iran issue was consistently on the Russian–American agenda ensuring that increasingly Russia could use its alignment with Iran to achieve its objectives towards the United States. While the Russian–American relationship was strong, Russian policy towards Iran was driven by the economic interests of a number of public and private actors.

Russia's policy towards Iran starkly highlights the deliberate balancing behaviour that Russia exhibited through its alignments with regard to the United States. The policy goals of economic actors became secondary to Russian geopolitical considerations precisely at those points when Russian–American relations were most strained. This, in turn, induced the state to step in and coordinate policy. Russian–Iranian cooperation in the fields of nuclear technology and weapons sales is useful in elucidating the evolution of Russian policy. In response to cracks in the Russian–American relationship, Russia undertook a policy of active balancing. Whereas Russian policy for most of the period was largely

responsive to Iranian initiatives, Russia became proactive in its nuclear policy towards Iran as a result of its relations with the United States. Consequently, in the Iranian case, the American connection saw Russia come to use its relationship to clearly demonstrate its defiance and independence.

5

Russia and Saddam's Iraq: The Road to Nowhere

Russian alignment with Iraq strikingly illustrates the progression from commercial economic advantage to balancing manoeuvres as the guiding forces behind Russian alignment policy. This reflects not merely a movement from one set of objectives to the other but rather an evolution in the perception of Russian interests. The combination of a more unilateralist American foreign policy and a more assertive Russian policy climate brought about a policy shift ensuring that Russia was more willing to challenge the United States over time. Moreover, the American–Iraqi relationship shifted the environment in which Russia was forced to act.

In the initial post-Soviet period, Russia's Western orientation resulted in a policy centred on global issues. Russian Foreign Minister Kozyrev frequently referred to Russia's support of UN policy towards Iraq as 'the litmus test of Russia's stand on the civilised, democratic side of the barricade'.⁷³¹ Nonetheless, the economic benefits to be had in Iraq drew Russian public and private economic actors into the country. Given the enormous investments of Soviet times, one would have anticipated a more proactive approach to Iraq. What we soon discover is a policy of reaction.

In the early period of post-Soviet Russian foreign policy, various economic actors within Russia sought cooperation with Iraq in pursuit of their own economic gain resulting in a less than cohesive Russian policy stance towards Iraq. However, different from the other cases, there was more or less a consensus on the need to engage Iraq. This could only be done through diplomatic means. The interaction between economic and global factors clearly impacted the development of Russian–Iraqi relations. Any economic cooperation between Russia and Iraq were subject to United Nations Security Council Resolution

687, imposing trade sanctions on Iraq. Russia's desire to deepen economic relations with Iraq thus had to be grounded in the elimination of these sanctions.

An initially reactive policy, impeded by the desire to rejoin the West, gave way to an adaptation in Russian policy in response to negative American policy decisions. Iraq became an instrument with which to address deleterious American actions in the international system. The important shift in policy in the mid-1990s brought about a shift in the value of Iraq in Russian foreign policy. In the words of Dmitri Trenin, Deputy Director of the Carnegie Moscow Centre: 'Our interests in Iraq were political, to keep Iraq as opposition to American hegemony. We had Serbia in the Balkans, North Korea in South East Asia and Iraq in the Middle East.'⁷³² By late 1994, Russia began to use its relationship with Iraq to challenge the United States on issues ranging from economic sanctions to military intervention.

This balancing behaviour was undertaken with disparate objectives. Part of the balancing behaviour was directed at ensuring that Russian economic and political interests both in Iraq and in the region were maintained, as seen in the other cases as well. Much effort was devoted to consolidating Russian political and economic gains in Iraq in order to guard against American military actions which would likely obliterate Russia's advantageous relationship with Iraq.

The potential for a loss of influence in Iraq carried not merely economic losses but also political implications. The Iraqi case underscores the importance of identity factors in influencing Russian alignment policy. Russian balancing behaviour served as a response to a perceived loss of status. Russia's ties with and defence of Iraq was a means by which to demonstrate Russia's capacity to resist American influence. It also demonstrated Russia's ability to challenge and thwart the American hegemon.

Nonetheless, the Iraqi case emphasises the underlying caution of Russian diplomacy under President Putin. Though over time Russia was more willing to actively challenge the United States, Russia remained largely risk averse. In fact, Russian actions were mainly responsive to American policies in the international arena. Russia very hesitantly threatened the use of its Security Council veto, and only after that there was little alternative. The setting for negotiations on the Iraq issue, the United Nations, allowed for other states such as France and Germany to take centre stage on the issue. Even following the American invasion of Iraq and the execution of Saddam Hussein in December 2006, Russia did little more than express its dissatisfaction.

It is noteworthy that Russia frequently stressed the importance of the UN in the post-Cold War era.⁷³³ Russian reasoning for this is often overlooked. First, Russia held a veto in the United Nations Security Council. Therefore, it was an important venue for its influence and an area in which Russia could still be seen as one of the world's leading powers. There were fewer and fewer institutions where Russia could justifiably be regarded as an equal. Second, in the post-Cold War period, Russia placed great emphasis on the diplomatic resolution of conflicts. It did so because its capacity to employ military force was rather limited; hence, when diplomatic efforts ended, Russia's voice in decision-making was virtually silenced.⁷³⁴ For this reason, Russia endeavoured to oppose continued American attempts at military intervention in favour of political mediation.

Peculiar to the Iraqi case was the need for a multilateral approach to attain Russian objectives. Given the fora of the United Nations Security Council, Russia was able to combine forces with other states to challenge American objectives. Russia's multilateral approach to diplomacy in the Iraqi case demonstrated Russia's manoeuvrability and potential to find allies opposed to American policies. Moreover, Iraq confirmed Russia's posture on the multipolarisation of the international system by indicating that major powers were able to ally and oppose the United States, weakening the conception that the United States was an omnipotent hegemon. The Iraq issue was also a platform for Russia to strengthen its relations with other European states. The following section addresses the interplay of four factors in motivating Russian relations with Iraq.

Factors in Russian policy towards Iraq

Russian state economic actors were at the forefront of engaging Iraq. The potential gains to be made were precisely what united different actors within the Russia polity to respond to rather clever Iraqi initiatives in support of Russian partnership with Iraq. The Iraqi case is particularly important in demonstrating the interconnection between state economic and private commercial interests. The political leadership sought to coordinate economic cooperation between Russian economic groups and the Iraqi government in pursuit of Russian economic interests. However, this occurred against the backdrop of American constraints on these relations.

Notwithstanding potential economic gains and Russia's historical ties with Iraq, Russia was unwilling to risk its partnership with the West for cooperation with the 'rogue' Middle Eastern dictatorship. Certainly,

with the exception of a few diplomatic attempts to prevent war from breaking out between the United States and its allies and Iraq over Kuwait in 1991, the Soviet Union was reluctant to strain relations with the United States or other Middle Eastern states. This was somewhat surprising given the Soviet Union's historic relationship with Iraq. By 1994, the deterioration of Russian–American relations lifted the constraints on engagement with Iraq while economic factors gave continued impetus to the Russian–Iraqi relationship. This period saw the motivation of economic gain give rise to a politicisation of the Iraqi issue.

Russia came to use Iraq as a tool for its broader foreign policy. Russia turned to the United Nations Security Council to achieve its economic objectives while increasingly using its stance on Iraq to raise its profile and challenge the United States' right to act unilaterally. In this manner, Iraq's salience in Russian foreign policy rose. What resulted was an activation of Russian relations with Iraq. Increasingly, Russia responded positively to Iraqi diplomatic initiatives seeking to re-invigorate Russian–Iraqi economic relations.

Between 1996 and 1999, the deterioration of the Russian–American relationship produced a more diplomatically active Russia in the UN. The inception of Primakov's tenure as Foreign Minister, with a clear partiality for cooperation with the Middle East, reinforced trends towards deepening ties with both Iran and Iraq at the expense of Russia's relations with the United States.⁷³⁵ Increased Russian engagement with Iraq both provoked and reflected worsening relations with the United States. This period witnessed the first post-Soviet Russian threat to use its veto in the United Nations Security Council as well as sustained opposition to American military interventions in Iraq. Russia's inability to counter NATO expansion, the American abrogation of the ABM Treaty, and America's pursuit of a ballistic missile defence all highlighted the need for Russia to both stand firm on the Iraq issue and to ensure that its diplomatic presence remained in the international system. Whereas in previous periods Russia had conducted a reactive policy, this period saw Russia being far more proactive in balancing the United States through its relationship with Iraq.

The period from 2000 to 2002 revealed increasingly open cooperation between Iraq and Russia. Russia's more coordinated approach to the Iraqi issue involved coalition building with France, Germany, and China, which buttressed both its support for Iraq against an American-led invasion and reinforced its call for multilateralism and multipolarity.

With the American invasion of Iraq in March 2003, Russia could do little more than express its opposition and make diplomatic forays to end hostilities. Russian policy was restrained. When the inevitability of American military intervention in Iraq became clear, Russia sought to enhance its capacity for future involvement by ensuring that its pre-war behaviour was not beyond the pale. Notwithstanding Russian opposition, American and British forces resolved to rid Iraq of the Hussein regime and began military operations in March 2003. A Pentagon report declared that Russia had, through its Ambassador in Iraq, provided Saddam Hussein with intelligence on US military plans in the opening days of the invasion in 2003.⁷³⁶ Russia adamantly denied these and other accusations with regard to Russia smuggling weapons of mass destruction from Iraq immediately preceding the American invasion.

With the invasion, Russian engagement with Iraq was to be determined by the United States, which was the worst-case scenario for both Russian political and economic actors. Russian political influence was dramatically weakened. This ensured that, once again, economic interests were to be at the forefront of Russian–Iraqi relations, though in a much more coordinated manner than in the early post-Soviet period.

The economic dimension

There were a number of important interests to be gained for an economically weakened Russia. Russian economic interests in Iraq in the post-Cold War period were mainly founded on two objectives: recouping approximately \$7 billion in Soviet era debt and gaining an economic foothold in a post-sanctions Iraq. It should be noted that there was a connection between these two factors. There was little genuine anticipation within Russia that Iraq would repay its debts in a timely fashion. However, these debts were used as a basis upon which to engage Iraq in lucrative future economic cooperation.

Russia's economic relationship with Iraq was premised on its comparative economic advantage as was the case in the other countries examined in this book. This was the result of its long history of cooperation with this state. From the 1960s to the 1980s, Iraq was the Soviet Union's most important economic and military-political partner in the region. In fact, Iraq accounted for approximately half of the exports and at least one-third of Soviet imports from the Middle East. In addition, most Iraqi industrial enterprises (oil wells, oil refineries, power stations, textile factories, irrigation systems, etc.) were built or modernised with Russian help.⁷³⁷

Economic interests in Iraq brought Russia into direct confrontation with American opposition to the rule of Saddam Hussein. Russian–Iraqi economic cooperation consistently fell under the shadow of potential American military intervention. Russian fears were connected with concerns that Russia would lose its position in a post-Hussein Iraq, which proved extremely prescient. Given Russia's close connection with the Hussein regime and the potential profitability of cooperation, Hussein's removal and the installation of a pro-American government would potentially mean Russia's forfeiting its debt and investments to Western businesses. Thus, Russia's economic aims could only be achieved by ensuring that America was prevented from intervening militarily in Iraq. As cooperation on the economic front increased between Russia and Iraq, markedly as a result of Iraqi initiatives, Russia was faced with a significant obstacle in the shape of United Nations Security Council sanctions.

Russian policy, which in the early post-Soviet period was largely responsive to Iraqi initiatives, increasingly became bolder and more proactive in reaction to more bellicose American policies. Russia's economic policy towards Iraq stood as a challenge to American aspirations in Iraq. A more assertive Russian policy climate facilitated a policy in which Russia was more willing to challenge the United States in order to protect its economic interests.

