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Gulf Cooperation Council Relations **with the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)**

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Research Papers

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Abdulaziz O. Sager
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Contents

Chapter One

Introduction

Putting a GCC-CIS Relationship into Perspective

1.1 The Middle East, the CIS and the GCC

The Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) is the formal name for the geopolitical grouping of relatively new successor states that comprise the enormous Eurasian territories of the former tsarist Russian Empire and ex-Soviet Union. The CIS has a long-established tradition of political, cultural and economic relations with the Middle East. Such relations have evolved on the basis of two differing sets of factors: internal and external. From an internal perspective, it should be considered that Muslims numbering in the dozens of millions, from predominantly Turkic, Farsi, Tatar nationalities—as well as many smaller ethnic-Muslim nationality categories—have settled in the CIS over a period of no less than five centuries. The Muslims of the present-day CIS countries, whose presence in these states has come about both as a result of conquest and voluntary incorporation into tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union, are inextricably linked due to their faith to the mainstream *Ummah*, or pan-Islamic community of Muslims. Islam's most important holy sites are found in the Middle East and provide notable spiritual significance for Muslims worldwide. Moreover, Muslims from the present day CIS have historically viewed the region as a source of cultural inspiration.

From an external perspective, tsarist Russia—and more particularly the Soviet Union—has been a leading power in the international political arena during the past three centuries. Given the historically significant political geography of the Middle Eastern region, its strategic significance for international trade routes and linkages to some of the world's major waterways, it is only natural that the region would have figured centrally in Russian imperial and Soviet geopolitical planning. However, it was the Soviet Union's Marxist-Leninist ideology-driven foreign policy of the Cold War period that brought Middle Eastern-USSR relations to what arguably became their historical apex. The Soviet Union's support of progressive Socialist Arab regimes during the 1960s-1980s—including Nasserite Egypt, Baathist Syria and Iraq, Libya and the (Democratic People's Republic of) Yemen—led to an enormous level of political and economic cooperation between the USSR and Middle Eastern region.

Quite a substantial historical precedent exists for CIS-Middle Eastern relations from both the internal and external perspectives. However, concerted relations between Russia and the former Soviet Republics, as well as the states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)—a political-economic bloc of countries established in 1981 which includes Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Qatar, Kuwait and Oman—are a relatively new phenomenon. Formal political relations between Russia and the majority of the Gulf monarchies were only established during the late 1980s and start of 1990s, when Moscow was still the capital of the Soviet Union. Although the Soviet Union was an active player in the politics of the Arabian Peninsula as early as the 1920s, and Moscow even welcomed an official visit from then Crown Prince Faisal bin Abdul Aziz of Saudi Arabia in 1932, the onset of war in Europe brought an end to Soviet-Gulf relations of the period. During the Cold War, while some positive diplomatic exchanges took place between Moscow and Riyadh during the 1950s, conflicting ideologies (Communist and Wahhabi) and the closure of

ranks amongst rival (pro-Western and Soviet-backed) Arab camps during the height of the Cold War in the 1960s and 1970s forged a gulf between the Soviet Union's diplomatic relations with Saudi Arabia and the newly independent monarchies of the Arabian Gulf. The Soviet Union became even further distanced from the GCC states during the first half of the 1980s, primarily as a result of Moscow's war in Afghanistan and Saudi Arabia's financing of Afghan rebels fighting against the Soviet occupation of their country.

1.2 The impact of a changing global political environment

The changing international environment of the post-Cold War system of international relations, however, is bringing the GCC bloc, Russia and the successor states of the Soviet Union closer together. The macro-arena of international relations from the 1990s onwards is no longer dominated by global polarity and the maneuvers of two rival superpowers and their client states in the developing world, but rather by a multitude of different factors, including: the assertive promotion of national interests by individual countries and regional blocs of states, such as the European Union, the Asian tigers, the GCC, etc.; geopolitical competition between states for influence in some of the world's emerging regions, such as Central Asia and the Caspian; the globalization of the international economy and the onset of market relations; international energy security; and lastly, concerns about international terrorism and religious fundamentalism. Within this fundamentally restructured international political order, a number of key political, cultural and economic developments have taken place. The effect has resulted in the emergence of a new set of dynamics that are driving Russia, the CIS and the GCC states towards new levels of international engagement.

