

RUSSIA AND THE GULF

STEPHEN BLANK

Observers expected that Yevgeny Primakov, who replaced Andrei Kozyrev as Russia's foreign minister in early 1996, would activate Russian policy in the Gulf. Recent reports seemingly have confirmed this expectation. Russia has signed energy agreements with Iraq worth up to \$10 million that are to go into effect once UN sanctions are lifted. And recently Russia has reached an agreement with Iran on delivery of defence-related goods totalling \$4 billion over the next 4-5 years. Iran is seeking a long-term stable agreement with Russia to replace the one that Mikhail Gorbachov negotiated in 1989. As of now Russia is already selling Iran \$500 million a year in arms, which makes up almost 85 per cent of Iran's total imports from Russia.¹

However, this assertiveness is not a new policy. Rather it is an intensification of a policy that had begun to take shape by 1995. By then it was clear that Russia is returning to the entire Middle East. Russia's sale of a nuclear reactor to Iran almost became the main issue in the May 1995 Clinton-Yeltsin summit. The decision to sell the reactor precipitated a strong US reaction and even threats to cut off aid to Russia. But this deal's ramifications go beyond considerations of US-Russian relations or nonproliferation, even if Iran fulfils the profile of an aspiring nuclear power.² Those who assumed that this deal is simply an arrangement for jobs to save the Ministry of Atomic Energy (Minatom) or that the US-Russian relationship is breaking down and therefore Russia must be contained anew, missed much of this deal's underlying significance and Russia's general re-entry into the Middle East and the Gulf.

Certainly Minatom is a law unto itself and eagerly competes with the United States for foreign contracts.³ However, this deal goes back to 1992-93 though the US administration and the media have made it look new. Russia has had a multi-year contract with Iran to sell arms and transfer nuclear energy and never promised the United States that it would abrogate that contract, but rather that it would not add to it. Legally Russia has been completely within its rights in executing this contract and selling either reactors or weapons to Iran. However, one of the most troubling aspects of this deal is that Minatom still appears to be out of control. Its ability to escape the kind of strict controls taken for granted in the West also apparently typifies Russia's overall policy process.

"Russian diplomacy appeared also to suffer from the autonomous international activities of various economic or nationalist political groupings—to name just a few examples, it seems certain that Russia's atomic energy complex has exerted significant influence over Moscow's increasingly assertive policies vis-à-vis relations with Iran and North Korea; that Russia's oil interests have undermined the Foreign Ministry's efforts to thwart a Western oil consortium from exploiting energy resources in the Caspian Sea and potentially limiting Russia's influence in the region; and that the uncontrolled activities of Russian arms merchants have complicated the tasks of Russian diplomacy in a number of foreign capitals."⁴

Minatom's antics are part of a larger picture where the ministries of Foreign Affairs and Defence battle to control arms sales policies while the main arms sales organisation, Rosvooruzhenie, undergoes numerous, justified, well-publicised corruption investigations. These bureaucratic struggles indicate the degree to which lack of co-ordination and steadiness has characterised Russian policy. That lack of balance and inability to control the various institutions making security policy, remains one of the most troubling aspects of Russian policy. Especially in

nuclear issues, this lack of control and rampant corruption strengthens the widespread fear that Russia lacks sufficient control of its nuclear material (not just weapons which still appear to be relatively safe, but fissile material).⁵

At the same time, Russia's arms and nuclear sales to Iran, like its desire to sell arms to all other Gulf and Middle East states, including Iraq once the embargo is lifted, indicates Russia's new-found determination to act as a global power. Recent Russian reports have begun writing that thanks to the reactor sale Russia has now become the US's main rival in the Gulf.⁶ This ambition grows out of the restoration of Russia's strategic position in the Caucasus and Central Asia, due to Russia's ability to project military power into those areas: essential preconditions for bringing Russian power to bear in the Middle East.⁷

With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the independence of the Central Asian and Transcaucasian states, the boundaries of the Middle East have now expanded. That expansion has fuelled widespread and growing suspicion that a new Islamic anti-Western crusade will somehow emerge as a form of interstate or even 'civilisational' rivalry.⁸ For Russia these are not academic issues. Moscow perceives these regions as geographically connected and confronts real threats of ethnic conflicts in failed, or failing, or fragile states throughout the North Caucasus and Central Asia that not even the most democratic Russian state could ignore.⁹ Though Russia's response is generally a heavy-handed one of direct force aiming at a revived hegemony, Moscow must defend its interests in these areas, even if we object to the means it employs.¹⁰

Similarly the reverse side of the coin for Moscow's return to the new Middle East is the fact that the local state system's porosity offers Moscow opportunities to gain influence or even in some places hegemony. If Moscow is to counter threats emanating from the southern tier of the Commonwealth of Independent States, it also must engage the actors on the other side of the border and seek to influence their policies. And the main force with which Moscow must engage is Iran. That designation may jar US sensibilities, but many Western experts believe that Iran's main concern is with internal issues, not propagation of an international Islamic system. Therefore Iran, too, needs partners to evade the US campaign against it and who can help it secure its own-ethnic state against irredentist threats, eg. from Azerbaijan or from general instability in Central Asia.¹¹ Iran also clearly needs weapons supplies from abroad. Both Tehran and Moscow have abundant reasons for a rapprochement. And for Iran, rapprochement with Russia in economics, technology and arms transfer, etc., is a long-term strategy, not just a marriage of convenience.¹²

As a result Russia is hedging its bets. Admittedly renewed war or the breakdown of the Arab-Israeli peace process is against Russian interests since it reinforces the centrality of the US as the one factor that can underwrite a new status quo. Yet Russia cannot offend Iran without risk to itself. And since the main threat to the Middle East is the rise of Iranian backed or indigenous radical movements that will derail the peace process, Moscow intends to have a foot in all camps as insurance against any potential outcome. The following analysis captures the diversity of regional threats.