United Nations Security Council sanctions

Russian reactions to United Nations Security Council sanctions are particularly useful in highlighting three factors in Russia's evolving alignment policy towards Iraq. First, this issue sheds light on the influence of Iraq itself in driving Russian policy. Second, it demonstrates that as Russian–American relations faltered, Russia became more willing to challenge America in the United Nations Security Council on the issue of Iraq. Russia unswervingly opposed sanctions, yet chose to compromise with the United States when it was to its benefit, and abstained rather than vetoed when the United States objected to particular actions. Third, the issue of sanctions is remarkable in the manner in which it reveals a coherent approach from a variety of actors both private and public within the Russian polity.

In the initial post-Soviet period, Russia viewed economic sanctions as a just response to Hussein's flagrant disregard for the international system. Economic sanctions had been imposed on Iraq as a result of a United Nations Security Council Resolution in 1990, entailing a full

trade embargo barring all imports from and exports to Iraq.⁷³⁸ Russia put no diplomatic weight behind lifting sanctions until 1994 when it began to give new impetus to economic ties with China and Iran and took the first steps in its diplomatic drive to improve relations with Iraq.

Following a visit shrouded in secrecy by Tariq Aziz to St. Petersburg in July 1994, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Boris Kolokolov stated, 'Russia is ready to initiate discussion in the Security Council of the question of lifting the oil embargo against Iraq.'⁷³⁹ Both China and France strongly supported this proposal.⁷⁴⁰ Incidentally, the record of more forceful Russian statements on the lifting of sanctions seems rather closely linked to Aziz's visits, demonstrating the influence that Iraqi-driven policy had on Russian actions.⁷⁴¹

Russia consistently sought to ease sanctions against Iraq and opposed any attempts by either the United Kingdom or the United States to tighten the sanctions regime, even going so far as to threaten the use of veto. Russia supported the implementation of all Security Council resolutions on Iraq so that sanctions against Baghdad could be lifted.⁷⁴² By April 2001, Foreign Minister Ivanov noted Russian support for lifting sanctions declaring they hurt 'Iraq and its people and are also incurring great losses on Russia'.⁷⁴³

The debate over sanctions continued into May 2001 when Britain, with the support of the United States, proposed relaxing the embargo on sales of all types of non-military goods to Iraq, creating 'smart sanctions', which Russia opposed as it feared increased competition from British and American firms for lucrative contracts. Sergei Lavrov, Russia's Permanent Representative to the UN, declared that the humanitarian programme should be extended for another six months, at which point new ideas regarding the sanctions regime would be discussed.⁷⁴⁴ He also announced that if the British draft resolution were put to a vote, Moscow would exercise its veto.⁷⁴⁵ China seconded Russia's position.⁷⁴⁶ By July 2001, the United States and Britain withdrew their draft resolution.

It cannot be said that Russia and America were perpetually at a stalemate in the Security Council on the issue of Iraq. In February 2002, they held talks on Russian contracts with Iraq blocked by the UN. These consultations produced an agreement on lifting the embargo on \$23 billion worth of Russian-Iraqi contracts. The United States also promised to speed up consideration of other frozen projects totalling \$600 million.⁷⁴⁷ The fact that Russia and the United States were able to reach accord reveals that Russia's position on Iraq was not intransigent. Where they

came into conflict was over the use of sanctions and military actions which would have damaged Russia's influence in Iraq.

In December 2002, the Russian delegation abstained from Resolution 1454 regarding the reference list of goods for Iraq. Russian manufacturing companies had long had an interest in the Iraqi market, yet the resolution did not sufficiently reflect this. Russian diplomats did manage to ease some of the initial provisions.⁷⁴⁸ Deputy Foreign Minister Yuri Fedotov stated, 'As we tried to get our requirements taken into account, we had the interest of our own producers in mind. To some extent we did manage to raise the threshold for contracts to be scrutinised by the UN committee.'⁷⁴⁹ It was Russia's defence of its economic interests which increasingly interacted with Russia's great power aspirations influencing Russian policy on sanctions. In May 2003, Russia, along with France and Germany, voted in support of a United Nations Security Council resolution to lift sanctions against Iraq.⁷⁵⁰

The sanctions issue underscores the fact that a variety of groups within Russia (from the Presidential administration, to the Duma, to the power ministries and their lobbies) were able to come to agreement in opposition to sanctions on Iraq. It was generally held that no comprehensive economic cooperation could occur without Russia's intervention in lifting UN sanctions.⁷⁵¹

The Duma supported the move towards a more proactive policy, as well as demanding even greater proactivity of the Russian presidential administration. In June 1997, a law was adopted 'On Measures to Develop Cooperation with the Republic of Iraq', which would not allow any federal budget funds to be available to support sanctions against Iraq. According to Aleksei Mitrofanov, Head of the Duma Geopolitics Committee and author of the draft, it was drawn up 'in pursuit of normalization of the situation in the Persian Gulf area'.⁷⁵² The law was also to permit Russian state institutions, individuals, and legal entities to resume commercial relations with Iraq.⁷⁵³ This fell firmly in line with the generally positive views the Duma held towards Iraq. However, the Federation Council, the upper house of the Russian Parliament, rejected the bill, as it would have violated UN sanctions.

The Duma was not to be deterred. In February 1998, it adopted an amended bill proposed by the LDPR on 'Measures to Develop Cooperation with Iraq'. This bill provided for the resumption of commercial relations with Iraq on exports and imports not banned by the President and the government.⁷⁵⁴ However, after the bill was passed, Foreign Minister Primakov declared that the chamber did not have the authority to adopt such a decision. Moreover, on the same day, the Duma Foreign

Affairs, Security, Geopolitics, and Defence Committees prepared a statement maintaining that Russia should abandon the UN sanctions regime with regard to Iraq if military force was used in that country.⁷⁵⁵

The issue of sanctions is intimately connected with the oil-for-food programme which was an attempt to lessen the effects of the sanctions regime for the Iraqi populace. Russia took a lead role in this project which brought it further into conflict with the United States.

Oil-for-food agreement

The Russian government strongly encouraged Russian firms to participate. Moreover, the Russian state exhibited consistently tough responses to American impediments to cooperation under this programme. American obstructions only encouraged Russian balancing behaviour.

United Nations Security Council Resolution 986 of 14 April 1995 enabled Iraq to sell up to \$1 billion worth of oil every 90 days and to use the proceeds for the purchase of humanitarian supplies. By 10 December 1996, the resolution went into effect.⁷⁵⁶ Almost immediately, Deputy Foreign Minister Viktor Posuvalyuk and Deputy Minister for Foreign Economic Relations Vladimir Karastin travelled to Iraq to discuss export deals.⁷⁵⁷ Other ministries were also keen to join the potentially lucrative bandwagon. Pyotr Rodionov, Minister of Fuel and Energy and Co-chair of the Russian–Iraqi Inter-Governmental Commission, in negotiations with his Iraqi counterpart, discussed the prospects for Russian participation in the amount of \$2 billion. The head of *Zarubezhneft* declared he was sure that Russian energy companies were fully ready to realise this temporary quota.⁷⁵⁸ By mid-December 1996, Russian oil companies had signed contracts to buy 1.3 million metric tons of oil.⁷⁵⁹

Both the Russian Foreign Ministry and the Ministry of Foreign Economic Relations called on businessmen to develop commercial relations with Iraq under this programme.⁷⁶⁰ Given Russia's strong emphasis on the economic benefits to be had in Iraq, it encouraged the continuation of the oil-for-food programme in September 2001. Furthermore, it supported the simplification of procedures to ensure increased accessibility for Russian companies.⁷⁶¹ Interestingly, it was reported that though Russian companies signed agreements under the programme, American firms were the first to sign contracts.⁷⁶²

The United States seemed none too pleased about the increasing cooperation between Russia and Iraq. Consequently, Russians encountered a number of barriers to deeper cooperation through the oil-for-food

programme. In September 1996, American missile strikes were launched while a delegation of Russian oil companies led by Deputy Foreign Minister Viktor Posuvalyuk, including *Zarubezhneftgaz*, *LUKoil*, *Mashinimport*, *Nafta-Moskva*, *Rosnefteimpex*, were in Iraq concluding a number of agreements under the auspices of the oil-for-food programme.⁷⁶³ The Russian Foreign Ministry responded strongly calling the strikes disproportionate and unacceptable.⁷⁶⁴

Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ordzhonikidze, in October 1999, expressed deep discontent to the United States Permanent Delegate to the UN regarding the fact that practically all Russian contracts submitted for approval to the UN Committee for Sanctions Against Iraq were being blocked by American representatives. He noted, 'This is a selective and deliberate policy of the United States, spearheaded against the Russian companies, since similar contracts, concluded by other countries, pass through the sanctions committee without any particular problems.'⁷⁶⁵ The Foreign Ministry was particularly disturbed by the situation with *Zarubezhneft*, given practically all its contracts 'are being blocked for absolutely far-fetched and groundless reasons'.⁷⁶⁶

The Russian meeting with Iraq, which took place at the end of March 2002, saw the Iraqi Oil Minister Amir Rashid promise his counterpart Igor Yusufov that Russia could increase its share of exports under the oil-for-food programme to 40 per cent of Iraq's total exports.⁷⁶⁷ As a result, between 1996 and 2002, Russian participation in the oil-for-food programme had increased the volume of trade to \$35 billion.⁷⁶⁸

Continued economic cooperation with Iraq occurred against a background of redoubled efforts by the United States to get Russia to end its support for Iraq by offering them a substitute for Iraqi petrodollars.⁷⁶⁹ In this manner, the Americans attempted to 'outbid' Iraq for Russia's favour. However, the Iraqis countered with efforts to sign a programme of long-term cooperation, worth almost \$4 billion.⁷⁷⁰

A number of allegations of wrongdoing in the programme began to surface in 2004 with regard to kickbacks paid by companies, including a number of prominent Russian firms and individuals, to obtain contracts under the programme. The Duelfer report written by Iraq weapons inspector Charles Duelfer uncovered the regime's complicated and lucrative schemes to earn illicit funds. Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov expressed scepticism about the report.⁷⁷¹

Demonstrating the clear connection between the private and the public in the Russian context, 30 per cent of the oil vouchers issued under this programme went to beneficiaries in Russia, including allegedly to officials in the president's office, the Russian Foreign Ministry, the

Russian Communist Party, members of the Russian parliament, and the oil firms *LUKoil*, *Gazprom*, *Zarubezhneft*, *Sibneft*, *Rosneft*, and *Tatneft*. Moreover, Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, the Russian Liberal Democratic Party leader, and companies associated with his party were allocated 53 million barrels. Alexander Voloshin, chief of staff under former Russian President Boris Yeltsin, was allocated 3.9 million barrels of oil.⁷⁷²

The oil-for-food programme was a clear example of the Russian government working hand in glove with Russian economic actors to secure economic agreements with Iraq. Notwithstanding the ostensible profitability of the oil-for-food programme, Russia's goal remained the elimination of sanctions, which would allow for the fulfilment of Russia's long-term objectives of deep economic engagement with Iraq.

Debt collection

Iraq's debt to Russia is a legacy of Soviet–Iraqi cooperation during the Cold War. The issue of debt collection in the post-Soviet period is rather more complicated than it appears. There are few Russian policy-makers or analysts who genuinely believed that Iraq was either capable of or willing to repay its debt to Russia. However, Russia continued to place emphasis on debt repayment in its relations with Iraq. This is not a result of naiveté or wishful thinking; rather the debt was used as a bargaining chip in negotiations with Iraq, ensuring Russia's centrality in Iraq's oil-for-food programme as well as discussions of post-sanction contracts.