Political dynamics

From a political angle, major international crises have altered the dynamics of international relations and provided substantial scope for Russia and the GCC states to construct new political ties. These events include: the war to liberate Kuwait from Iraqi occupation during 1990-1991; Russia's wars in Chechnya during the 1990s; the Anglo-American invasion of Iraq in 2003; and acts of international terrorism, such as the attacks on the World Trade Center in New York on September 11 2001. Moscow's firm stance against Iraqi aggression towards Kuwait in 1990, for example, and its decision to join the allied coalition to liberate Kuwait—despite the Soviet Union's longstanding alliance with Baghdad—were warmly greeted by the GCC and facilitated the establishment of formal relations between the USSR and Saudi Arabia. Such moves also won Moscow voluminous financial aid from the Gulf monarchies and brought with it substantial expectation of would-be trade and investment relations between the newly created Russian Federation and the Gulf.

The rapprochement between Moscow and the Gulf states that ensued after the Gulf War did not, however, facilitate the degree of constructive economic and political cooperation that Moscow would have liked. Furthermore, while the war in Afghanistan had ended and Saudi Arabia was no longer sponsoring Muslim insurgents against Russia, Moscow remained suspicious of non-governmental Gulf based charities and other forms of support from the region that were extended to Chechen Muslim separatists fighting against Russian intervention. However, as American-Saudi relations reached an all-time low following the September 11 acts of terrorism in New York, and with much of the Arab world becoming increasingly disenchanted with Anglo-American aggression towards Iraq during 2003, further rapprochement between Russia and the Gulf took place. The official visit of Saudi Arabia's then Crown Prince Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz al-Saud to

Moscow in September 2003 has convinced many analysts that Russia's strategic interests in contemporary international relations have been converging with those of Saudi Arabia and the other GCC states. Such efforts have thereby fostered a new round of constructive diplomatic and commercial relations between Russia and the Gulf.

Cultural trends

From a cultural angle, there has been a major revival of Islam in many states and regions of the former Soviet Union, a trend which started to emerge as a result of greater political liberalization and freedom of expression during the Soviet presidency of Mikhail Gorbachev. The Islamic revival accelerated rapidly in the predominantly secular Muslim regions of the Russian Federation and the newly established titular Muslim republics of Central Asia and the Caspian during the 1990s. It was marked by the establishment of thousands of new mosques, which opened their doors to those ex-Soviet Muslims who wanted to rediscover Islam now that the Soviet style ban on religion was no longer enforced. Equally important was the opening of Islamic schools and extensive distribution of various types of Islamic literature in order to make knowledge of Islam more widespread in the CIS's Muslim regions. From the outset, the Gulf had backed the ex-Soviet Islamic revival by providing both finance and moral support to assist the spread of Islam in the previously atheist territories of the former-USSR, be it through the donation of hundreds of thousands of copies of the Qur'an, funding Islamic teachers and missionaries who have come to the region to propagate Islam or sponsoring CIS-Muslim pilgrims for their once-in-a-lifetime *Hajj* to Mecca. In principle, CIS governments welcome an influx of financial aid from the wealthy states of the Gulf into their countries; however, they have generally been skeptical of such spiritual or financial support given the links that some claim have emerged between Islamic foreign aid of this

nature and the spread of Islamic fundamentalism in the former Soviet Union.

Economic developments

When looking at Russia, the CIS and the changing nature of the international economy since the end of the Cold War, it is noted that the successor states of the former Soviet Union have by and large become integrated into the global economic system. The Soviet Union' trade relations during the Cold War were constituted by its links with its satellites in Eastern Europe and its client states in the developing world. On the contrary, the CIS now actively encourages foreign investment and trade relations with the outside world and is increasingly integrating into international economic institutions such as the World Trade Organization. As a result, resource-rich Russia and the other CIS states have become ripe for economic exploitation from the outside world, bringing a new abundance of raw materials to the international markets. In terms of CIS-GCC relations, the most significant aspect from this development is the fact that the Russian petroleum industry has started to match the production levels of the Middle East's oil superpower, Saudi Arabia, putting forward the argument in some circles that CIS oil may present itself as a reliable alternative to the West's traditional dependence on oil supplies from the Gulf. This argument has been underscored further after doubts began to emerge over Saudi Arabia's political viability in the wake of the September 11 attacks which, together with Russia's impressive annual increases in oil production from 1998 to present, seems to have fostered a new energy dialogue between Russia and the US. It is quite possible that then Crown Prince Abdullah's visit to Moscow in late 2003 may have represented an attempt to create Riyadh's own energy dialogue with Russia.