"Geopolitically, the black hole of Central Asia now constitutes an expanded part of the new Middle East. Geoculturally, few other regions entail a nation-state border system of such potential transparency, where common and cross-border religious, ethnic, linguistic, and collective memories could act individually or jointly as destabilizing or integrating factors. From Kazakhstan to Egypt (and one could substitute Tajikistan to Algeria and Sudan-SB) dynamics of anti-colonial

feeling (old or new), economic under-development, uneven development, religious revivalism, arms proliferation, artificial borders, and ethno-territorially driven conflicts are characteristic.”¹³

This analysis even omits the deep and persisting interest of foreign states, international organisations, the UN non-governmental organisations, international businesses, etc. who have traditionally competed vigorously in the Middle East and the Persian Gulf for influence, leverage and hegemony. And the fall of the Soviet Union has only opened up new arenas of conflict, eg. oil, that are super-imposed over or juxtaposed with these fissures.¹⁴ No self-respecting Russian government, even if it grossly overstates its capabilities as this government has done, can or will forego the opportunity to act here lest it become marginalized. But today Russian policy is motivated not only by threats and the need to respond to them, but also by the opportunities now presenting themselves to Moscow.

However, when taken in tandem with the sale of a reactor to Iran and talk of future arms sales to Syria and Iraq, these quite rational policy guidelines begin to disintegrate. As Russian observers unanimously agree, the continuing proximity of the Middle East to Russia requires Moscow to follow the strategic course of opposing any foreign military presence. This applies with even more force to nuclear armed forces and therefore should mandate very strict efforts to supervise nuclear transfers and even arms sales to the Middle East in order to prevent a recurrence of past conflicts.¹⁵ Even critics of the orientation to the United States concur that Moscow and Washington have a common interest in preventing such conflicts and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Thus Andrei Vdovin, director of the Middle East and North Africa department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, has stated that Russia will not allow Iran to become a nuclear state as that would fundamentally contradict its vital interests.¹⁶

Clearly the proliferation of any weapons of mass destruction into the area heightens Russia's security concerns because of its proximity to the Middle East. For instance, even though it cultivates Iraq, Moscow has insisted on compliance with the UN's resolutions by Iraq including those on destroying its Weapons of Mass Destruction capability.¹⁷ But with Iran a different and disturbing situation emerges.

There can be no doubt that key Russian leaders regard proliferation as a major threat. As the Foreign Intelligence Service's (the SVR) 1995 report on the Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT), submitted by Primakov, its then director, states,

“For Russia the specific fate of the NPT will not only inevitably affect its strategic course for enduring security, but will also have a major impact on national security interests: The appearance of new nuclear countries on Russian Federation borders would create a real threat, destabilise the situation in the ‘near abroad’ zone, and force it to revise the guidelines of Russian defence policy, including in terms of its nuclear component.”¹⁸

The report stated that the main threat to the nonproliferation regime is countries like Israel, Pakistan and India who are de facto nuclear powers but remain outside the treaty. Their capability is dangerous in itself and can be diffused to other countries, eg. Pakistan's transfer of know-how to Iran.¹⁹ Since these states are outside the Nonproliferation Treaty, they cannot rely on the international community to provide ‘real levers’ to compel their potential enemies to refrain from going nuclear.²⁰ Accordingly, their exclusion from the Nonproliferation Treaty regime is a regionally destabilising factor because it stimulates their

enemies to follow suit. Certainly Iran fulfils this designation vis-à-vis Israel. That alone logically should lead Moscow to work against further nuclear-ization of the Middle East.

Furthermore the SVR report categorically states that Russia cannot support states pursuing a double standard toward "unofficial" nuclear countries or states, like Iran, who are on the nuclear threshold or seeking to acquire weapons. Because such tactics allow both sets of states to nuclear-ize further and triggers arms races among them and their enemies, supporting such states is a highly dangerous policy.²¹

Yet the SVR then complains that states like Iran who criticise the Nonproliferation Treaty regime provisions on access to certain nuclear materials rightly highlight the purely political nature of such restrictions. In other words, US anti-proliferation efforts against Iran are purely politically motivated since Russia's sale of a reactor cannot be used effectively for producing weapons. Russia also denies Washington's charge that Iran has made a policy decision to go nuclear and is advancing its capabilities beyond those of other possible "threshold states".²² This obscures the fact that Minatom was ready to sell Iran centrifuges without its government's knowledge before Washington intervened.²³

Thus the SVR argues that Iran could become a problem, but US efforts against it are purely selfish and political. This argument is not far removed from Russian arms sellers' claim that US pressure in arms markets is motivated purely by a desire to remove competitors from the conventional arms market or place key regions under its influence through arms sales. But here the SVR report betrays its similar intentions for Russia, namely that Russia's efforts to provide Iran and North Korea with reactors aim for the same kind of leverage in those countries. The report expresses this sentiment in lofty language but the objective is unmistakable.

"Russian-Iranian co-operation could be a unique testing ground where the possibility and need for a member state of the 'nuclear club' to fulfil its obligations under Article IV of the NPT whereby the participants in the Treaty must promote equitable, non-discriminatory co-operation in the field of peaceful atomic power engineering but must, in doing so, prevent conditions for the proliferation of nuclear weapons [and this] would be meaningfully examined. Co-operation in the cause of replacing the North Korean gas-graphite reactors with light water ones can also be the same kind of example."²⁴

Since Russia's main objective in seeking access to the consortium to provide North Korea with reactors was to gain leverage in Korea and Asia generally, it is clear that the issue here is an Irano-Russian security partnership on issues of common concern: Azerbaijan's westward turn, control of Caspian Sea oil flows, stabilising Central Asia, and policing the Transcaucasus.²⁵ Russia has also asked Iran to help it resolve Tadjikistan's civil war.²⁶

The SVR's view has now become official policy. Deputy secretary of the Security Council, Valery Manilov stated, in 1995, that the situation regarding Iran was one where other interests based on economic competition and competition for spheres of influence had intruded into the sphere of nuclear nonproliferation. Russia had strictly evaluated the details of Iran's programme and is convinced that the programme will not constitute a threat of nuclear weapons and that everything Iran does is under International Atomic Energy Agency supervision. Russia understands its responsibility to prevent nuclear proliferation, but its programme with Iran will contribute to both regional and global stabilisation.²⁷ The fact that

Minatom is carrying out its own policy or that Russia is training Iranian nuclear engineers in violation of its agreement with the United States were conveniently overlooked here.