As Chapter 2 demonstrated, there was a strong interplay between public and private economic interests in the Iraqi case. The issue of debt repayment provided incentives for close coordination of policy between various government ministries and private commercial interests. Though Iraq was in no position to repay its debt, it was able to conclude agreements for the post-sanction period. In this manner, *LUKoil*, *Rosneft*, and *Zarubezhneft* coordinated a special Russian–Iraqi company to finance Russian oil firms in Iraq in the post-sanctions period. Russia's share of the company's incorporation capital was set against part of Iraq's debt to the former Soviet Union.⁷⁷³

Throughout the Hussein period, cooperation with Iraq on the debt issue demonstrated Russian independence, as Russia signed agreements with Iraq which the United States opposed. In September 1994, Iraqi Minister of Trade Mukhammed Salekh articulated Iraq's commitment to repay its debts to Russia.⁷⁷⁴ It was, however, clear that this would not be possible until sanctions against the Hussein regime were lifted. Nonetheless, Russia and Iraq signed a protocol disclosing

that immediately after the lifting of sanctions, Iraq would give Russia first-priority repayment of its accumulated debt.⁷⁷⁵

The issue of debts to Russia and the American connection once again came to the fore with the March 2003 American military action in Iraq. In early April 2003, American Deputy Defence Secretary Paul Wolfowitz asked that Russia simply write off the Iraqi debt to help Iraq's post-war reconstruction.⁷⁷⁶ The Russian government initially bristled. Prime Minister Mikhail Kasyanov even argued that Moscow would not forgive loans granted to Iraq under Saddam Hussein until Russia's own Soviet-era debts were written off.⁷⁷⁷ Yet Russia was in a far weaker bargaining position given Iraqi threats to cancel all contracts signed with Russia during the Hussein regime. The pragmatism of the Putin regime resulted in the use of these debts to improve Russia's bargaining position with the United States.

President Putin first announced Russia's readiness to consider the issue of writing off debts on 11 April 2003, shortly after the beginning of the military operation in Iraq.⁷⁷⁸ He soon agreed that writing off Iraq's debt would be legitimate within the context of the Paris Club.⁷⁷⁹ Russia used its cooperativeness to maintain involvement in a post-Hussein Iraq through attempts to vie for construction contracts to rebuild Iraq.⁷⁸⁰ Though Igor Yusufov, Russia's Energy Minister, maintained that Iraq's debt and Russian contracts in Iraq were not interconnected issues, they have consistently been discussed in conjunction.⁷⁸¹ However, it was only when the situation in Iraq had conclusively changed that Russia took the step of writing off Iraqi debts. In November 2004, each of the 19 Paris Club nations agreed to cancel approximately 80 per cent of the Iraqi debt to each creditor nation. In September 2006, Alexei Kudrin, Russia's finance minister, signed an agreement to write off \$10 billion in Iraqi debt to Russia leaving Iraq with a \$1 billion debt to Russia.⁷⁸²

Russia's role as host of the G8 in St. Petersburg in July 2006 further demonstrated Russia's concessionary stance on the debt issue and reinforced Russia's use of Iraq as a pawn in its broader international aspirations. In the leaders' statement on Iraq, the states reaffirmed their intention to reduce Iraq's debt by implementing the terms of the Paris Club agreement. The issue of debt is indicative of Russia's broader restraint in policy. As the situation evolved around Iraq, Russia sought alternate methods to entrench its position.

Post-sanctions contracts

In the Iraqi case as in the others assessed, Russia found a state that was desirous of Russian products. Russian industries incapable of competing

in the world market found a market in Iraq. One such example was the Moscow *Gidromashservis* Company, involved in the production of engineering products. Over a four-year period, it concluded more than 120 contracts with Iraq totalling approximately \$400 million. Other companies such as *KamAZ*, *Bryanskiy Arsenal*, *Cheboksary's Promtraktor*, Moscow's *Gidrostal*, *Uralkhromyazhmash*, and others were also prominent actors in Iraq.⁷⁸³ These companies were unlikely to survive without the Iraqi market and the Russian government was fully cognizant of this fact. For this reason, the Russian government sought to assist in the coordination of economic ties. Moreover, Russia had grave concerns over any American military intervention in Iraq for two reasons: the displacement of Russian companies in favour of Western organisations and a potential decrease in oil prices. Both of these held serious economic implications for the Russian economy. Russian actions were in part stimulated by the conviction that the fall of the Hussein regime, as a result of Western action, would lead to a rush by Western companies for the Iraqi market. On the eve of Tariq Aziz's third unofficial visit in four months in December 1994, Deputy Foreign Minister Viktor Posuvalyuk stressed that once sanctions were lifted, Western firms would immediately rush into Iraq. The Russian strategy then would be to help lift sanctions and, in the process, establish a Russian foothold in Iraqi markets in advance.⁷⁸⁴

American policy did not give Russia any reliable assurances that its interests would be taken into account in a post-Hussein Iraq.⁷⁸⁵ Notwithstanding United States Secretary of State Colin Powell's declaration that Russian economic interests would be respected,⁷⁸⁶ there was little American policy in that direction. Accordingly, Russia concluded as many agreements as possible with the Iraqi regime while concurrently attempting to ensure that the United States did not intervene in Iraq. This was especially true given American energy experts' warnings to Russian companies that their contracts would be cancelled because of Russia's opposition to the war.⁷⁸⁷

With the fall of the Hussein regime, Russian fears proved justified. In May 2003, Ayad Allawi, leader of the Iraqi National Accord movement, declared, 'Everything that was signed during Saddam's rule has now lost its force.'⁷⁸⁸ However, President Putin stated clearly that Moscow would not surrender its position in Iraq. He declared, 'We have our own interests there... But we will not engage in haggling as if we were at an Oriental bazaar, or sell out on our position in exchange for any economic advantages.'⁷⁸⁹ Nonetheless, Russia's unassailable position in Iraq was weakened. After the fall of the Hussein regime, Russian companies

fought to retain their positions.⁷⁹⁰ By December 2003, Putin urged the government to resume negotiations with the Iraqi leadership on the implementation of Russian companies' contracts with Iraq.⁷⁹¹ In early 2007, the Iraqi Council of Ministers approved a controversial hydrocarbon law on production sharing agreements, heavily pushed by the American and British governments, which radically redrew the Iraqi oil industry.⁷⁹²

All was, however, not lost for Russia with the end of the Hussein regime. In 2004, *LUKoil* became the largest fuel supplier in Iraq, replacing the disgraced US Halliburton oil and gas company. *LUKoil's* subsidiary, *LUKoil* International Trading and Supply Company (LITASCO), signed a contract with the US Refinery Associates of Texas, which won a large tender for fuel supply to Iraq. The Russian company took responsibility for all the activities connected with logistics, and commercial and financial coverage of the fuel deliveries. *LUKoil* continues to keep a foothold in Iraq through training. Iraqi oil workers have been travelling to Russia for month-long training programmes in *LUKoil's* Western Siberian oil fields. This programme is being carried out under an agreement signed by *LUKoil* in March 2004 in Baghdad.⁷⁹³ However, the main goal of *LUKoil* remains the securing of rights for exploration and extraction at the huge West Qurna-2 oil field. The previous contract between *LUKoil* and Saddam Hussein was signed in 1997.⁷⁹⁴

A second influence on Russia's approach to post-sanction contracts was the fact that an American military intervention could result in significantly lower world oil prices. Yuri Shafranik, Chairman of the Russian Union of Oil and Gas Industrialists Council, noted that 'world oil prices could fall to twelve to fifteen dollars per barrel. According to the Russian Energy and Finance Ministry figures, the loss of one dollar in oil prices would impact the Russian treasury by approximately one hundred and twenty to one hundred and fifty million dollars per month.'⁷⁹⁵

Some have argued the tensions around Iraq and the continuation of sanctions actually benefited Russian coffers. According to this argument, UN sanctions as well as the tensions caused by American–Iraqi hostilities ensured that world oil prices remained high thereby increasing Russian revenues.⁷⁹⁶ As a consequence, though Russia had pressed for the lifting of sanctions which would allow Iraq to re-join the world oil trade in full force, and consequently allow Russia a prime position in the Iraqi market, the continuation of tensions also had the effect of aiding Russia economically given Russia's economic dependence on its indigenous oil production.

Russian actions were not merely guided by fears of American military intervention but also by the state of Russian–American relations. The worse the state of Russian–American relations, the greater Russian proactivity in engaging Iraq economically. There were a number of meetings with Iraq that seemed to correspond with increasing tensions in the Russian–American relationship. It cannot be said that these meetings occurred directly in response. However, three points are important. First, Russian government officials tended to be more amenable to accepting Iraqi diplomatic initiatives following a particularly contentious encounter with the United States. Second, Russian officials themselves noted that coinciding meetings with Iraqi and American officials demonstrated Russia’s diplomatic strength. Third, Russia cancelled meetings with Iraq when it felt that these would be too deleterious to Russian–American relations, thereby indicating a conscious sensitivity to how these interactions impacted on each other.

An official Iraqi delegation led by Iraqi Oil Minister Safa Hadi Jawad visited Moscow in October 1994, at the start of a new Iraqi crisis. The purpose of the visit was to discuss the details of Russian oil companies’ possible participation in developing oil deposits in Iraq and constructing an oil refinery and gas pipeline after sanctions were lifted. This appeared to be the first attempt to coordinate economic relations between the two states. This visit, coming at a time of increased tensions between Iraq and the United States, placed Russia in the rather precarious position of taking the side of America’s enemy. However, Russia’s readiness to pursue its economic interests, notwithstanding American objections, demonstrated not so much the primacy of Iraq in Russia’s foreign policy as the need for Russia both to demonstrate its independence at a time when the issue of NATO expansion was increasingly on the Russian–American agenda and to respond to the backlash within Russia against an unambiguously Western foreign policy.

Russia’s more active approach to relations with Iraq was evidenced in April 1995 with the organisation of the first Inter-Governmental Commission on Economic Cooperation. Russia’s Deputy Fuel and Energy Minister Pyotr Nidzelsky declared, ‘Moscow has not made and is not making secret its interest in further cooperation with Baghdad.’⁷⁹⁷ In response to American criticisms, Foreign Minister Kozyrev reiterated Russia’s right to pursue its economic interests.⁷⁹⁸ This approach was further reinforced in February 2002 with growing American pressure on Iraq, following George W. Bush’s assertion that Iraq was part of an ‘Axis of Evil’. Russia chose just this time to convene a meeting of the Russian–Iraqi Inter-Governmental Commission on Trade and

Economic Cooperation, which had not met since October 1999.⁷⁹⁹ Previous meetings had ostensibly been postponed for technical reasons.⁸⁰⁰ The meeting, chaired by Russian Minister of Energy Igor Yusufov and the Iraqi Minister of Oil Amir Muhammad Rashid al-Ubaydi, resulted in the signing of a 'Long-Term Program for Economic and Scientific Cooperation' including 67 investment projects.⁸⁰¹

In an analogous manner, as America prepared for war in 2003, the Russian Ministries of Economic Development and Energy reached agreement on a 'Five-Year Plan of Cooperation with Iraq', estimated to be worth \$40 billion.⁸⁰² Under the auspices of the agreement, *Stroitransgaz* signed a contract on developing the fourth oil and gas field in Iraq's Western Desert. Contracts were also drafted with *Soyuzneftegaz* and *Tatneft*. Moreover, very serious consultations were held with *Zarubezhneft* on concluding a contract to develop an oil field on the river Ben Umar, which can produce about 600,000 barrels of oil per day, which is equal to the daily production of oil in Qatar.⁸⁰³ The implication is twofold. First, Russia was willing to actively challenge America's approach through a clear show of support for Iraq. Second, Russia was prepared to oppose American conceptions of the existence of an 'Axis of Evil'.

Russia, however, was not always willing to make such explicit statements about its relations with Iraq in light of American opposition. It occasionally acted with smoke-and-mirrors Soviet-style subterfuge. In February 1996, the Iraqi news agency disclosed that Iraqi Deputy Oil Minister Fayez Shahin and an official Russian delegation, led by First Deputy Energy Minister Ivan Matlashov, had signed an agreement on 'Rebuilding Iraq's Petroleum Industry and Increasing Iraqi Oil Production' to 60.8 million metric tons per year.⁸⁰⁴ Mintopenergo was quick to deny involvement.⁸⁰⁵ Even a representative of Russia's *Zarubezhneft*, the official operator of all Russian oil projects in Iraq, denied involvement in the agreement.⁸⁰⁶

By late 1996, Russian ministries confirmed the contract worth \$10 billion was most definitely signed. In November 1996, Russia's Minister of Fuel and Energy Pyotr Rodionov and Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz reconfirmed their readiness for cooperation in the oil and gas industry.⁸⁰⁷ Incidentally, four days before the visit ended, the United States Air Force launched a strike against Iraq to prevent Iraqi troops from taking action against Iraqi Kurds, inducing the continuation of sanctions.⁸⁰⁸

Russian proactivity in its economic policies towards Iraq came rather late in the day. Certainly, Russia's economic engagement was highly

influenced by Iraqi manipulation. In large part, Iraq took the lead in initiating economic cooperation with Russia. It skillfully employed techniques of inducement and punishment to affect Russian policy. It drew Russia into cooperation through the provision of highly lucrative contracts, though not unwillingly, which then compelled Russia to take political actions to both pursue and consolidate its position.