1.3 Structure of the ensuing manuscript

The ensuing manuscript will elaborate on contemporary relations between the states of the GCC and Russia and the CIS countries from a political, cultural and economic perspective as has been initially introduced above. In Chapter 2, after an initial discussion of Russian standing in the present day international order and also a brief account of Russian-CIS relations, the discussion will focus on the formal political ties that have been emerging between Russia (as the leading power in the CIS) and the GCC states in the post-Cold War political environment. Furthermore, the following manuscript will note that Russia-GCC relations have been consolidated in a particularly assertive manner after the terrorist attacks in New York on September 11 and the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003. Chapter 3 contains a discussion on the renaissance of Islam, which has been taking place in the Muslim regions of the CIS and has been accelerating rapidly since the dissolution of the Soviet Union. While acknowledging the role that the states of the GCC have played in the former Soviet Islamic revival, the main question of interest in this section of the manuscript is whether an association can be made between the Islamicization of politics in certain regions of the CIS on the one hand, and the backing that the Islamic revival in the former Soviet Muslim territories has been receiving from the Gulf on the other.

Chapter 4, the final chapter of the manuscript, will focus on the significance of economic ties between the regions—an area of general under-development within the context of GCC-CIS relations during the 1990s. The main themes discussed include the potential challenge that vastly increased outputs of Russian oil production are posing to Saudi Arabia and other Gulf oil-producing states at present, as well as Russian and CIS efforts to develop closer ties with the GCC states in the international arms trade. The concluding chapter provides an afterthought on the main developments in the previous chapters and discusses what is

demonstrating itself to be the consolidation in relations between the CIS states of the former Soviet Union and the GCC states of the Arabian Gulf.

Chapter Two

A Political Framework for Russian, CIS and GCC Relations

2.1 Russian standing in the new world order

Before we begin to consider the current state of relations between the states of the CIS and the GCC, it might first be useful to briefly review the role that Russia—the nation that constituted the backbone of the Soviet Union and the tsarist empire—plays in contemporary international relations on the one hand, and the influence that it continues to exert in the newly sovereign territories of the former USSR on the other. Ever since the inception of Peter the Great as the Tsar of Russia in the late 17th century, the Russian nation has held the status of one of the great European powers. It has been a dominant force in international relations since that time and continues to be at present. Russia became an imperial power, competing with the likes of Britain, France and Germany for colonial territories during the second half of the 19th and early 20th centuries. Russia incorporated vast territories of Eurasia into its empire during this period. By the second half of the 20th century, Russia had attained the status of a superpower amidst a postwar international order in which the global power of European states declined, challenged solely by the United States of America in its quest for international political hegemony.

When the Soviet Union was officially dissolved in December 1991, a new Russian state known as the Russian Federation

emerged and became the direct beneficiary of most of the assets and institutions of the former Soviet state. However, a post-Soviet Russian political elite that had become accustomed with their own *Derzshavnast* (i.e. sense of being a super-power and lead-player in major international events) during the Cold War period, found that its global status was rapidly dwindling to that of a secondary power. During the immediate years following the Soviet disbandment, Russia very suddenly lost influence in many regions of the world where Soviet foreign policy played an active counterbalance to US policy, while political and economic chaos engulfed the length and breadth of the former Soviet Union.