Clearly more is involved here than merely making money for Minatom, though that too is an interesting problem. Rather this reactor, like the conventional arms sales to Iran since 1990, reflects a developing Russo-Iranian entente in the new Middle East. Clearly Russia also does not fully control its nuclear and other weapons exports. This reality is jarring when juxtaposed to official statements of a tough policy on proliferation, export of dual use substances, etc., especially to this dangerous region.²⁸ It should also be noted that Russia is aggressively marketing its nuclear technology and expertise. It also has offered nuclear co-operation to South Korea and most recently, Pakistan.²⁹ Although all of these agreements are reportedly for peaceful purposes and are so advertised by the host countries, eg. Pakistan, any hint that these or other Asian states may either gain access to nuclear weapons or improve their existing deterrents, triggers widespread alarm throughout Asia. But Minatom claims it must market its top of the line reactors aggressively to survive and is unmoved by other arguments.³⁰

MOSCOW AND THE GREATER MIDDLE EAST

A second worrisome factor is that Russia is apparently manoeuvring in the Gulf and Central Asia to exploit any erosion of or even undermine the US-inspired policy of dual containment of Iran and Iraq that grew out of Operation Desert Storm. To the degree that that status quo is eroding, a vacuum opens for Russia to exploit. Inasmuch as the United States could fashion a 'unipolar moment' and a new regional order in the Middle East thanks to its military victory over Iraq and the collapse of the USSR, it could create facts: the peace process, the isolation of both Iraq and Iran in the dual containment policy, the sustainment of the Kurds in northern Iraq, a military commitment to the Gulf, and the decline of Soviet power to the point where that government simply fell apart and Turkey became the US's favourite model for the Middle East's Northern Tier.

Today that status quo is under serious attack. Pressure on Iraq is ebbing in the West and Middle East, Turkey has proven economically unable to sustain its new position on its own and is under pressure at home from Islamic parties, inflation and the impact of the Kurdish insurgency, and Iran remains anti-American. Finally, ethnic movements or movements for political Islam are still shaking regimes across the Middle East and worry Russia. Therefore, unless Russia wants to be consigned to a passive role as was the case with its status in the Arab-Israeli peace process,

"The importance of the Middle East for Russia presupposes pursuing an active policy towards countries in the region as well as our partners in Middle East affairs who are outside it. Russia has a stake in participating in components of the security and co-operation system that are shaping up in the Middle East where Russia and the United States play the privileged role of co-sponsor."³¹

Consequently, at least five factors now drive Russian policy. The first, obviously, is Russia's own need to find security on its frontiers from the threat occasioned by the failure of Russia and the CIS states to create viable state institutions and control the use of armed forces.³² The second factor is Russia's need to find economic partners and markets whether for arms or business, especially oil and gas, control those resources as a source of capital, and restrict foreign competition. We make a critical mistake if we underestimate how deeply Russian élites fear becoming a Western economic colony.³³ Geography, economics, and

the unsettled security situation throughout this new Middle East beckons both arms traders and the oil dealers. But while Russian analysts regard the peace process and the end of superpower rivalry in the Middle East as prompting a restriction of Arab-Russian economic relationships; we must not merely assume that simple economics drives Russian policy towards the region or individual states.³⁴

The third factor is the prevalence of crises and conflicts that seem to defy solution, many of which are inside the CIS or on its borders. These wars naturally energise a Russia that has not fully come to terms with its imperial defeat and that has a historic animus towards Islam. Since Russian leaders believe their Islamic neighbours are uncivilised and cannot create viable states, it is axiomatic to them that the logic of the situation must lead to integration around Russia, which they interpret as a diminution of sovereignty.³⁵ Finally, in Iraq and Iran, due to America's dual containment policy, Russia can make significant inroads since there is nobody strong or near enough to counter its political support for Tehran and Baghdad. Russia can reassert its influence and standing relatively and seemingly cheaply. Furthermore, if Russia is to maintain its hegemony in Central Asia and the Caucasus, it must have Iranian co-operation. Russian officials freely admit that arms deals since 1992 and the transfers of atomic technology are pay-offs to Iran for its co-operation there.³⁶ In this context the reactor deal, despite its sinister aspects, merely extends a well-established precedent. And this holds true for future arms deals.

Other aspects of Russia's return to the Middle East and Gulf also deserve our attention. First of all this return could only occur because of Russia's success until now in projecting its power into the Caucasus and Central Asia. Despite the Chechnya debacle, Russia is solidifying its military hold on the Caucasus or trying hard to do so through the establishment, despite the CFE Treaty, of large forces permanently based in Georgia and Armenia and probably also in the North Caucasus.³⁷ These forces allow Russia to threaten Azerbaijan constantly and rebuff Turkey which is suspected of the grandest and most nefarious designs on the CIS.³⁸ So too, Russia's determination to use the Tadjik civil war as a pretext for its military re-entry into Central Asia and its continuing ability until now to dominate Central Asian economies and armed forces and beat back other rivals allows it to approach the Gulf, and South Asia. Hegemony in the new Middle East's northern tier—the CIS's southern belt—facilitates Russia's return to the broader Middle East. And, for all the talk of Russo-Iranian friendship, if not something more, there do remain Iranian voices who are very suspicious of Russian objectives in Central Asia as manifested for example in Tadjikistan.³⁹

Accompanying the return of Russian power are rationalisations that sound very much like traditional Soviet claims about the strategic proximity of the region to Russia. The geographical foundation of these claims is shakier than in the past, but that does not stop Russian diplomats from saying that Russia is a legitimate presence here because the Middle East is a region adjacent to Russia's vital strategic interests.⁴⁰ Yet even as Russia makes these claims, its ability to sustain a traditional position is seriously in doubt. Economically it can offer little except the chance for Arab or Israeli businessmen to invest in Russia—not the most attractive of prospects—and oil, gas and pipeline deals as with Oman. Though it is desperately eager to sell arms to anyone who will buy them, and the Middle East is regarded as a priority area for arms sales, the fact is that its sales are still relatively meagre, \$2 billion-3 billion per annum for 1993-94, and no more than \$3 billion projected for 1995.⁴¹ Lacking the economic instruments to provide what CIS states most need and Arab states most want, hobbles Russia's ability to exercise a pervasive and lasting influence across the Middle East.⁴² What Russia

can offer, except for arms and nuclear technology to those who can and want to pay for them, is its great power status. But even here it can only gain a strong position in those states—Iraq and Iran—that the United States has abandoned.