Iraq undertook the first serious attempt at long-term economic cooperation in September 1994 at which time the Joint Russian–Iraqi Commission on Trade, Economic, Scientific and Technical Cooperation was established. Oleg Davydov, the Minister of Foreign Economic Relations and Co-chair of the Commission, stated that the Commission would serve to restore trade and economic relations with Iraq. The resulting series of meetings ended in the conclusion of contracts with Russian firms for construction work and deliveries of equipment and goods valued at \$8–10 billion.⁸⁰⁹ Iraq continued to stimulate relations with Russia, the focus remaining economic agreements in a post-sanction period.

Tariq Aziz visited Moscow in November 1996, at which time he met with Foreign Minister Primakov who declared that one of the priorities of the meetings was to ‘look at the possibilities for large-scale and extensive cooperation between Iraq and Russia in the post-sanction period’.⁸¹⁰ Furthermore, Yevgeni Primakov, in a rather opaque reference to the United States noted, ‘Military actions, whatever their motivations may be, can only lead to a complication of the situation in the region.’⁸¹¹

Agreement was reached between Russia and Iraq on oil production in March 1997. *Lukoil*, *Zarubezhneft*, and *Mashinoimport* signed a \$3.8 billion deal with Baghdad to develop the West Qurna-2 oil field.⁸¹² The Russian Foreign Ministry described the oil contract as ‘a step in the line of attempts which Russia is making to preliminarily formulate its starting positions for the post-sanction period of cooperation with one of the potentially richest states of the East’.⁸¹³

Iraq was particularly proactive in its engagement with Russia at times when Iraq was in conflict with the United States. Thus, in December 1999, only a few days after the signing of a continuation of sanctions, Iraq agreed to go ahead with a \$419 million deal with the Russian firm *Technopromexport* to resume construction of a power station interrupted by the invasion of Kuwait and the sanctions regime.⁸¹⁴ Iraq also took the initiative in the weeks following September 11, 2001 when Saddam Hussein invited Russian oil companies to develop additional oil deposits in Iraq, with Iraqi Oil Minister Amer Mohammed Rashid declaring,

'economic and trade relations between Iraq and Russia are strategic, despite the continuing embargo and US-British strikes'.⁸¹⁵

Iraqi officials continually placed pressure on both Russian companies and the Russian government to work towards ending sanctions. *LUKoil* in June 1999 sent an official letter to the Foreign Ministry requesting assistance in developing oil fields in Iraq, in effect, seeking Russian governmental action to end sanctions. The government itself was fully aware of the necessity to end sanctions. Sergei Generalov, head of the Mintopenergo, explained, 'everything hinges on the sanctions; even if Tariq Aziz were to give us those deposits as a gift, we'd still have to drill wells and build pipelines'.⁸¹⁶ The interconnection between public and private interests was exacerbated in the Iraqi case by private companies' need for Russian diplomatic engagement with the UN to achieve their economic objectives. Later Minister of Fuel and Energy Viktor Kalyuzhny described the government's task as preventing the ousting of *LUKoil* from the Iraqi market and keeping Russian positions in Iraq strong.⁸¹⁷

When inducements were unsuccessful in spurring Russian action, Iraq turned to threats. Increasingly, Iraq used its commercial contracts with Russian companies to forward its political ends. In March 2001, Iraqi Deputy Oil Minister Fayik Shahin threatened to cancel contracts concluded with Russian oil companies (*LUKoil*, *Zarubezhneft*, and *Slavneft*), asserting that these companies were unable to meet the commitments they had assumed.⁸¹⁸ The Russian Foreign Ministry stepped in to admonish the Iraqi side given that Russian companies could not carry out their obligations while UN sanctions were in force.⁸¹⁹

Iraq's use of 'sticks' as well as 'carrots' was evident in December 2002, when Iraq decided to cancel the aforementioned contract.⁸²⁰ The contract for the development of the West Qurna-2 oil field had been signed by *LUKoil*, *Zarubezhneft*, *Mashinimport* and the Iraqi Oil Ministry in March 1997.⁸²¹ This Iraqi action elicited a harsh response from Russia. The Russian Foreign Ministry stated, 'Such a move can only be interpreted as running contrary to the friendly character of Russian-Iraqi relations and the level of bilateral cooperation in different areas.'⁸²² It was only after the Russian Foreign Ministry's intervention that the Iraqi government agreed to continue negotiations.⁸²³

This project was especially significant as it was supposed to clear part of Iraq's debt to Russia.⁸²⁴ In December 2002, the Chairman of the Iraqi Parliament's Committee on Arab and International Affairs, Salem al-Kubeysi, stated that *LUKoil* could be replaced by any other Russian company.⁸²⁵ By January 2003, with the changes in the political

situation surrounding Iraq, talks between a Russian delegation and Iraqi Vice President Taha Yasin Ramadan led to an agreement to withdraw complaints made by each of the sides against the other.⁸²⁶

With the American military intervention in Iraq in March 2003, Russian interests in Iraq were seriously threatened. The handover of sovereignty to the Iraqis in June 2004 obliged Russia to build anew relations with a state now firmly in the grips of civil war and significantly influenced by the United States. Russia had long understood the potential consequences of an American military intervention for its interests. This was precisely the motivation for taking such extensive measures to secure its place in Iraq.

By the mid-1990s, the international climate and the resulting diversification of Russian foreign policy brought about an increased Russian willingness to challenge the United States in order to protect its economic interests. As a result of these changes, Iraq's value rose in Russian calculations. By the mid-2000s, the economic relationship between Russia and Iraq became one of the only remnants of its historical relationship with this key Middle East nation.

Russian domestic security

On the surface, it would seem the issue of Russian domestic security and Iraq would be unrelated. Russia shared neither a border with Iraq nor could Iraq pose any real security threat to Russia. However, indirectly Iraq was associated with an issue that was seriously divisive for Russia – that of Islam. Russia was home to almost 20 million Muslims, constituting one-seventh of the population. The previous chapter described how the religious question was complicated by operations in Chechnya over the past decade.

Chechnya was considered by many to be Russia's 'bleeding wound'.⁸²⁷ By all accounts, Iraq never actively supported Chechen forces or criticised Russian actions in the republic. Developments in the Iraqi situation, however, had potential ramifications for Russia. As such, how Russia engaged the Middle East bore on the security of the state itself. Events in the Middle East and the Gulf held importance for the immediate neighbourhood including but not limited to Chechnya, Tajikistan, and Afghanistan.⁸²⁸ Russian policy-makers were obliged to take into consideration the reciprocal nature of the relationship. Policy towards Iraq had the potential to influence relations with Russia's own Muslim population. But Iraq and broader Islamic issues were also capable of destabilising the religious situation within Russia.

The American connection in this context takes on added salience. An American invasion of Iraq had the potential to destabilise the region by inflaming Islamic fundamentalist movements. For example, in March/April 2004, Sunni and Shiite Muslims in Iraq put aside their disputes to challenge American forces. The capacity to contain such instability likely influenced Russian opposition to American military actions in Iraq.

Russia attempted to maintain a generally positive relationship with states in the Middle East. Though largely marginalised in the Middle East peace process, Russia had made continued efforts to retain a moderating influence. Furthermore, Russia actively supported secular regimes in the region, including that of Saddam Hussein. Those that regularly depict the inherent danger of Islam also advocate that Russia come to terms with 'moderate' states in the region. This is in no way meant to imply that Hussein was a moderate politician; however, notwithstanding his failures, he maintained a moderate Islamic state.⁸²⁹ Should a more radical form of Islam emerge in Iraq, this would be highly detrimental to Russian interests. Russian officials also followed a rather consistent line attempting to moderate Islam within the Russian Federation. One of the reasons that Russia took such a position on Iraq was to avoid justifying more religious conflict within Russia.⁸³⁰ Taking a hard stance towards Iraq might have further antagonised the religious situation in Russia. Certainly, contact had been made between Russian and Iraqi Muslims, the importance of which should not be underestimated.⁸³¹

The second factor influencing Russia's policy is often referred to as the fear of a global Islamic threat, which could have potentially destabilising repercussions for Russia. Russia feared Islamic fundamentalism emerging anywhere, as it had the potential to spread. As a result, Russia discouraged any actions that could incite religious tensions that could easily spill into Russia. It may likely have had such concerns in mind with regard to American military action in Iraq.⁸³² Attempts to deter military action may have served to avert the potential of a fundamentalist, destabilising force posing a threat to the territorial integrity of the Russian state. This is especially true given the American-British military intervention in Iraq attracted approximately 6000 Dagestanis to the fighting. It was also rumoured that a number of Chechens fought on the Iraqi side in the conflict.⁸³³

Issues of domestic security were not a driving factor for Russia's policy towards Iraq. Rather, they were one aspect in the dynamic development of Russian policy. The issue of Islam also played an important role in guiding Russian regional interests.

Regional dimension

As in the case of Russian domestic security, the regional interests Russia was pursuing through its relations with Iraq can only be described as less important compared with Russian economic and geopolitical concerns. Nevertheless, they do set the context in which Russia formulated its policy towards Iraq and are therefore relevant. The regional factor is helpful in elucidating two objectives of Russian alignment policy. It shows Russia's desire to prevent the erosion of its role as a regional and global power. Second, it reveals an active policy of mitigating American influence at the regional level. These dual objectives were meant to ensure that Russia was not marginalised and was given a voice in its relations with the United States.

Russia's presence in the Middle East held enormous potential. Economic cooperation with the states of the Middle East was increasingly important for Russia as a result of its economic decline and the loss of other foreign markets. Relations with Iraq both benefited and hampered this objective, thereby reinforcing the contention that Russia's Iraq policy fell outside the bounds of Russian strategy towards the Middle East, if in fact one can identify a strategy at all. On the one hand, Russia's stance on Iraq demonstrated independence from the United States which was appreciated by a number of Gulf states. On the other, the Iraq issue became so politicised and polarised that these states were concerned with taking too strong a position for fear of upsetting relations with America. Russia's blatant support for the Iraqi cause led to the unsuccessful conclusion of Chernomyrdin's tour of six major Arab oil-producing states in November 1994.⁸³⁴

Russia also stressed its desire for political stability in the region, perceiving the Middle East as an area of fundamental strategic interest.⁸³⁵ Under Foreign Minister Primakov, Russia acted as a mediator in the Arab–Israeli conflict as it had in the various Iraqi crises. Russia had a stake in participating in components of the security system in the Middle East.⁸³⁶ Deputy Foreign Minister Posuvalyuk portrayed Russia as an integral part of the entire region:

Everything that happens here affects us. It is true that we are in a weaker position and our financial resources are limited. We can no longer extend unlimited credit to our allies. Nor do we have a mandate from the Russian people to supply endless quantities of arms. But we do have a number of advantages.⁸³⁷

These advantages were to be reinforced. For Russia, Iraq was vital in raising Russia's regional and global profile. As it happened, this was precisely the region holding the largest concentration of states posing concerns for Washington.⁸³⁸ Russian objectives could only be achieved by ensuring that the United States did not make greater inroads into an historical area of concern for Russia. Thus, Russia sought the creation of a system of relations in the region that would minimise American influence. Notwithstanding Russia's less than coordinated approach to the region, it did at times manage to formulate proposals for an alteration in the balance of power.

During Foreign Minister Ivanov's trip to the Middle East in November 2000, he put forward a proposal concerning a new security system for the Persian Gulf region. According to the document, at the time three power centres shaped the situation in the region. The first two were Iran and Iraq. Both of these countries were feared by their neighbours, who then came together in the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf relying on the American military contingent in the region. Russia was proposing that the system be altered by the creation of a new structure in which Iran and Iraq would participate; in the process, Russia was prepared to give security guarantees to the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council.⁸³⁹

The proposal did not gain real support and faded. However, Russia had shown its interest once again in becoming an active influence in the region, mainly as a counterweight to the United States. One of his objectives was to reduce Arab dependence on the United States.⁸⁴⁰ As can be seen, Ivanov's proposal was not entirely outside the realms of possibility. Iraq was to act as another fulcrum for Russian influence. Given Russia's historical connection with this state, in addition to its contemporary 'special relationship', it was assumed that Russia would be able to regain its standing in regional politics through relations with Iraq.