Critics described Russia to be in a state of acute domestic social and political crisis during the 1990s, with the chronic disorder taking place in the country reflecting on Russia's weakened foreign policy position in the newly emerging post-Cold War world order. Amidst much soul-searching for Russia's new place in the world following the end of the USSR, from a foreign policy perspective it seemed that Russia's standing in the world was driven by the need to improve relations with the West—which had been improving since the mid-1980s—and maintaining its strategic interest in the territories of the former Soviet Union. As one commentator put it:

> Compared to the Soviet era, whole regions of the world effectively vanished from the [Russian] foreign policy map. This retrenchment [in foreign policy] was not restricted to logical casualties such as Africa, Latin America and Southeast Asia—which has long been of secondary importance—but also to regions where Moscow's presence had until recently been quite strong, such as the Middle East.[1]

[1]- Bobo Lo, *Vladimir Putin and the Evolution of Russian Foreign Policy* (London: Blackwell Publishing, 2003).

Similar to its retreat from many of the Soviet Union's client states in the developing world, Russia likewise fell away from its traditional Cold War satellites in Eastern Europe, where its voice was only occasionally heard and usually as a response to crisis stemming from Western initiatives such as NATO enlargement or aggression towards religious orthodox brethren such as the Balkan Serbs.[2]

However, Russia analysts today no longer tend to categorize the country's foreign policy or standing in the new world order through the prisms of political weakness and continued retreat from global regions. A fairer assessment would be to view the contemporary Russian state as a pragmatic and interventionist power primarily driven by national interest and holding notable standing in the increasingly competitive environment and complex structure of post-Cold War international relations. In contrast to the 1990s, when analysts spoke of Russian foreign policy as disjointed and having little in the way of military and economic strength to support it,[3] or assessed how Russia could manage its withdrawals from empire without incurring too great a cost,[4] analytical discussions now tend to focus more on resurgent Russian standing in the international system. Andrej Kreutz, for example, suggests that Russia—despite its critical problems—remains one of the major states and its current and potential impact on the role in the regions,

[2]- Ibid.
[3]- Robert Freedman, "Russia's Middle East Ambitions," *Middle East Quarterly* (September 1998).
[4]- Roland Dannreuther, "Russia, Central Asia and the Persian Gulf," *Survival* 35 (Winter 1993): 109.

which are near its borders, certainly deserve attention and careful analysis.[5]

Furthermore, Bobo Lo, in his leading recently published account of Russian foreign policy, speaks of Russia's international standing under President Putin in the following manner:

> For the first time in years, there is a genuine belief that a resurgent Russia is capable of playing an important and constructive role in international affairs. Emerging from the disorientation of the [President] Yeltsin period, it is belatedly enjoying the respect and sense of 'belonging' it has long craved but had found impossibly elusive since the fall of the Soviet Union. No longer dismissed as a 'failed state' or as a quasi-rogue state, Russia is playing a real part in the post-Cold War world.[6]

As further suggested by Samuel Huntington, contemporary international relations are "a strange hybrid, a uni-polar system with one super-power and several major powers…where the settlement of international issues requires action by the super-power, but always with some combination of other major states."[7] All accounts point to the fact that Russia, buoyed by a half decade of consistently high economic growth, is once again one of the states heavily involved in the resolution of major international issues. Furthermore, it should not be forgotten that Russia has inherited the Soviet Union's permanent seat on the UN Security Council and has used this institution to leverage its position during international

[5]- Andrej Kreutz, "The Geopolitics of post-Soviet Russia and the Middle East," *Arab Studies Quarterly* (Winter 2002).
[6]- Bobo Lo, *Vladimir Putin and the Evolution of Russian Foreign Policy* (London: Blackwell Publishing, 2003).
[7]- Samuel Huntington, "The Lonely Superpower," *Foreign Affairs* 78 (March/April 1999): 36.

crises such as NATO's bombardment of Serbia, or when it colluded with France and Germany to form the main opposition bloc to the Anglo-American invasion of Iraq in 2003. Russia is also an important player in major international institutions, such as the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the G8 group of the world's wealthiest countries. Also, largely as a result of its thriving natural resources sector, Russia's leading political and business personalities are frequent attendees at the annual Davos Summit for the world's political and economic elite held each January in Switzerland. Although the current Russian state is no longer capable of deploying the resources of the all-powerful Soviet Union—and while no single country can presently compete with the US for global political and economic hegemony—Russia's sense of empty *Derzshavnast* of the 1990s has been re-branded in foreign policy terms, where the country now presents itself as a vital strategic partner in the stability of the new world order and constructive member of the international community.[8]