Nonetheless, Russia is attempting to use this meagre position as a basis for regional initiatives and to get back into the game. During his December 1995 visit to Israel, the Russian defence minister, Pavel Grachev, expressed his intention (the first statement of its kind from Russia and a sign of his usurpation of foreign policy making) to try and promote Iran and Syria's rapprochement with Israel and establish Russia as a "superpower" and "co-ordinator" of regional peace.⁴³ Russia's motives are traditional ones of realpolitik. Russia's supposed insecurity due to the prevalence of conflicts to its south leads it into a policy that expands its influence to gain security. Russia's policy is, therefore, an insecurity policy which fuels expansion of its influence abroad.⁴⁴ Another motive of Russian policy is habitually expressed as a global Islamic threat in which the domino theory is frequently cited.⁴⁵ Although the salience of this threat is great in public rhetoric, one cannot gauge from a distance how important it really is to policy makers. Still, it is constantly cited as a justification for a vigilant Russian policy.⁴⁶ Yet oddly enough, even some of those who most graphically depict this threat then counsel Moscow to effect a reconciliation with 'moderate' states, eg. Iran, and say this is feasible and desirable (whether Iran so qualifies is another question) for Russia.⁴⁷ The reasoning is that only if Russia deals with 'moderate' Islamic actors can it avert the threat to its south and gain a prominent position in a key region of world politics.⁴⁸

Thus, Russia's re-entry into the Middle East represents a reassertion of national (and departmental) interests, a preventive policy to deter Islamic assertion by a blend of coercion towards Turkey and co-optation towards Iran, and the failure of the US policy to create a lasting and stable status quo. Accordingly what is at stake here is not just US-Russian relations or the Nonproliferation Treaty, but also the nature of the regional status quo, that includes Central Asia, the North Caucasus and Transcaucasia in the new Middle East. This consideration makes Russia's return to the Middle East more troubling than a simple reassertion of national interests might be.

Even more troubling is that Primakov has launched a Russian policy in the area that is clearly anti-American in its direction. Today this is the fifth driving force of Russian policy. In numerous statements he has indicated a long-standing belief that it is necessary to create, under Moscow's leadership, a belt or bloc of states who will seek to counter the unipolar and hence unilateral American policy and thus force Washington to allow Russia into the peace process and regional policy more generally even though Moscow has little to offer anyone outside of Iran and Iraq.⁴⁹ Throughout 1996 his rhetoric against the unipolar phenomenon has grown in intensity and it has come to be the leitmotif of his global policy.⁵⁰ At bottom, in many ways Primakov's anti-Americanism testifies to the continuing tendency to see the world as polarised into blocs and Moscow's desperate hunger for an undeserved equality with the United States.

It is true, of course, and Primakov too realises it, that not all Russian and American interests are at odds. Russia is not interested in renewed Israel-Arab fighting, nor does it want to see nuclear weapons in the Middle East or Central Asia. But Moscow's increasing reliance on traditional anti-American instruments like arms sales or nuclear technology transfers, and efforts to advance security systems for the Gulf that are billed as anti-American seem to follow the guidelines postulated in 1992-93 by the right-wing Eurasians school of thought. That

school's fundamental approach is indifferent to if not hostile to Western notions of reform and democracy.⁵¹

When these trends are combined with steady support for Central Asia's authoritarian regimes, and pressure on them to integrate with Russia, the pattern suggests a decision to fashion a regional anti-Western alignment.⁵² Indeed, it has been argued that in 1994 Russia made a conscious decision to seek comity with China, India and Iran in order to gain a balance with which to confront US policy. And restored hegemony over the CIS was the indispensable prelude to that strategy.⁵³ Certainly some people in Moscow think this way as then Defence Minister Pavel Grachev offered China a division of 'policing' responsibilities in Asia.⁵⁴ If this occurs, then the Middle East, or at least much of it, will be too implicated in the denouement of the CIS to find its own regional voice.

The truth is, however, that Russia remains a distinctly second-rate competitor in the area due to its economic weakness. Russian diplomats state that Russia's regional role is based on its prestige accumulated over many years, and traditional ties, not spending money. Indeed, "Russia has not invested a copeck" into the peace process.⁵⁵ Given the Arab interest in a counterweight to Washington, and an economic outlet and trading partner, or arms supplier and purveyor of credits, this means that Russian influence in the Middle East and Arab world faces numerous obstacles.⁵⁶ In fact the only tangible thing, outside of prestige, Russia can offer Syria, for example, is arms, and it can only do that on concessionary terms since Syria cannot even pay back its old Soviet debts. Nonetheless there is considerable interest in selling Syria arms, precisely in order to get back in the ring.⁵⁷ Grachev's 1995 visit to Israel, where he signed some intriguing arms deals allowing Israel to upgrade Russian models sold abroad, is seen in some quarters as Moscow's efforts to induce Syria to include Russia in its recent economic boom.⁵⁸ This accord may have interesting repercussions as well in the Gulf.

RUSSIA AND THE GULF

Indeed, if the peace process stabilises or its participants attempt to do so under watchful US eyes where only Washington can really galvanise the peace process, Russia must find another outlet for its ambitions. This is perhaps one reason for Russia's much stronger presence and interest in Iraq, Iran and the Emirates. But there are equally compelling security interests closer to home than the Gulf especially vis-à-vis Iran.

In its pursuit of restored hegemony and empire in the North Caucasus, Transcaucasia, and Central Asia, Russia frequently invokes the threat of Islamic fundamentalism and a kind of domino theory that if Muslims anywhere are allowed to gain freedom (of course at Russia's expense) all of the CIS, including Russia, and Eurasia will be at risk.⁵⁹ However, Russia's tragic but ongoing fiasco in Chechnya shows that Russia cannot create an alternative order there, certainly not by force or economic coercion. Therefore Russia needs allies or clients throughout the CIS and Middle East. Thus as Russia lurches towards authoritarianism at home it supports it abroad in the Muslim East. This support stems from both motives of increasing affinity and realpolitik, since as domestic rhetoric shows, Russian policy making is increasingly authoritarian in content and style and increasingly anti-Western.