In 2003, Russia requested membership in the OIC, though Russia lacks the required 50 per cent minimum Muslim population.⁸⁴¹ While Russia was not granted full membership, it became an observer to the OIC.⁸⁴²

These regional influences on Russian policy were largely subsidiary to Russia's broader economic and geopolitical objectives. Russia's policy on Iraq did not truly interact with Russia's expansive Middle Eastern goals except at the broadest strategic level in attempting to provide a balance against America in the region.⁸⁴³ In fact, Iraq was largely held separate from Russian economic and political interactions with the rest of the region. As such, the regional factor cannot be deemed to have seriously induced or hampered Russia's policy on Iraq. Rather, Russia's regional

concerns in interacting with Iraq were framed within the context of creating a stable system of regional cooperation in which Russia was an active participant, as well as ensuring limited American influence in the region. In this manner, Russia's regional concerns interacted with its global aspirations.

Global dimension

The global dimension of Russian–Iraqi relations was intimately connected with balancing the United States. First, given Russia's history of relations with Iraq, it proved an ideal issue with which to demonstrate Russia's influence in international affairs. Russia, by way of its 'special relationship' with the Iraqi leadership and successful diplomatic manoeuvring, was able to avert the American move to war for a significant period of time, thereby demonstrating its continued clout. Second, Russia's relations with Iraq were a means of carving out a new role in the international system. In this manner, Russia became the defender of diplomacy and multilateral action, opposing any resort to military force.

Russia's stance on Iraq was a practical means of defying the United States. However, with the exception of some rather extreme rhetoric from President Yeltsin and right wing forces, Russia acted with great restraint. Iraq afforded Russia important opportunities for expression on the world stage, which it not only accepted but also increasingly sought out. In this manner, the global dimension attested to Russia's persistent great power aspirations.

Great power aspirations

The evolution of Russia's Iraq policy mirrors the evolution of Russian self-perception. As with both China and Iran, Russia used its partnership with Iraq to resist the developing perception of Russia as a second-rate, 'junior' power. It came to use its relationship with Iraq to signal three facets of its great power status: as a great power Russia could and would resist American pressure by pursuing a closer relationship with Iraq; Russia could sabre-rattle to ensure that it was heeded; and Russia maintained the right to engage in international diplomacy because it had considerable influence over its allies. The very act of balancing against American interests in Iraq reinforced the perception that Russia was once again working effectively in placing Russian 'national interests' at the forefront of its foreign policy.⁸⁴⁴

As mentioned earlier, in the initial post-Soviet period, Russian cooperation with the United States precluded any real association with Iraq. Moscow expressed full support for American strikes on Baghdad in June 1993 with Foreign Minister Kozyrev stating, 'This is not a question of crime and punishment, but an action that the US views as the exercise of the state's inalienable right to self-defence, in accordance with Article 51 of the UN Charter.'⁸⁴⁵ It is noteworthy that the expression of this position came only two days before President Yeltsin's Tokyo meeting with President Clinton, which resulted in significant economic support for Russian reforms.

Though Russia sought a more independent foreign policy by 1994, it was still unwilling to allow its relations with Iraq to complicate Russian-American cooperation. Tariq Aziz's clandestine July 1994 visit to St. Petersburg is a clear example. The Russian Foreign Ministry would not acknowledge the trip until it was completed. Incidentally, this meeting occurred only days before Yeltsin's flight to Naples for the G-7 summit.⁸⁴⁶ Attempts to keep the meeting secret could be viewed within the context of Russia's desire to remain on Washington's good side. It is possible to deduce from this that the United States played a role in deterring, or at a minimum restraining, Russia's relations with Iraq.

Factors within Russia and outside began to coalesce to demonstrate the need to pursue a foreign policy line more in harmony with Russia's desired great power status. The Duma elections of December 1993, rising domestic pressure on Foreign Minister Kozyrev for following too Western an approach to foreign policy, and the growing prospect of NATO expansion into Eastern Europe, all served to ensure the need for a more pronounced Russian great power posture. Following the Duma elections, survey data on voters' motives revealed that those who voted for both the Liberal Democratic and the Communist Parties did so because they saw them as being most likely to support the restoration of order within and great power to the country.⁸⁴⁷ Consequently, Russia undertook a more overtly defiant stance in its relationship with Iraq.

In October 1994, Russian diplomats succeeded in obtaining Baghdad's agreement on the text of a Russian-Iraqi communiqué foiling America's desire for a military solution to yet another crisis around Iraq.⁸⁴⁸ Russia's willingness to more openly resist the United States, both in rhetoric and in practice, was manifest in the United Nations Security Council Resolution 949 adopted in October 1994. The initial version included a point that essentially consented to the commencement of military operations against Iraq. Russia threatened the use of its veto in response to such a resolution, and the point was deleted.⁸⁴⁹

The United States failed to see the peaceful resolution of the conflict in a similar light to Moscow. In fact, American Secretary of State Warren Christopher declared that the United States was reviving the anti-Iraq coalition and the American State Department issued a negative statement on the agreement.⁸⁵⁰ Russia viewed this success in light of its own continued status as a global great power. Foreign Minister Kozyrev stated that Western forces, and especially the United States, reacted with a kind of jealousy to the successes of Russian diplomacy and that they were unwilling to accept the fact that Russia continued to maintain its status as a great power.⁸⁵¹

Russia increasingly discarded subtleties in its relations with Iraq in favour of even clearer indications of its resolve to prevent conflict and defy American wishes. Given America's ever more apparent desire to settle the Iraq issue militarily, Russia's strategy became more dynamic. In July 2000, Tariq Aziz visited Moscow as an officially invited guest of the Russian government upon its initiative for the first time.⁸⁵² The American State Department criticised Yeltsin for officially receiving Aziz. In Washington's view, leaders of countries that were permanent members of the United Nations Security Council should not have any contacts with the Iraqi leadership. On an even harsher note, Donald Rumsfeld, then American Secretary of Defence added,

To the extent that Russia decides that it wants to parade its relationships with countries like Iraq and Libya and Syria and Cuba and North Korea, it sends a signal out across the globe that that is what Russia thinks is a good thing to do, to deal with the terrorist states.⁸⁵³

As the Russian–American relationship continued to decline, in the aftermath of the brief improvement of relations following September 11, Russia was more willing to flaunt its close ties with Iraq. In April 2002, the Russian government hosted both Iraqi and American representatives simultaneously with meetings held between Russian and Iraqi Ministers of Foreign Affairs and the American and Russian Ministers of Defence.⁸⁵⁴ Russian Security Council Chairman Ivanov described, rather glibly, this coincidence as reflecting 'the active actions of Russia in the interests of political resolution of the situation in Iraq'.⁸⁵⁵

Russian–American relations had further been complicated by a CIA report published in the month preceding George W. Bush's State of the Union address, in which Russia was listed among suppliers of dual-use technologies to countries forming the 'Axis of Evil'.⁸⁵⁶ This was issued against the backdrop of American Presidential Adviser Condoleezza Rice's

statement that the United States would draw no distinction between actual terrorists and those who support and supply them.⁸⁵⁷

In the early post-Soviet period, this would have raised concerns within Russia, but from the mid-1990s, America's challenges to Russia's relations with Iraq only served to reinforce the necessity for an independent Russian policy on Iraq. In many senses, America's opposition to Russian policy demonstrated its effectiveness. American protests concerning Russian relations with Iraq revealed that Russia could resist American pressure and pursue a policy in line with its 'national interest'. Russian uses for Iraq were not limited to mere defiance. Russia came to use the issue of Iraq to actively and vocally sabre-rattle, thereby challenging the United States' right to unilateral action and global leadership.

Tariq Aziz's visit to Moscow in December 1994 came immediately following the Budapest session of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, addressing the inescapability of NATO expansion,⁸⁵⁸ which President Yeltsin declared would plunge 'Europe into a Cold Peace'.⁸⁵⁹ Yeltsin went so far as to state, 'By his actions, [Clinton] might run right into a new world war. He's making too much noise.'⁸⁶⁰ Few issues in the post-Cold War period have witnessed the United States and Russia at such loggerheads. The issue of Iraq repeatedly elicited bold statements from Yeltsin, confirmation that Russia was not to be ignored in international relations.

Many in Moscow saw America's operation 'Desert Fox' as exhibiting a lack of respect for Russia.⁸⁶¹ On 7 February 1998, President Yeltsin declared, 'We should not allow an American strike under any circumstances. We can't allow it. I've told US President Bill Clinton: "No, we won't allow it."⁸⁶² Even stories by the *Washington Post* alleging a deal between Russian companies and Baghdad for the delivery of dual-use equipment for the production of biological materials did not shake Russia's stance on Iraq.⁸⁶³ *The Washington Post* had reported, based on unidentified sources, that UN inspectors in Iraq had found evidence of a 1995 agreement by the Russian government to supply Iraq with equipment that could be used to develop biological weapons. In Moscow, the Russian Foreign Minister denied the report, but the story cast a negative light, just as the Clinton administration was opposing Russian efforts to resolve the conflict with Iraq by diplomatic means.⁸⁶⁴

The most dramatic example of Russian sabre-rattling occurred in January 2003. Though Russia continued to scramble to find a diplomatic resolution to yet another Iraqi crisis, it simultaneously sought to demonstrate its great power status. In early January, Russia placed three war ships on standby to go to the Persian Gulf in defence of Russian

'national interests'.⁸⁶⁵ Moreover, Foreign Minister Ivanov clearly stated, 'Russia will not give in to American pressure and will veto the new UN Security Council resolution.'⁸⁶⁶

War in Iraq began in March 2003. Russia's response was indignant yet pragmatic. President Putin demonstrated his annoyance by postponing his annual address to the Federal Assembly; there was a demarche of the left and among Zhirinovskiy's supporters in the Duma; and the Duma refused to debate ratification of the Strategic Offensive Weapons Agreement.⁸⁶⁷ Similar to his reaction to the American abrogation of the ABM Treaty, President Putin described the American attack as a 'big political mistake'⁸⁶⁸ yet went no further. He even argued that Russia did not side with either of the conflicting parties, and thereby backed neither losers nor winners.⁸⁶⁹

This by no means implied that Russia had ceded its interests in being a great power. Defiance and sabre-rattling was not meant to threaten the Russian-American relationship but to give Russia a greater voice and greater respect. The reason Iraq was so important in this context was the influence and rapport Russia had with the Hussein regime. The fact that Russia could cajole Iraq into being more flexible and responding to international demands demonstrated that Russia remained an important actor in international diplomacy and could continue to influence its allies to the benefit of international security.