2.2 The CIS: Russia's organic sphere of influence

As present day Russia once again recaptures standing in the international community. Russian foreign policy is taking on a more confident outlook and becoming more ambitious in its policy

[8]- Bobo Lo, *Vladimir Putin and the Evolution of Russian Foreign Policy* (London: Blackwell Publishing, 2003). We can add here that at the time of writing, and in advance of the summit between Presidents Vladimir Putin and George W. Bush in Bratislava, Slovakia, on February 24, 2005, the Bush administration was primarily concerned with counting on Russia as an important partner in the struggle against terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their technologies. According to assistant US secretary of state for Europe and Eurasia, Elizabeth Jones, the two presidents would primarily meet to discuss ways of advancing cooperation on these international security issues, as well as Russia's bid to join the World Trade Organization. See Simon Saradzhyan, "Bush Has Packed Agenda for Putin," *The Moscow Times*, 14 January 2005.

objectives. Nowhere is this in greater evidence than the Eurasian territories of the former Soviet Union, where Russia has traditionally been the major power. The initial period following the dissolution of the USSR witnessed Russia's sudden retreat from many of its satellites in Eastern Europe and proxy states in the developing world. The political trend in many of the newly created republics of the disbanded USSR was likewise one of asserting independence where possible, or seeking greater levels of autonomy from the Russian mother state where full sovereignty was not likely to result. A resurgence of newly rediscovered national identities swept the faltering Soviet Union at the end of the 1980s and start of the 1990s, resulting in some member states of the Union (such as the Baltic Republics and Georgia) declaring their independence from the Soviet federal center.

This was followed by further desire for independence from Moscow not only by other federal-Soviet republics, but also by regions that officially belonged to the newly established Russian Federation itself—in particular, Muslim republics such as Chechnya, Tatarastan, Bashkurtastan.[9] As Russia's traditionally dominant standing in the world declined, the sovereignty and autonomy of the Eurasian nation-states of trans-Caucasia, the Volga-Caspian basin and the Central Asian steppe strengthened during the 1990s. Muslims populated many of these territories and some commentators began to speak of a general process of Russian withdrawal from the Muslim world that is unlikely to be reversed.[10] Although it has often been suggested that the non-Muslim,

[9]- Roland Dannreuther, "Russia, Central Asia and the Persian Gulf," *Survival* 35 (Winter 1993): 93. Chechnya declared its independence in November 1991, Tatarastan declared its state sovereignty in March 1992 and Bashkurtastan even earlier in October 1990. All three have, however, officially remained within the formal framework of the 89 subjects of the Russian Federation.
[10]- Ibid., 93

predominantly Christian-Orthodox Slav nations of the Western Soviet Union—such as Ukraine and Belarus—were less inclined to dispel themselves from Russian influence, they, too, preferred to distance themselves from the USSR, voting for its dissolution in late 1991 and preferring to join the looser organization of the CIS instead.

It can be deduced that Russia's role in its Eurasian spheres of influence declined in the 1990s and it would have therefore been reasonable to assume that the newly independent states of the CIS would be free to develop their own relations with the outside world independent of Moscow's traditional patronage; however, in reality the picture on the ground was far more complex. The independent republics of the CIS and autonomous territories of the Russian Federation have remained far closer to Moscow than initial observations may have led observers to believe. This was due to a diversity of factors, many of which have their roots in the pattern of development that emerged in both tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union.