Russia staunchly supports the increasingly visible despotism's of Central Asia and their repressive policies even as it seeks to restrict their international freedom of manoeuvre.⁶⁰ More important, Russian generals and political élites alike

increasingly look to Iran. The turn to Iran reinforces the existing partnership between the two states and makes sense given the American blockade or embargo on Iran that drives Tehran to find other partners and both sides' need to establish an arrangement or regime to sort out Central Asian and Caucasian conflicts and energy issues. Not surprisingly, two authoritarian states conducting policies that have isolated them to some degree from the international community should come together. At a 1995 Irano-Russian round-table,

"The speakers alluded to the quest by Iran and Russia for an identity and to Russia's political determination to prevent any country from dominating the region [Central Asia and the Caucasus]. It was stressed that Iran and Russia are natural allies with distinctive natural resources and the predominance of any third power should be prevented. This is related to the manner in which the two sides define their strategic objectives. It was also stated that Russia's influence in Central Asia and the Caucasus should be treated with respect and if domination is not the objective co-operation is possible."⁶¹

These sentiments speak for themselves and highlight the deeper aspects of the anti-American and anti-Turkish coalition that is coming into being. Russian generals in Chechnya have maintained that the Chechens will find it difficult to conduct a guerrilla war from the mountains without foreign aid. Here is another reason for Moscow to court Iran to deter it from supporting the Chechens.⁶² The same holds true for the transfer of atomic reactor technology to Iran.

This policy of strategic partnership belies the invocation of the Islamic threat used to justify everything from Chechnya to Tadjikistan. In fact, many policy makers recommend dealing with Muslim societies, specifically Iran.⁶³ Yeltsin's advisor, Andranik Migranyan, a believer in Russia's hegemony in the CIS told the Iran News,

"In many areas Iran can be a good and strategic ally of Russia at [the] global level to check the hegemony of third parties and keep the balance of power. ... Russia will try to further co-operate with Iran as a big regional power. We will not let the West dictate to Russia how far it can go in its relations. Of course, we will try at the same time not to damage our relations with the West."⁶⁴

The discovery of areas of agreement and interaction with Islamic states and societies also includes lucrative oil and arms deals with them and a growing effort to propose and even underwrite grandiose schemes of Gulf security while selling arms to all and sundry in the area. Grachev's remarks in Israel are an example of the grand aspirations of some policy makers in this region.⁶⁵

Russia clearly wants to 'internationalise' the issue of Gulf security, obtain a role as a recognised guarantor of the area, either through the UN or through a regional alignment, and displace the US's primacy there even as it recognises the latter's strong regional interests.⁶⁶ At the same time, Russia is vigorously pushing arms sales to the region which is seen as its primary arms market.⁶⁷ Iranian officials' statements indicate an unconcealed desire to arrive at a "division of responsibilities with Russia in regard to regional conflicts and energy issues."⁶⁸ US efforts to isolate Iran from oil deals in Central Asia and the Caucasus, trade abroad and nuclear power deals, coupled with Russian resentment at US policies, provides excellent grounds for a durable marriage of convenience where Russia 'has seen the light'.⁶⁹

Another common interest is apparently preventing the spread of US interests into the Caucasus by way of Azerbaijan where the key issue is exploration of the

Caspian Sea for oil by the new states and constructing pipelines from there to bring it to Europe and the West. Neither Russia nor Iran is interested in Azerbaijan (or anyone else, ie. the West) being free to explore and ship oil there and both states want a veto power over the use of that sea.⁷⁰ This shared interest also brings Russia and Iran together. However, this may change as a result of Grachev's visit to Israel. Soon after that a joint Irano-Azerbaijani effort to improve relations got under way, but it is impossible to determine if that was coincidence or related to Grachev's policy.⁷¹ Nonetheless, for now the evidence suggests continued close ties between Iran and Moscow. And clearly Primakov wants to strengthen them, even to the degree of obtaining international approval for Iran's participating in a solution to the Lebanon crisis.⁷²

Thus security of the CIS, guaranteeing Russia's hegemonic position there and stability within the area, the desire to seek a recognised position in the Gulf as a security guarantor, a desire to strike at US policies and assert Russia's importance, markets for arms, oil, and nuclear transfers all come together as motives for Russia's Iranian policy. The political rapprochement with Iran and anti-Turkish and anti-American gambits in the Gulf region are not just expressions of *realpolitik*, but also signify a recognition of common interests and political culture. This rapprochement also represents Russia's attempt to make up for its defects in Asia's and the Islamic world's politics by the means traditionally associated with Soviet diplomacy, arms sales, and nuclear technology transfers.

Russia's Iraq policy similarly combines many of these same motives, especially the desire for markets and an economic foot in the door and the desire for political leverage. There are undoubtedly many on the right who loudly advocate breaking the UN sanctions on Iraq or overturning them so that Iraq and Russia could establish friendship, pay off its \$7 billion debt to Russia through oil sales and become a market for Russian business, especially in the energy sector. Likewise Russian officials reiterate their desire to sustain the large Soviet economic investment in Iraq, develop it further, and regain the Iraqi arms market in the belief that Iraq can and soon will buy many arms. Since the whole purpose of the arms sales programme appears to be a bailout of the defence industry, defence industrialists and officials in this domain are among the most consistent supporters of easing the UN sanctions.⁷³ Moreover, it appears that some elements in Moscow are willing to ship Iran missile parts in violation of the UN sanctions and Russia's obligations as a member of the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR).⁷⁴ This recent episode, where Russian-made parts were intercepted before reaching Iraq, signifies another example of how poorly Russia controls its weapons.