Moscow was relatively successful in moderating Iraq's behaviour as the Iraqi regime had an interest in retaining Russian patronage. When a crisis broke out in October 1994 after Baghdad moved forces towards Kuwait, President Yeltsin launched an initiative to reach a political settlement to the crisis, sending a group of Russian diplomats led by Igor Ivanov, at the time First Deputy Foreign Minister, and the Russian President's Special Representative for the Middle East Viktor Posuvalyuk to Iraq and Kuwait.⁸⁷⁰ Russian diplomats succeeded in obtaining Baghdad's agreement on the text of a Russian-Iraqi Communiqué declaring Iraq ready to recognise the sovereignty of Kuwait and its border.⁸⁷¹

Moscow marked another diplomatic victory in November 1997 following the expulsion of six American experts on the United Nations Special Commission from Iraq.⁸⁷² By 18 November, a joint Russian-Iraqi Declaration was issued in which Iraq agreed to the return of the Special Commission in its full composition. Primakov was credited with averting a new Gulf War.⁸⁷³ He stated,

I believe that this is a great success for Russian diplomacy, one that is recognised by absolutely everyone. At the talks, we insisted that Iraq

fulfil all the resolutions. We expect that Iraq will make a decision today, without any exceptions, on the return of inspectors to the country... Russia achieved this. It was achieved without the use of force and without a show of force; it was achieved through diplomatic means.⁸⁷⁴

Russian moderation of the Iraqi position was also evident in January 1998 when Saddam Hussein refused to allow inspections of Presidential sites by the United Nations Special Commission on Disarmament in Iraq, and once more the American and British battle groups amassed forces on Iraq's border.⁸⁷⁵ President Yeltsin's Press Secretary, Sergei Yastrzhembsky, announced on February 2 that in consultation with the Russian delegation, Iraq had agreed to allow inspections of presidential sites with certain restrictions.⁸⁷⁶ However, Iraq was playing its own games to assure itself maximum leverage, when shortly thereafter the Iraqi Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Riyadh al-Qaysi categorically denied the report.⁸⁷⁷ The Russian Press Secretary was forced to reconfirm reports that the Russian Foreign Ministry and Presidential Press Service had made noting, 'We do not coordinate our statements with statements made by Iraqi officials.'⁸⁷⁸ Though an embarrassment, this incident neither diminished Russia's search for a peaceful resolution to the crisis nor its desire to persist in its diplomatic efforts.

Whereas in the past, Russia's demands had at least been taken into consideration, contemporary Russia's weakness elicited a search for comparative advantage. In Iraq, Russia had just such an advantage based on its historical relationship and its existing familiarity with the Iraqi leadership. Given America's disregard for Russian interests in Iraq, Russia was provided the opportunity to challenge America's positions both in Iraq and the international system. In so doing, Russia became the defender of diplomacy and multilateral institutions. Key battles were to occur under the auspices of the United Nations Security Council though the movement from rhetoric to invasion to the execution of Saddam Hussein took place elsewhere.

UN diplomacy: giving Russia a voice

Russia used the venue of the UN to balance the United States in three ways: focusing on diplomatic solutions to the Iraq issue; reluctantly threatening the use of its veto; and joining a 'coalition of the willing' to prevent war with Iraq. The final issue, that of multilateralism, will be addressed separately as it has wide-ranging implications for Russia's broader foreign policy and touches on its strategy of multipolarisation.

Russia made use of the United Nations Security Council to voice its opposition to military action in Iraq, which would certainly undermine its political and economic interests. As an unintended consequence, the United States increasingly sought to bring Russia on side thereby improving Russia's diplomatic position. With the exception of Russian support for American's bombing of Iraq in 1993, Russia consistently opposed any resort to military force in the Iraqi case while simultaneously seeking diplomatic means for the achievement of a lasting resolution.

By September 1996, Russian diplomatic machinations faced a perpetual struggle to avoid American military action. When 27 American cruise missiles were launched against military targets in southern Iraq, Russia's reaction was severe. The Russian government issued a statement describing the American action as 'disproportionate and unacceptable'.⁸⁷⁹ Russia and Iraq were able to agree on a joint statement seeking a 'political-diplomatic solution to the crisis'.⁸⁸⁰ With this diplomatic victory there was a sense that Russia was once more taking its rightful place as a great power.⁸⁸¹ 'Operation Desert Fox' reinforced Russia's desire to come to a peaceable resolution. While bombings continued, Russia struggled to find a middle ground. Foreign Minister Primakov declared these actions 'unprovoked' and 'on the conscience of the American administration'.⁸⁸²

The United States was also placing emphasis on bringing Russia into line. This was an unanticipated benefit of Russian involvement in Iraq. In taking such a firm stance on the Iraq issue, Russia placed itself in the role of a major player of which the United States had to take account. Thus, in September 2002, Russia was sent a British dossier on weapons production in Iraq just before Washington sent an envoy to Russia and France to persuade both countries to agree to a new American-British proposal. Foreign Minister Ivanov dismissed this as mere propaganda while President Putin called for a quick political resolution to the crisis.⁸⁸³

Russia's position on Iraq remained consistent. Foreign Minister Ivanov maintained that unilateral actions against Iraq outside the existing United Nations Security Council Resolutions were inadmissible.⁸⁸⁴ Russia's emphasis on a peaceable solution under the auspices of the UN must be viewed through the lens of Russian weakness. In the UN, Russia remained a great power. Russian diplomats, faced with increasing pressure from the United States to find a military solution to the Iraq issue, came to use the threat of its Security Council veto in order to prevent the use of force in Iraq.

As early as 1996, Foreign Minister Primakov declared that Russia would not countenance a United Nations Security Council resolution condoning the use of force, as it would undermine Russian efforts to secure a diplomatic solution beneficial to Russia.⁸⁸⁵ Importantly, Russia also raised the commonality of its position with other permanent members of the Security Council such as China and France at this early stage.⁸⁸⁶ Sergei Lavrov, then Russia's Permanent Representative to the UN, and later Russian Foreign Minister, declared that it was dependent on the co-authors of the resolution to take into account Russian concerns.⁸⁸⁷ The British resolution was later withdrawn, potentially for fear of a Russian veto.

In the crisis of November 1998, Russian attempts to prevent military action against Iraq proved less successful notwithstanding redoubled efforts to ensure peace in the region. The Americans stood firm on the need for military intervention. The United Nations Security Council was convened in December 1998 at Russia's request to examine the conflict between Baghdad and the United Nations Special Commission. However, simultaneously the United States launched 'Operation Desert Fox', a military action against strategic Iraqi targets.

Russia's reaction was unsympathetic. A Duma statement, approved by all factions, was adopted calling the bombing of Iraq an act of international terrorism.⁸⁸⁸ President Yeltsin, in a phone call to President Clinton called the attacks, 'unacceptable from the viewpoint of international law, the UN Charter, the principles of partnership and cooperation'.⁸⁸⁹ Moreover, as mentioned previously, Speaker of the Duma, Gennady Seleznev, announced that the Duma had stopped discussing the START-II Treaty as a result of the air strikes in Iraq.⁸⁹⁰ Incidentally, it was within a few days of the beginning of 'Operation Desert Fox' that Prime Minister Primakov, while in India, declared the desirability of a Moscow–Beijing–Delhi triangle.⁸⁹¹ In reacting to the bombings, Moscow took a step unprecedented in the history of its post-Cold War relations with Washington – it recalled its Ambassador. Security Council Secretary Sergei Ivanov even hinted that bilateral dialogue between Moscow and Washington could be seriously damaged, adding that the United States should measure its actions against the interests of subsequent relations with Moscow.⁸⁹²

Russia continually stressed its unwillingness to accept anything exceeding the framework of the United Nations Security Council Resolution, yet steered clear of threatening the use of veto for some time.⁸⁹³ Russia was cautious in the way it phrased its opposition to military intervention. In January 2003, Foreign Minister Ivanov declared

that Russia 'will apply all available political and diplomatic means to prevent a situation that would require the use of the veto'.⁸⁹⁴

Increasingly, however, President Putin employed the threat of the veto. Referring to the use of Russia's veto, Putin stated, 'If today something is done that might lead to an unjustified use of force, we shall do so – together with France, or on our own.'⁸⁹⁵ However, it seemed that there was great reluctance to actually use the veto for fear of permanently damaging Russian–American relations. President Putin argued that using the right of veto 'would make it more difficult to reach agreement with other members of the Security Council who do not share our point of view'.⁸⁹⁶

In order to continue the balancing strategy, while minimising the damage to Russian–American relations, Russia sought to coordinate its actions with France and Germany. In comparison with these states, Russia maintained greater moderation attempting to avoid the use of exceptionally harsh criticism of the United States. In addition to emphasising that opposing war was not equivalent to opposing the United States, President Putin frequently affirmed the role of the United States in compelling Iraq to cooperate with the UN.⁸⁹⁷ Moreover, President Putin stated he hoped that President Bush 'will remain my friend' despite disagreements on the Iraqi problem.⁸⁹⁸

Russia never closed the door to a new resolution on Iraq.⁸⁹⁹ Germany, Russia, and France presented new proposals on Iraq on 24 February 2003.⁹⁰⁰ Two days later, President Putin declared that any United Nations Security Council resolution automatically authorising the use of force against Iraq would be unacceptable to Russia.⁹⁰¹ What is most interesting is that many had anticipated that President Putin would be hesitant to take an entirely anti-American stance. However, his unequivocal entry into the Franco-German anti-war camp clearly went against those expectations.⁹⁰²

Developments in negotiations necessitated that Russia unambiguously declare its decision to use the veto if such a resolution were put to a vote. On 27 February 2003, Foreign Minister Ivanov announced that Russia would be willing to use its veto power.⁹⁰³ On the next day, De Villepin declared that France would 'shoulder its responsibilities' over Iraq.⁹⁰⁴ By 5 March 2003, Russia, France, and Germany issued a statement arguing that they would try to prevent the adoption of a resolution authorising the use of force.⁹⁰⁵ Foreign Minister Ivanov stated that the joint declaration was intended to 'consolidate the unity and solidarity of states facing common threats. It is in the framework of the UN and its Security Council that all the states, on an equal footing, have

an opportunity to find solutions to problems affecting the interests of universal security.⁹⁰⁶

Washington had undertaken to influence Russia's position. There were a number of veiled threats of 'costs' for Russia in its relations with the United States if it used its veto.⁹⁰⁷ Furthermore, American diplomatic sources issued warnings that Russian economic interests would be 'significantly affected by the degree to which Russia supports, or does not obstruct, the solution of the crisis in Iraq'.⁹⁰⁸ The United States also offered incentives for cooperation. A proposal was submitted to the United States Senate in early March 2003 for the repeal of the Jackson-Vanik amendment adopted during the Cold War, which restricted the development of business relations between the United States and Russia. Moreover, rumours circulated that Washington intended to revisit the scale of export quotas for Russian steel producers revising them upwards and also share with Russian companies future contracts for rebuilding Iraq's economy.⁹⁰⁹

These American initiatives proved ineffective in preventing Russia's decision to push forward with attempts to prevent military intervention in Iraq. However, Russian moderation seemed to have been appreciated in Washington. There was significantly less American condemnation of Russia's position compared with criticisms suffered by France and the 'Old Europe'. At his 6 March press conference, when asked about the 'Franco-German-Russian anti-war alliance', George W. Bush even avoided including Moscow in his remarks.⁹¹⁰

The situation came to a head when the United States, Britain, and Spain proposed a UN resolution declaring that Iraq 'has failed to take the final opportunity to disarm itself of weapons of mass destruction'⁹¹¹ and sought means to disarm Hussein through military measures. Russia was not, however, forced to use its veto. On 18 March, Britain, Spain, and the United States withdrew the draft resolution seeking United Nations Security Council authority for military action to disarm Iraq.⁹¹² Within two days, the United States led a 'coalition of the willing' in invading Iraq. The war began without the legitimisation of the UN and all that was left for Russia to do was condemn the aggression.

The United States also sought to provide concessions to Russia after the invasion of Iraq. The United States incorporated Russian demands in June 2004 into the United Nations Security Council draft resolution on an Iraqi interim government.⁹¹³

Russian utilisation of the UN over the past decade with regard to Iraq highlights the evolution of Russian balancing strategy. Russia sought to maintain the pre-eminence of one of the only organisations in which it

remained a full and equal great power. Russia's voice in the UN was used to achieve a political resolution, resorting reluctantly to threats of using its veto only when it seemed that no other options remained. Nonetheless, Russia's balancing behaviour was moderate and nuanced. Russia did not stand alone. It came together with other international actors, such as France and Germany and to a lesser extent China, who were willing to take the lead on this issue. The multitude of crises surrounding Iraq dictated that Russia would have to find its own 'coalition of the willing' to challenge the preponderant force of the reigning hegemon.

The utility of multilateralism

Russian emphasis on multilateralism to resolve the multitude of Iraq crises is especially illustrative of Russia's increasing recognition that it was unable to balance against the United States unaided, thereby reinforcing its multipolar ideal. As a result, Russia came to align with other states, especially those with permanent seats on the United Nations Security Council, to pursue its diplomatic objectives. Furthermore, Russia used this issue to push forward its relations with these states in other arenas.