First, it should be noted that the Soviet Union—unlike Great Britain and France—was a contiguous empire, with no legitimately defined borders between the core Russian state and the imperial periphery.[11] This resulted in an absence of political consensus over the acceptance of certain inter-republic borders once the Soviet state was dissolved—a development that was only further reinforced by the fact that numerous Russians mixed with the indigenous populations of the newly created states and territories. In some of the newly independent states, such as Kazakhstan, the number of ethnic Russians was nearing half of the entire total of the

[11]- Ibid.

population, thereby giving Moscow plenty of scope for leverage over this Central Asian country's domestic policymaking process.[12]

Furthermore, the titular elites in many of the states of the former Soviet periphery were Russified Soviet technocrats and ex-Communist Party apparatchiks. Many still associate Russian culture and the Russian language as compatible with modernity and progressive compared to their own societies, which were often little more than a generation away from feudalism and still dominated by ties of kin and clan. Many of the titular elite studied in the Soviet Union's most prestigious Russian cities, like Moscow and Leningrad (now St. Petersburg) and had Russian wives.[13] Although nationalist currents were present in the Soviet Central Asian Muslim republics during the late 1980s and early 90s, neither the political elites nor the anti-Soviet opposition in these countries showed any concerted desire for separation from the Soviet Union. It was perhaps by no accident of history that none of the leaders of the region were invited to participate in the Belovezshsky Agreement on the disbanding of the Soviet Union and establishment of the CIS in December 1991.[14]

In fact, the leaders of all of the five Central Asian Muslim republics have voluntarily continued to look to Moscow as their main partner in the international arena, guarantor of national security and major

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[12]- See the appendices in Yuriy Kulchik, Andrey Fadin and Victor Sergeev. *Central Asia After the Empire* (London: Pluto Press, 1996). Ethnic Russians comprise close to 40 percent of Kazakhstan's total population, though there are significant numbers of other Slavs also living in the country (some 44 percent of the population professes to be of the Russian Orthodox faith). In Kyrgyzstan ethnic Russians total nearly a quarter of the population; in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan around 10 percent respectively; with smaller and declining (due to immigration and civil war) numbers in Tajikistan.

[13]- Ibid., 46.

[14]- Ibid.

source of relations for trade and investment.[15] In the case of the smaller, weaker members of the CIS—such as Armenia and Moldova—or in disputed territories—such as Abkhazia—the ruling elite has looked to maintain even closer ties with Moscow, especially in the case of Armenia and Abkhazia, who have sought both military and political backing from Moscow in their still unresolved conflicts with Azerbaijan and Georgia respectively. Even Slav states such as Ukraine, where the recent victory of the seemingly pro-Western candidate Victor Yuschenko in the country's residential elections of November-December 2004, continue to promote very close relations with Russia.[16] Despite the Kremlin's concern that Yuschenko's victory would lead to Kiev turning away from Moscow and increasingly leaning westward for its economic and political guidance, Ukraine in particular is likely

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[15]- Kazakhstan's President Nursultan Nazarbayev made a recent public statement proclaiming that Russia was Kazakhstan's major partner on the international arena (see Novosti, "Kazakhstan's President's Regards Russia as Major Partner on International Arena"; available from www.novosti.co.yu; Internet; accessed 12 January 2005. At a public lecture at Oxford University in May 2003, Kazakhstan's Ambassador to the United Kingdom and former foreign minister Erlan Iddrissov, spoke of Kazakhstan's favorable development as a nation under the Soviet Union and reiterated that it would be unforeseeable for the country not to retain mutually close ties with Russia. Despite the fact that his country is often seen as the most independent from Russia of the Central Asian republics, Uzbekistan's President Islam Karimov has made statements to the effect that "Russia guarantees the security and indivisibility of the borders of the Central Asian region, therefore Uzbekistan cannot survive without [the extension of Russian security]." See Yuriy Kulchik, Andrey Fadin and Victor Sergeev. *Central Asia After the Empire* (London: Pluto Press, 1996).

[16]- Latvia's President Ms. Vaira Vike-Freiberga, has recently announced that she will attend official state celebrations in Moscow on May 9, 2005 commemorating the 60th anniversary of the Soviet Union's defeat of Nazism, a declaration seen by many as an effort by Latvia to maintain cordial ties with Russia. One should also note that approximately half of the population of Riga, the Latvian capital, is comprised of ethnic Russians. See Steven Paulikas, "Latvia to Join Moscow War Tribute"; available from www.bbcnews.com; Internet; accessed 12 January 2005.

to remain one of Russia's closest allies in the international arena for years to come.[17]