Russia's political motives are also equally important vis-à-vis Iraq. When Russia mediated the crisis in November 1994, that looked like a resumption of the war with Kuwait, it won much credit in Baghdad because it showed the erosion of the united front in the Security Council. The US-led forces appeared to be in disarray. Russia's actions were rightly seen as a declaration of Russia's independence in the Gulf and assertion of the equal importance of its interests to Washington's.⁷⁵ As Vladimir Tytarenko, deputy chief of mission in Baghdad observed, Russia's policy will be based on reinforcing strategic interests and Russian interests in Iraq and the Middle East are no less important than America's interests. Stressing that local events have great repercussions in Russia, he played up trade rivalry with Washington, not ideological rivalry.⁷⁶ Viktor Posvalyuk, the Foreign Ministry's roving ambassador to the region, used that crisis to reiterate Russia's demand for an all-inclusive Gulf security system that it would help into being.⁷⁷

While all this is normal and not unexpected, it is not the whole story. Unfortunately Middle Eastern states are notoriously unresponsive to foreign efforts to direct or moderate their policies. Thus there are reports of a broader Iraqi-Iranian rapprochement which would involve Iranian sale of Iraqi oil to Russia in return for Russian weapons.⁷⁸ Since Iran cannot even pay for the weapons and goods it has already bought as of 1995, it is a good question how it will pay for this contract with Minatom or the new goods it is purchasing.⁷⁹ It is also the case that Russia's reactor sales to China were equally incomprehensible from the economic point of view.⁸⁰ Careful examination of Minatom's activities and financial transactions abroad do not bear out any of its claims of success or need for money and hard bargains for cash, quite the opposite.⁸¹ If indeed a triangular arrangement of Baghdad, Tehran and Moscow be the case, the contacts of both states with Russia would have to be seen in a very different light and Russian policy would not just be seeking to exploit the erosion of dual containment, but would be an active agent against it. In other words, anti-Americanism as such would then be a motive for policy.

It is too early to tell what will happen and where Russian relations with these two states and in the Gulf will go. But there are already disquieting signs. Because Iran clearly cannot afford what it has already bought from Moscow, payment for the reactor and other goods it is buying instantly becomes an acute question. First, Minatom clearly usurped its mandate to sell a centrifuge to Iran without governmental knowledge, yet has not suffered any consequences. The message that is sent thereby is not reassuring. Second, the desire to sell arms to Iraq which still refuses to comply with the UN's sanctions and is building up chemical and biological warfare capabilities, like the sale of weapons to Iran and possibly Syria can only be on concessionary terms or credit. Thus Russia might only get some political leverage. But the whole history of Moscow's Middle Eastern policies should have taught Russia how hard it is to translate the leverage produced by arms sales into influence and control. Furthermore, Moscow's visible support for Saddam Hussein's offensive against the Kurds in Northern Iraq and attacks on US policy indicate its commitment to a renewed dialogue with the present Iraqi government. Thus Moscow is again trying its anti-American gambit in this area too.

A third discouraging factor is that Moscow sent a high-ranking military delegation to Khartoum in April 1995 to resume implementation of old Soviet agreements with Sudan. Not only was Sudan an ally of Iraq in 1990-91, many guerrillas against the Algerian and Egyptian governments were reportedly trained there.⁸² Journalist Alexander Ivanov observed,

"Following the well-known 'bridge-building' between Moscow, Tehran, and Baghdad recently, the intention proclaimed by the Russian generals to interact with the Sudan regime is being perceived ... here as a new Moscow challenge to the West or as an attempt by the Kremlin to put pressure on it. The reference is primarily to the United States in connection, for example, with its position on the question of the expansion of NATO. After all, co-operation with Khartoum clearly promises Moscow no financial benefit ..."⁸³

Finally the fourth, and most disturbing factor is Moscow's apparent disregard for its own clearly stated self-interest vis-à-vis prospective proliferators like Iran and North Korea. There is obviously a short-term gain from selling arms and reactors to such states if they can reimburse Russia. But they cannot even do that. And the consequences of their nuclearization, whether directed directly or indirectly against Moscow or even third parties, can only be destabilising to the fragile Russian state. Providing Iran with such 'toys' is obviously rewarding to someone,

but not to Russia. These issues therefore merit a deeper search into motives and rewards. Thus we are forced back again to our starting point, namely the fragility of state control even in an atmosphere of hard-nosed realpolitik.

Though Russia's Gulf policies are evolving, they have many troublesome and disturbing features that suggest the policy might soon run away from its progenitors in an unforeseeable direction. While clearly prestige and influence are benefits, Moscow is not even getting cash for its arms that help proliferate regional threats. While the ideological contests of the past are unlikely to recur, the great powers' ability to control local political trends has been poor. Though definitive resolutions of the direction of Russian policy, like that of Russia as a whole, are not yet forthcoming, Moscow's Middle Eastern policy displays too many disquieting and even misconceived factors for anyone to become complacent.

1 'Time To Repay Debts', Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press (henceforth CDPP), XLVIII, No. 1, 31 January 1996, pp. 23-24; The Monitor, 20 February 1996; 'Russia in Billion Dollar Arms Sales to Iran', Jane's Defence Weekly, 27 March 1996, p. 14.

2 Chubin, Shahram (1994), 'Iran's Strategic Aims and Constraints', in Clawson, Patrick (ed.), Iran's Strategic Intentions and Capabilities, Washington DC, Fort Leslie J. McNair; Institute for National Security Studies, National Defence University, McNair Paper, No. 29, 1994, p. 79.

3 'Iran Deal Pending Until Gore-Chernomyrdin Talks', Foreign Broadcast Information Service-Central Eurasia (henceforth FBIS SOV), 18 May 1995, p.2; 'Nuclear Reactor Sale To Iran Critiqued: Security, Economic Interests Weighed', Joint Publications Research Society, Arms Control (henceforth JPRS TAC), 95-011-L, 9 May 1995, pp. 63-64; The Monitor, 12 June 1995.

4 Foye, Stephen (1995), 'Whither Moscow? Domestic Politics and Russia's Assertive Diplomatic Posture', Post-Soviet Prospects, III, No. 5, May, p. 3.

5 Zisk, Kimberly Marten (1995), 'Arzamas-16: Economics and Security in a Closed Nuclear City', Post-Soviet Affairs, XI, No. 1, p. 59.