For the most part, Russia, France, and China held similar positions on the Iraq issue; each seeking to ensure that military intervention was not undertaken. Incidentally, though Russia and China's common voting on Iraq in the United Nations Security Council is frequently cited, the situation is somewhat less clear. There were 43 United Nations Security Council resolutions passed on Iraq from 1992 to the invasion of Iraq in 2003. Of these votes, 38 were unanimous, 3 saw Russia and China vote in the same manner (abstaining), and there were 2 votes on which Russia and China differed.⁹¹⁴ Moreover, China and Russia voted differently on almost every occasion in the UN General Assembly with reference to the human rights situation in Iraq, with Russia supporting the resolutions and China abstaining.⁹¹⁵ However, this obfuscates the rather analogous positions Russia and China took on Iraq, which is more accurately reflected in joint declarations and statements than in United Nations Security Council voting records.

Russia stood firm with its partners in opposing American military actions on a regular basis; however, it was the August 1998 crisis which really served to underline the need for a coalition against war in Iraq. Russia not only put forward its own proposals on dealing with the crisis, largely falling in line with Iraqi demands,⁹¹⁶ but also attempted to bring onside other likeminded states in an anti-American position. This

highlighted Russian balancing strategy and spoke to Russian great power aspirations. President Yeltsin noted,

In view of my position and my connections with Clinton, Kohl and Chirac, I have been able to play a big role... Other countries have gotten involved. We are making it clear to Clinton that we don't agree with his policy that the Security Council will oppose it.⁹¹⁷

By December 1998, Foreign Minister Ivanov asserted that within the United Nations Security Council, 'China is actively in solidarity with us and France has adopted the same stance. However, in the world itself, I think that most states side precisely with our position, which is based on the supremacy of international law.'⁹¹⁸ This was not mere rhetoric but an affirmation of Russia's interest in assuring that no state could unilaterally circumvent international institutions or international law.

Russia, France, and China continued to place obstacles in the way of American military intervention. They used their solidarity to insist that United Nations Security Council Resolution 1154 include a point stating that if the United Nations Special Commission's work was again frustrated, a new meeting of the Security Council would be called and it alone would have the authority to decide how to resolve the situation rather than allowing for military intervention to be employed immediately.⁹¹⁹ On 10 February, France, Germany, and Russia adopted a declaration in Paris urging strengthened UN inspections to disarm Iraq and avoid war.⁹²⁰ Earlier that day, France, Belgium, and Germany used their veto in NATO to block an American request for military support to Turkey in case of a war in Iraq.⁹²¹

Incidentally, at the same time, Russia was increasing efforts to enhance the level of interaction with the European Union.⁹²² President Putin clearly indicated during his visit to France in February 2003 that 'political partnership helps economic ties'.⁹²³ French Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin declared that the Iraq issue was the 'main challenge facing France and Russia in our strategic partnership, and this is how France and Russia can make their main contribution to peace and international security'.⁹²⁴ Trust between Russia and other European countries strengthened somewhat as well, although this should not be overestimated. Notwithstanding declarations and coinciding opinions with France and Germany over Iraq, Russia did not resolve any of the deep-seated problems between them including Kaliningrad, membership of the WTO, or the Schengen rules.⁹²⁵ However, this cooperation may set the tone for future collaboration.

Given Russian diplomatic successes, the American government sought Russian cooperation in pushing forward the implementation of the UN's oil-for-food programme, as well as coordination of policies on Iraq. With this in mind, in December 2001, American Assistant Secretary of State John Wolf visited Moscow.⁹²⁶ It is noteworthy that during the same week President Putin and Chancellor Schroeder voiced opposition to any military operation in Iraq. In an interview with the *Financial Times*, President Putin cautioned America against rash action, expressing hope that the United States would consult with European countries before launching a war against terrorism outside Afghanistan.⁹²⁷

The lessons Russia drew from the Iraqi conflict reinforced Russian concerns with the state of the international system. Foreign Minister Ivanov declared, 'We should learn the right lessons from the Iraqi tragedy and step up efforts aimed at creating a multipolar world.'⁹²⁸ Putin also saw the relationship with France over Iraq as a stepping stone. After his visit to France in February 2003, he noted that the joint declaration was the 'first stone to have been laid in the groundwork of a multipolar world'.⁹²⁹ Primakov was quoted as saying this Iraqi crisis was 'another step in the formation of a multipolar world because Europe stood up to America'.⁹³⁰ Deputy Foreign Minister Yuri Fedotov denied allegations that Russia was forming an axis with France and Germany based on the position the countries shared on Iraq: 'The word "axis" has often been used out of place lately. I believe our interaction can be described as a unity of countries who value the ideals of international law and peace.'⁹³¹

The Iraqi situation necessitated that Russia find partners to support the Russian position against the use of force in Iraq. This, in turn, reinforced the Russian hypothesis that Russia needed to consolidate partnerships which could continue to buttress Russian great power aspirations and multipolar ideals.

Conclusions

The Iraqi case is critical in highlighting the manner in which the United States stimulated Russian alignment policy. Russian policy towards Iraq revealed a definitive change in direction from policies aimed at reaping economic benefits to those with greater geopolitical aspirations. Initially, Russian policy towards Iraq was spearheaded by economic actors within Russia pursuing their own economic gain. However, engagement could only be achieved through diplomatic means. Consequently, the global dimension became instrumental in the achievement of Russian

economic objectives. The series of reactive, individual responses to Iraqi initiatives gave way to a more strategic approach.

As Russian–American relations experienced increasing tensions, Russia sought to use its relationship with and defence of Iraq to challenge any attempts by the United States to alter the status quo. Part of Russian balancing behaviour meant to ensure that Russian economic and political interests were maintained.

By 2007, Russia sought to maintain whatever interests it still possessed in Iraq in light of American influence and civil war. This is not to say that Russia has entirely relinquished its interests in Iraq. Certainly, the argument between US Secretary of State Condoleeza Rice and Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov in June 2006 demonstrates that Russia still has major differences over how to proceed on Iraq.⁹³²

The Iraqi case clearly highlights, more than any other case, the importance of identity in driving Russian alignment policy. America's policy towards Iraq came to represent for Russia one in a series of American policies serving to entrench American hegemony. Russia feared the propagation of American military diplomacy at the expense of Russian interests. For this reason, Russia undertook measures by which to counter what Russia viewed as attempts to create a system of international relations based on domination by developed Western countries in the international community, under American leadership.⁹³³ On numerous occasions and on a variety of issues, the Russian government attempted to frustrate American objectives in Iraq.

Importantly, the Iraqi case also sheds light on the underlying caution in Russian diplomacy under President Putin. Russia very hesitantly threatened the use of veto, and only with the support of allies. Thus, notwithstanding issues of prestige and great powerhood, Russia was unwilling to damage irreparably its relations with the United States. The fact that the Iraq issue played out within the United Nations Security Council was critical in demonstrating the importance of multilateralism. Russia was obliged to combine forces with other states to challenge American intentions.

Russia's approach to Iraq was significant in reinforcing Russia's calls for multipolarity. In 1996, referring to the international crisis with Iraq, Foreign Minister Primakov declared, 'No one will accept diktat by any single power, be it the US, Russia or some other state.'⁹³⁴ It was American power that Russia felt hard-pressed to resist. Russian relations with Iraq were in essence a reflection of Russia's own helplessness in opposing American hegemony.⁹³⁵ Russian policy did not develop in a vacuum.

It evolved in step with American policy towards Iraq and its more bellicose foreign policy more generally. In this manner, Russia was a political actor seeking to entrench its influence where possible and prevent the uninhibited expansion of American political and economic ideals.

Conclusion

Winston Churchill's frequently cited quote about Russia confounds as much as it clarifies. Churchill stated 'I cannot forecast to you the action of Russia. It is a riddle, wrapped in a mystery, inside an enigma; but perhaps there is a key. That key is Russian national interest.' In truth, there are many keys which facilitate opening the black box of Russian foreign policy.

No foreign policy of a great power has been premised entirely on obduracy, insolence, or greed. Neither has Russia's. What is vital is that we not overestimate or underestimate an individual factor in understanding the new Russia. Rhetoric is sometimes vital and at other times extraneous. Pursuit of national interest is sometimes a catch-all for any economic interest and sometimes intimately linked with national security.

This book has sought to unpack the vibrant animal, that is the new Russia, by providing a new toolkit to understand Russian alignment policy. It has shed light on the complexity, confusion, and clarity of Russian foreign policy not by virtue of identifying a single answer to why Russia is the way it is. Those that seek to explain Russia in these terms miss the very point that Russia is not static. The manner by which Russia has survived for over a thousand years is by evolving, by learning.

In the 'challenger' states, Russia has found friends which help to facilitate its survival. This book has demonstrated that Russia has grudgingly chosen the path of resistance: resistance to decline; resistance to fragility; and resistance to a system of international relations in which it is a marginal, regional power.

This is by no means meant to imply that Russia's leadership set a strategic objective of alignment. Rather, this policy haltingly developed from a few economic and political forays.

This book has introduced two key concepts into the study of Russian alignment policy. First, it brings into the international relations vernacular the concept of 'challengers'. This demonstrates a sensitivity within the Russian foreign policy-making community of states that are perceived by the United States to be irritants. Fortuitously, these were also states with which Russia had long histories of relations. Moreover, they were states with significant strategic importance.

Second, this book sheds light on the evolutionary nature of Russian policy. Rather than examining Russian policy in the context of single explanatory factors, it highlights the complicated interaction of a number of factors, revealing how motivations changed over time. Though this creates more complexity in terms of understanding the motivations of Russian actors, it provides a more holistic picture of Russian alignment policy over time.

The initial post-Soviet period witnessed a haphazard approach to 'challenger' states premised on the interests of particular private commercial and public economic actors seeking to reap the rewards of Russia's comparative economic advantages in these states. Between 1991 and 1996, Russia had little coordination in its policy towards any of the 'challenger' states. This was a result of the lack of an institutional framework delineating the hierarchy between various government actors. This resulted in competing ministries and economic groups pursuing inconsistent and incongruent policies.

What is important to note is the role of 'challenger' states themselves in driving relations with Russia. Most clearly in the cases of Iran and Iraq, neither the Russian government nor the private Russian economic groups drove economic interaction at the outset. Rather, these groups largely responded to 'challenger' states' initiatives. Certainly, both Iran and Iraq were adept at playing on both the lack of cohesion in Russian foreign policy-making and Russian geopolitical aspirations to achieve their ends. Both the Iranian and the Iraqi governments were successful in deepening cooperation with Russia by establishing extensive ties with Russian enterprises in the absence of a strategic Russian policy.

The confusion was further reflected in the fact that state priorities towards 'challenger' states were developed independently of the interests of those ministries most closely involved in these relationships. President Yeltsin's approach to Iran and Iraq, premised on their utility in the Russian-American relationship, resulted in incongruities in Russian policy, as well as impeding the actions of ministries such as the Minatom and the Ministry of Defence which had actively been pursuing independent policies towards these states. The state, especially

under President Yeltsin, was not averse to stepping in dramatically to alter Russia's policies towards 'challenger' states entirely disregarding ministerial prerogatives. The inclination of the political leadership to step in to coordinate relations with 'challenger' states was exacerbated during times of crisis in Russian–American relations at which points the Kremlin and Foreign Ministry took charge of these relations to provide increased coordination to policy consequently interfering with ministerial policies towards 'challenger' states. The lack of central coordination and the haphazard interventions by the political leadership ensured that for much of the post-Soviet period Russian policy lacked a strategic character.

It is noteworthy that the evolution of Russia's relations with China occurred in a significantly different fashion to those of Iran and Iraq. In the Chinese case, relations were largely directed by the Presidential administration and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Given the potential importance of Russia's relationship with China, the Yeltsin government attempted to provide it a strategic framework from the outset. The state's agenda ensured that Russian policy was much more proactive towards China than with the other cases. However, as with the other cases, ministerial and corporate interests in collusion vigorously sought the pursuit of their own interests.