The states of the CIS will likewise continue to remain highly dependant on Moscow, both economically and militarily. Economically, the Soviet Union was a highly integrated and unified structure that could not be broken up into effective, self-contained units. Also, any rational post-Soviet economic policy—for both Moscow and the newly independent states—required that at least some of these ties be preserved so as to avoid complete economic collapse.[18] The landlocked Central Asian states in particular continue to depend on Russia as the main consumer of their raw materials, their chief supplier of technology and power resources and the key transit point for all their foreign economic activity.[19] Militarily, the CIS has maintained the strategic framework of the former Soviet Union's unified defense area and the present Russian defense doctrine views the territories of the CIS as strategic zones vital to Russian's national security.[20] According to this doctrine, the borders of the CIS—particularly its southern frontiers where the threat of Islamic fundamentalism and international terrorism remains a major concern—should be protected as if they were the

[17]- Despite the seeming concern in Moscow, immediately after Ukraine's central electoral commission declared Yuschenko's victory in the presidential elections, Yulia Tymoshenko, who became Ukraine's prime minister, declared that Russia and Ukraine have the same foreign policy goals, that they are destined in the next 10 years to be high-priority economic partners, and—united by Orthodox Christianity—the two countries shall look at mutual cooperation from the heights of a great historical mission. See Yulia Tymoshenko's, "Kremlin Bureaucrats Lost Ukraine, But Russia Won"; available from www.moscowtimes.ru; Internet; accessed 12 January 2005.

[18]- Roland Dannreuther, "Russia, Central Asia and the Persian Gulf," *Survival* 35 (Winter 1993): 93.

[19]- Yuriy Kulchik, Andrey Fadin and Victor Sergeev. *Central Asia After the Empire* (London: Pluto Press, 1996).

[20]- Ibid.

external borders of Russia. The borders within the CIS are very porous. Once inside the CIS, any potential movement of terrorists, shipment of drugs, arms or other smuggled goods can arrive anywhere in Russia relatively unhindered.[21] It is not surprising, therefore, that Russian Federation troops are stationed as peacekeepers as well as border guards along many sections of the CIS frontiers; their deployment has not always necessarily resulted from the invitation of the local government.[22]

In conclusion, it can be said that despite the initial impression that former Soviet republics have been consolidating their near decade-and-a-half-long independence with substantial vigor, the geopolitics of the region and the historical legacies of the Soviet state have resulted in Russia both directly and indirectly imposing some limitations on these states' sovereignty. Moscow—although no longer able to maintain the Soviet-style iron grip over its Eurasian neighbors—has remained a primary link for both the domestic development and foreign relations of the majority of CIS member states. As one scholar puts it when speaking of Russia's continued influence over the policies of CIS member states, "the Kremlin determines the security arrangements, foreign policies and economic relations of its neighbors, and [speaking of Ukraine during the recent presidential elections] …Moscow's central objective was to ensure a vassal regime that will follow Russia's foreign policy directions and it has employed several strategies to

[21]- Ibid.

[22]- One of the most contentious cases involving Russian troops based in CIS member states has been that of the Russian military bases in Georgia. A number of analysts suggest that Moscow's delay in withdrawing its bases there—to which it has agreed in principle with Georgia's Western-leaning government of President Mikhayil Saakashvilli—is a means by which Russia has been able to maintain a sphere of influence in Georgia, in effect imposing limitations on the country's sovereignty.

achieve this goal."[23] In contemporary international relations, therefore, the political space of the CIS has remained a Russian sphere of influence. On the other hand, member states—despite their formal independence—cannot engage with the outside world with the same degree of freedom as other sovereign states.

2.3 Conceptions of Russian policy towards the GCC states of the Arabian Gulf

Contemporary Russian policy towards the GCC states of the Arabian Gulf falls within Moscow's geo-strategic outlook towards the Middle East on the one hand, and Eurasia and the Caucasus on the other. The GCC has fallen into both Middle Eastern and Eurasian conceptions of contemporary Russian geopolitics.[24] The roots of Moscow's current relations with the states of the GCC go back to the latter 1980s, when Soviet President Mikhayil Gorbachev's active promotion of *rapprochement* with the West facilitated the USSR's withdrawal from Afghanistan and witnessed the establishment of formal political relations with the states of the GCC.[25] The USSR's participation in the US-led coalition during the

[23]- Janusz Bugajski, "Ukraine Needs Western Help in the Coming Cold Peace"; available from www.financialtimes.com; Internet; accessed 29 December 2004.