6 Perera, Judith (1995), 'Russia: Stepping into the Gulf', Middle East International, 20 March, p.13.

7 Blank, Stephen, 'Russia Reenters the Middle East', The World & I, (forthcoming,).

8 Huntington, Samuel N. (1993), 'The Clash of Civilisations', Foreign Affairs, LXX, No. 3, Summer, pp. 22-49.

9 Moscow, Mirovaya Ekonomika i Mezhdunarodnye Otnosheniia (World Economy and International Relations), No. 1, January 1995, FBIS SOV, 95-056-S, 23 March 1995, pp. 11-16.

10 Adomeit, Hannes (1995), 'Russia as a 'Great Power' in World Affairs: Images and Reality', International Affairs, LXXI, No. 1, January, p. 61.

11 Lamote, Laurent, 'Iran's Foreign Policy and Internal Crises', in Clawson, pp. 21-23.

12 Tehran, Voice of the Islamic Republic of Iran First Programme Network in Persian, 11 April 1996, (in Persian), Foreign Broadcast Information Service, Near East and South Asia (henceforth FBIS NES), 96-072, 12 April 1996, p. 71.

13 Mesbahi, Mohiaddin (1994), 'Introduction: The Emerging Muslim States of Central Asia and the Caucasus', in Mesbahi, Mohiaddin (ed.), Central Asia and the Caucasus after the Soviet Union: Domestic and International Dynamics, Gainesville, Florida, University Press of Florida, p.2.

14 Blank, Stephen (1995), Energy, Economics and Security in Central Asia: Russia and Its Rivals, Pennsylvania: Carlisle Barracks, Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College.

15 Vassiliev, Alexei (1993), Russian Foreign Policy in the Middle East: From Messianism to Pragmatism, Reading: Ithaca Press, p. 360.

16 Op. cit., London, Al-Sharq-Al-Aswat (in Arabic), 18 June 1996; FBIS SOV, 96-119, 19 June 1996, p. 24.

17 Moscow, Interfax (in English), 6 April 1995; FBIS SOV, 95-067, 7 April 1995, p. 7.

18 The report is found in JPRS TAC, 95-009-L, 6 April 1995, p. 1.

19 Op.cit., pp. 5-6, Hoagland, Jim (1995), 'Briefing Yeltsin on Iran', Washington Post, 17 May, p. 23.

20 JPRS TAC, pp. 5-6.

21 Ibid., p. 6.

22 Ibid., p. 7.

23 JPRS TAC, 95-011-L, pp. 63-64.

24 JPRS TAC, 95-009-L, p. 7.

25 Blank, Stephen (1994), Russian Policy and the Korean Crisis, Pennsylvania: Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, p. 15.

26 Tehran, Voice of the Islamic Republic of Iran First Programme Network (in Persian), 22 August 1994, FBIS NES, 94-162, 22 August 1994, p. 52.

27 'The Non-Proliferation Treaty Must Be Prolonged', Moscow News, 21-27 April 1995, p. 13.

28 Mamedov, Georgi A. (Deputy Foreign Minister) (1995), 'Counteracting the Proliferation of WMD' in Lewis, William H. and Johnson, Stuart E. (eds.), Weapons of Mass Destruction: New Perspectives on Counterproliferation, Fort Leslie J. McNair, Washington DC: Institute for National Security Studies, National Defence

University Press, p. 178, and Kortunov, Sergei, 'Non-proliferation and Counter proliferation: a Russian Perspective', *Ibid.*, pp. 149-150.

29 Blank, Stephen (1993), *Challenging the New World Order: The Arms Transfers Policy of the Russian Republic*, Pennsylvania: Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, Pa., pp. 64-66.

30 Tokyo, *Nihon Keizai Shimbun* (in Japanese), 19 May 1995, Foreign Broadcast Information Service, East Asia (henceforth FBIS EAS) 95-098, 22 May 1995, pp. 12-13.

31 Chisyakov, Alexei (1995), 'The Middle East in the Light of Geopolitical Changes', *International Affairs*, No. 8, p. 52.

32 Holden, Gerard (1994), *Russia After the Cold War: History and the Nation in Post-Soviet Security Policies*, Frankfurt Am Main and Boulder Colorado: Campus Verlag and Westview Press, pp. 33-37; Nissman, David (1995), 'Three Challenges for North Ossetia', *Prism*, 23 June; Goldenberg, Suzanne (1994), *Pride of Small Nations: The Caucasus and Post-Soviet Disorder*, London: Zed Books; and the articles by Birch, Julian and Colarusso, John (1995), 'Ossetia: A Caucasian Bosnia in Microcosm', and 'Abkhazia', in *Central Asian Survey*, XIV, No. 1, March, pp. 43-74, and pp. 75-97, respectively.

33 Foreign Broadcast Information Service, Central Eurasia: FBIS Report (henceforth FBIS USR), 93-037, Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation, 25 March 1993, p. 7.

34 Chistyakov, p. 51, FBIS SOV, 95-056-S, 23 March 1995, pp. 11-16 gives the comprehensive security rationale for Russia's deep engagement with the Middle East, and 'World Politics', *CDPP*, XLVII, No. 16, 17 May 1995, p. 24.

35 Blank, *Energy, Economics and Security*, pp. 6-7, Moscow, *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* (in Russian), 5 May 1995, FBIS SOV, 95-096-S, 18 May 1995, pp. 17-18.

36 London, *The Guardian*, 31 May 1995, FBIS SOV, 95-105, 1 June 1995, p. 16; Blank, Stephen (1992), 'Russia and Iran in a New Middle East', *Mediterranean Quarterly*, III, No. 4, Fall, pp. 124-127.

37 Mesbahi, Mohiaddin, 'Russia and the Geopolitics of the Muslim South', in Mesbahi, pp. 298-303.

38 Sevastopol, *Flag Rodiny* (in Russian), 12 January 1994, Joint Publication Research Service, *Russian Military Affairs* (henceforth JPRS UMA), 94-008, 23 February 1994, pp. 24-26; Moscow, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* (in Russian), 17 November 1994, JPRS UMA, 94-052, 14 December 1994, p. 14.