In significant ways, there was a blurring of the lines between public and private interests with regard to Russian policy towards 'challenger' states. Often government ministries were so deeply connected with their client groups, such as the case of the military and military–industrial complex, that it was difficult to ascertain where one ended and the other began. Given the difficulties in determining what was public and private in the Russian context, what emerged was a government often working in the interests of Russian business. The Russian government's approach to 'challenger' states shows clearly the sensitivity of Russian policy to the institutional interests of the military, military–industrial complex, the nuclear sector, and oil and gas interests. As these sectors reacted to economic proposals from 'challenger' states, the government increasingly sought to facilitate relations with these states.

The Iraqi case is especially helpful in highlighting the interconnection between state economic and private commercial interests. The state played a crucial role in coordinating economic cooperation between Russian economic groups and the Iraqi government in pursuit of the so-called 'Russian national interests'. The state was also extremely active in facilitating the entry of Russian economic actors into the Chinese economy, especially in the fields of military-technology and atomic

energy. Increasingly, the achievement of economic penetration into these states came to be tied with political means. This was particularly salient in the Iranian and Iraqi cases, in which the Russian government frequently had to intervene in defence of private and public commercial interests.

Given the salience of economic concerns and the sporadic attention of the Kremlin and Foreign Ministry to 'challenger' states in the early post-Soviet period, economic groups were able to set the context for Russian relations with which political actors subsequently had to deal. The importance of economic actors in determining Russian policy in the early post-Soviet period ensured that there was less room for centrally led policy in Russia's relations with these states.

The initiation of closer relations with 'challenger' states corresponded with the emergence of numerous threats to Russian domestic security that cooperation with 'challenger' states might be able to ameliorate or at a minimum prevent from exacerbating. Issues of domestic security, though significant, were never truly central to the Russian pursuit of relations with 'challenger' states. Rather, they set the context for improving the relationships and laying the basis for greater trust and cooperation. China was the most telling case in demonstrating the salience of domestic security in Russian alignment considerations. As a result of the latent threat that China posed through the issues of border demarcation and illegal immigration, Russian state policy towards China in the early post-Soviet period was oriented towards diminishing Russian insecurity. Certainly, concerns over the potential for Chinese economic, and potentially even territorial expansion into Russia's Far East, were significant aspects of the debate over how to properly engage China. Later, China was to prove instrumental in reinforcing Russian conceptions of sovereignty and territorial integrity, especially against the backdrop of numerous American interventions in the 1990s and Russian concerns over Chechnya.

In a similar way, Russian policy towards Iran was influenced by a desire to address Russian security concerns which thereafter set a more constructive context for the evolution of relations. The salience of the domestic security issue is evident in Russian policy towards Iran during Russia's wars in Chechnya. Russia sought Iranian support for, or at a minimum, Iranian constraint in its objections against Russian actions in Chechnya. Iran had the capacity to enflame an already fragile situation in the North Caucasus and Central Asia. As a result of intensive bilateral negotiations, relations significantly improved during the first and the second wars. It was of great importance for Russia to have strong and

cooperative relations with Iran, given its leadership role among Islamic states.

Iraq interacted with Russian domestic security goals in a very different manner. It was more the consequences of the situation around Iraq which held importance for Russian security interests than Iraq as a force in international politics in its own right. An American invasion of Iraq, which Russia consistently opposed, had the potential to destabilise the region and inflame Islamic fundamentalist movements within Russia. Consequently, Russian policy towards and interaction with Iraq was influenced by domestic security concerns. Nonetheless, as with the other cases, these issues were rather secondary to other drivers of Russian alignment policy.

Similar to domestic security, for the most part, issues of regional concern to Russia merely set the backdrop of and reinforced Russian relations with 'challenger' states rather than being a driving force behind these relations. In the regional context, Russia's approach to 'challenger' states was coloured by the desire to pursue two goals. First, Russian policy sought to prevent the erosion of its regional position while consolidating a more active role. Second, Russia undertook an active policy of using its relations with these states to mitigate American influence within both the Asia-Pacific and Middle East.

The region in the Asia-Pacific sense was essential to Russia realising the economic benefits of integration processes already in progress. China was instrumental in facilitating Russian entry into the Asia-Pacific as a more active political and economic actor. Russia became especially interested in integration in the region in the mid-1990s, when Russian–American relations were in decline. Incidentally, it is important that greater activity in the region occurred against the background of American and Japanese objections, which Russian–Chinese cooperation helped to balance.

With regard to the Middle East, Russian proactiveness occurred in response to serious security concerns in the region with which it was incapable of dealing independently. It was in the mid-1990s when regional concerns became a central facet of Russia's policies towards Iran as a consequence of constructive cooperation with regard to the Tajikistan conflict, Afghanistan, and the Caspian Sea. Iran repeatedly proved itself a reliable partner in Russian attempts to resolve regional issues.

Increased Russian activity in both the Asia-Pacific and the Middle East were responses to a sense of exclusion from these regions. Given the decline in the Russian–American relationship, as well as American

attempts to keep Russia out of the Middle East peace talks and Asia-Pacific security, Russia used its leverage with China, Iran, and Iraq to construct a new path for entry into these regions. Though the regional context was not the main driver of Russian policy, on the whole, it provided Russia with partners in achieving both its security and economic goals. Furthermore, as confidence was established through successful cooperation with these states, Russian policy towards 'challenger' states came to be appreciably influenced by the deterioration of Russian–American relations.

By the mid-1990s, Russian alignment policy was driven by Russia's global concerns with balancing the United States. Russian policy towards 'challenger' states starkly highlights the deliberate and conscious balancing behaviour Russia has exhibited through its alignments with regard to the United States. The policy goals of economic actors became secondary to Russian geopolitical considerations precisely at those points when Russian–American relations were most strained.

Importantly, Russia's policy of active balancing was appreciably informed by ideational factors. By the mid-1990s, it seemed to numerous Russian policy-makers that Russia was no longer being treated as an equal. Increasingly, Russia rejected the 'junior partner' role to which it felt itself being relegated. Moreover, the evolution of the international system into one dominated by a single hegemon was thoroughly unacceptable to Russia. Through alignment with 'challenger' states, Russia was behaving in a manner appropriate to what Moscow saw as its status as a great power. As a result, it undertook policy actions which would raise Russia's profile as a great power and increase its clout in the international system.

Both the Chinese and the Iraqi cases are valuable in shedding light on the role of Russian self-perception in pushing forward Russian relations with 'challenger' states. Frequent invocations of Russian and Chinese nuclear status and permanent membership in the United Nations Security Council reinforced Russia's right to status as a great and global power. As Russia felt itself losing influence in the international system, it became more proactive in using its alignment with China to retain its geopolitical role. Furthermore, the Iraqi case also highlights the importance of ideational factors in driving Russian alignment policy. Iraq came to represent for Russia one in a series of American policies serving to entrench American hegemony. Certainly, Russia's close relations with and defence of Iraq was a means by which to demonstrate Russia's capacity to resist American influence, which was particularly important as Russian–American relations deteriorated. On numerous occasions,

the Russian government attempted to frustrate American objectives in Iraq. This ability to thwart American political will responded to Russian desires to maintain and exhibit Russian great power status.

The United States itself played a significant role in provoking Russian balancing behaviour. The decline in Russian–American relations in the mid-1990s helped to precipitate a policy of active Russian alignment with ‘challenger’ states. The deterioration of the Russian–American partnership weakened the constraints on Russia to curtail relations with states the United States saw as dubious. The case of Iran illustrates this process. Throughout the post-Cold War period, the United States has attempted to get Russia to end its relations with Iran. When Russian–American relations were favourable, Russia was willing to use its relationship with Iran as a bargaining chip in the Russian–American relationship. The decline in Russian–American relations weakened constraints on Russian engagement with Iran and acted as an incentive to use this relationship to balance the United States. Moreover, the serious attention of the United States to Russian relations with Iran raised the value of this partnership for Russia. This was an unintended consequence of America’s emphasis on Russian–Iranian relations and came to play an important role in driving Russia’s approach to Iran.

Russian policy towards ‘challenger’ states throws revealing light on the reactive nature of Russian balancing behaviour. Active balancing occurred only when relations with the United States were experiencing significant difficulties and often in response to particular issues Russia viewed as threatening either Russian great power status or its national interests. This is indicative of Russia’s overall willingness to bandwagon. Only when this proved impracticable did Russia actively choose the balancing option. It was not the underlying priority of Russian policy towards ‘challenger’ states throughout the period. It was in response to such American foreign policy decisions as increasing American interventionism, NATO expansion, the abrogation of the ABM Treaty, and American desires to invade Iraq which brought Russia and ‘challenger’ states into more proactive collusion in defying the United States.

The policy of multipolarity further demonstrated the responsiveness of Russian balancing policy. It was only after Russia came to feel that the international system was evolving in ways that ran against its interests that Russia sought cooperation with China, Iran, and Iraq in opposing American hegemony. Tellingly, in the case of Iran, whereas Russian policy for most of the period had been largely responsive to Iranian initiatives, Russia became proactive in its nuclear policy towards Iran as a result of the poor state of Russian–American relations. Consequently,

Russia withdrew from the Gore–Chernomyrdin agreement and altered export regulations to facilitate easier trade with Iran precisely when the Russian–American relationship was in trouble.

Perhaps unexpectedly, Russian alignment with ‘challenger’ states points to an underlying caution in Russian foreign policy, especially under President Putin. Though over time Russia was more willing to actively challenge the United States, Russia remained largely risk averse. Notwithstanding issues of prestige and great powerhood, Russia was unwilling to damage irreparably its relations with the United States through its engagement with ‘challenger’ states. The use of ‘challenger’ states to balance the United States was meant to raise Russia’s profile and ensure its status and interests in the face of American expansion into Russian spheres of interest. The Iraqi case sheds light on the caution in Russian diplomacy under President Putin. Russia very hesitantly threatened the use of veto, and only after there was little alternative. The venue for negotiating the Iraq issue allowed for other states such as France and Germany to take a more vocal lead on the issue. President Putin, though quick to criticise the American invasion of Iraq, went no further in challenging the United States. For Russia, however, the Iraq issue reinforced the need for partners in opposing American hegemonic and unilateralist policies.

Russia’s multilateral approach to diplomacy in the Iraqi case demonstrated Russia’s manoeuvrability and potential to find allies in opposition to American policies. Moreover, Iraq confirmed Russia’s posture on the multipolarisation of the international system by showing that major powers were able to ally and oppose the United States, weakening the perception that the United States was an omnipotent hegemon. The Iraq issue was also a platform for Russia to strengthen its relations with other European states which, in turn, strengthened its status with regard to the United States.

Though not the subject of this book, the conclusions of this work beg the question of whether Russia itself is a ‘challenger’. In definitional terms, the United States likely does view Russia as a non-status quo state. Certainly some of the rhetoric and policy stances Russia has taken in the post-Cold War period have led to the perception that Russia is not a status quo power.

Interestingly, Russian policies over the past decade have indicated that Russia has sought, through its partnerships, the entrenchment of the status quo into which Russia was born in 1991. What Russia has fought tooth and nail was an erosion of the status quo in favour of a US-led, unipolar international system. Indeed, Russian opposition to NATO

expansion, US abrogation of the ABM treaty, and the diminishment of the UN were all the actions of a status quo power.

As this book has demonstrated, Russia only chose the path of balancing when it perceived systemic changes or hegemonic policies threatening to its survival, not necessarily its territorial survival but also its ability to remain a great power. Its overriding choice was to bandwagon and not balance.

A significant finding of this book is the role of the United States itself in inciting closer Russian relations with 'challenger' states. Though Russia had an affinity for and benefits to aligning with these states, the United States played an important role in bringing a more strategic character to these relations. The United States raised the profile of these relationships and provided a firm footing for them with policies that sought to change the status quo in its favour.

There are a number of important lessons to be gleaned from this work not least of which is the fact that Russian foreign policy objectives are not dramatically different from those of other great powers. Only when we stop looking at Russia as an entirely unique and unprecedented state entity will we be able to gain insight into Russian policy. Should other states choose to underestimate or undermine its interests, Russian foreign policy will naturally evolve and respond. This work has presented a number of tools to understand the motivations behind drivers of Russian alignment policy hopefully going some way towards solving the riddle, unwrapping the mystery, and allowing a small glimpse into the enigma that is today's Russia.

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