39 Tehran, *Jomhuriye Eslami* in Persian, 3 December 1995, FBIS NES, 95-241, 15 December 1995, p. 54.

40 For example, Baghdad, *Alif Ba'* in Arabic, 7 December 1994, FBIS NES, 94-238, 12 December 1994, p. 30; Smith, M.A. (1994), *Russia and the Middle East*, Conflict Studies Research Centre, RMA Sandhurst, pp. 2-3.

41 Open Media Research Institute, *Daily Digest* (henceforth OMRI), 26 May 1995.

- 42 Grachev, Andrei (1995), 'The Dumb Giant', *New Times*, April, p. 51.
- 43 Moscow, *Interfax* (in English), 5 December 1995, *FBIS SOV*, 95-234, 6 December 1995, p. 25.
- 44 This felicitous formulation occurred in Stephen Covington, 'Moscow's Insecurity and Eurasian Instability', *Conflict Studies Research Centre, Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst*, October, 1994, pp. 3-4.
- 45 *FBIS SOV*, 23 March 1995, pp. 11-16.
- 46 *Ibid.*
- 47 *Ibid.*
- 48 *Ibid.*
- 49 Moscow, *Komsomolskaya Pravda* (in Russian), 21 March 1996, *FBIS SOV*, 96-056, 21 March 1996, pp. 15-16; 'Primakov Discusses Foreign-Policy Priorities', *CDPP*, XLVIII, No. 10, 3 April 1996, pp. 12-13.
- 50 Moscow, *Trud* (in Russian), 25 June 25 1996, *FBIS SOV*, 96-124, 26 June 1996, pp. 18-19.
- 51 Mesbahi, *Russia and the Geopolitics of the Muslim South*, pp. 274-281.
- 52 Rahr, Alexander (1995), 'New Focus on Old Priorities', *Transition*, 1994 in *Review*, Part II, pp. 9-12.
- 53 *Ibid.*
- 54 Moscow, *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* (in Russian), 23 May 1995, *FBIS SOV*, 95-100, 24 May 1995, pp. 6-7.
- 55 Moscow, *ITAR-TASS* (in English), 23 March 1995, *FBIS SOV*, 95-060, 29 March 1995, p.11.
- 56 Katz, Mark N. (1995), 'Russia and the Arabs, Still Miscommunicating', *Middle East Quarterly*, II, No. 1, March, pp. 67-70.
- 57 Moscow, *Nezavisimoye Voyennoye Obozrenie* supplement to *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* (in Russian), No. 1, February, 1995, *JPRS UMA*, 95-011, 14 March 1995, p. 43.
- 58 Lelyveld, Michael S. (1995), 'Russian-Israeli Deal Hints at Mideast Realignment', *Journal of Commerce*, 22 December 1995, p. 1.
- 59 Mesbahi, *Russia and the Geopolitics of the Muslim South*, p. 295.
60. Fuller, Graham E., 'Russia and Central Asia: Federation or Fault Line?' in *Mandlebaum*, p. 115.
61. Tehran, *Abrar* (in Persian), 7 March 1995, *FBIS NES*, 95-052, 17 March 1995, pp. 71-72.

62 FBIS SOV, 1 June 1995, p. 16; Erlanger, Steven (1995), 'Russian Troops Take Last Chechen Cities', New York Times, 1 April, p. 3.

63 FBIS SOV, 95-056-S, 23 March 1995, pp. 11-16.

64 Tehran, Irna (in English), 8 March 1995; FBIS NES, 95-045, 8 March 1995, p. 51.

65 Tehran, Abrar (in Persian), 7 March 1995, FBIS NES, 95-052, 17 March 1995, pp. 71-72; Paris AFP (in English), 21 March 1995, FBIS NES, 95-056, 23 March 1995, pp. 47-48; Perera, p. 13; FBIS SOV, 6 December 1995, p. 35.

66. Grummon, Stephen (1995), Introduction, 'Russian Ambitions in the Persian Gulf', Middle East Quarterly, II, No. 1, March, pp. 87-92; Vassiliev, p. 360.

67 OMRI Daily Digest, 26 May 1995.

68. Tehran, IRNA (in English), 30 May 1995, FBIS NES, 95-104, 31 May 1995, pp. 65-66.

69. Moscow, Izvestiya (in Russian), 30 May 1995, FBIS SOV, 95-103, pp. 27-29.

70. Moscow, Izvestiya, 23 May 1995, FBIS SOV, 95-101, 25 May 1995, p. 14.

71. Lelyveld, p. 1.

72 Moscow, ITAR-TASS (in English), 22 April 1996, FBIS SOV, 96-079, 23 April 1996, p. 27.

73 'Iraq', CDPP, XLVII, No. 17, 24 May 1995, p. 24; OMRI Daily Digest, 6 June 1995; The Monitor, 12 & 28 June 1995; Weymouth, Lally (1995), 'Riches to Rogues', Washington Post, 20 April, p. 21.

74 Smith, R. Jeffrey (1995), 'U.N. Is Said to Find Russian Markings on Iraq-Bound Military Equipment', Washington Post, 15 December, p. 30.

75 Smith, pp. 3-4; Perera, p. 13.

76 Baghdad, Al-Jumhuriyah (in Arabic), 25 January 1995, FBIS NES, 95-071, 13 April 1995, p. 39.

77 Smith, pp. 3-5.

78 Milan, Corriere Della Sera (in Italian), 4 June 1995, FBIS NES, 95-108, 6 June 1995, pp. 62-63; on Soviet efforts to forge an entente between Iran and Iraq see, Shemesh, Haim (1992), Soviet Iraqi Relations 1968-1988: In the Shadow of the Iraq-Iran Conflict, Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner, and Smolansky, Oles with Smolansky, Bettie M. (1991), The USSR and Iraq: The Soviet Quest for Influence, Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press.

82 Moscow, Nezavisimaya Gazeta (in Russian), 18 April 1995, FBIS SOV, 95-079, 25 April 1995, pp. 16-17.

83 Ibid.

82 Moscow, Nezavisimaya Gazeta (in Russian), 18 April 1995, FBIS SOV, 95-079, 25 April 1995, pp. 16-17.

83 Ibid.