[24]- There are some schools of thoughts now emerging arguing that in contemporary international relations issues that have been traditionally viewed as Middle Eastern—particularly political Islam, issues of global security, such as weapons of mass destruction, and international terrorism—actually encompass a much broader space that should also include both Central and South Asia, along with the Caucasus. According to this school of thought, current Russian foreign policy towards the Middle East dully includes Central Asia and the Caucasus under one policy umbrella. See the summary notes for the "Carnegie-RAND Workshop on the Future of the Greater Middle East and the Prospects for US-Russian Partnership," Moscow (September 8 and 9, 2003).

[25]- The USSR established diplomatic relations with Oman and the UAE in 1985, with Qatar in 1988 and with Saudi Arabia and Bahrain during the Iraq-Kuwait

Iraq-Kuwait war of 1990-1991 confirmed further the newly established harmony between Moscow and the GCC capitals. This relationship had been absent during much of the Cold War period due to Moscow's embracement of its atheist brand of communist ideology and support for socialist regimes in the Middle East, as well as in other parts of the developing world.[26]

The dissolution of the USSR signaled the end of the war of ideologies between East and West and called for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the new Russian Federation to reassess its policy towards many parts of the world, including the Middle East. The Soviet Union's traditional allies in the Middle East have included the Baathist Arab regimes in Iraq and Syria, Nasserite Egypt, Libya, and Yemen, most of whom received significant amounts of military and economic aid from Moscow throughout much of the Cold War. However, by the late 1980s, the Soviet economy was in crisis and the USSR itself was both in need and it became a recipient of foreign aid from the international community.[27] From about this

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crisis of 1990-91. The case of Kuwait has been an exception to the USSR's lack of mainstream relations with the Gulf monarchies during the Cold War period as Kuwait and the Soviet Union have had full diplomatic relations since 1963. Relations between Kuwait and the USSR, while established, remained cool during most of the 1960s and 70s, but generally improved in the 1980s. See Mohiaddin Mesbahi, *Russia and the Third World in the Post-Soviet Era* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1994).

[26]- Ibid., 341. The Soviet Union's stand against Iraq's invasion of Kuwait was arguably the watershed that set the framework for Moscow's contemporary relations with the states of the GCC, which embraced Moscow's position with genuine satisfaction from the very outset of the crisis. The Soviet position in the crisis paved the way for the establishment of relations between the USSR and Saudi Arabia as well as Bahrain and facilitated substantial volumes of financial aid from the GCC to the ailing Soviet Union.

[27]- Ibid. It is interesting to note that the states of the GCC were already amongst Moscow's international creditors during this time, although the USSR was still officially engaged in Cold War with the West and relations with some of the states

time Moscow's foreign policy makers would embark on a process of de-ideologization. Russian foreign policy was transformed based on pragmatic, Russo-centrist national interests; improved relations with the Western powers, although the country continued to engage the West in geopolitical competition in strategic regions and traditional spheres of influence[28]; and the *economization* of Russian foreign policy making.[29] With regards to the Middle East, this rearrangement of foreign policy priorities meant that states such as Iraq, Syria, Libya and Yemen were becoming more of a liability to Moscow rather than effective political allies or economic partners. This was due in part because the states' were often defaulting on their economic debts. Moreover, the quasi-pariah status in international politics was likewise hindering Moscow's efforts to improve relations with the West.

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of the GCC—such as Saudi Arabia and Bahrain—had not yet been established. Between 1987 and May 1990, Kuwait had extended the USSR loans totaling $450 million.

[28]- Central Asia, the trans-Caucasus and the Caspian Sea basin became subject to notable political, economic and military competition between Russia and the West. Although Russia had largely withdrawn from Eastern Europe, there was still a conflict of interest between Moscow and the European-American alliance over the expansion of NATO. Meanwhile, Washington in particular was rarely pleased with Moscow's continued positive economic overtures towards both Iran and Iraq during the 1990s.

[29]- Bobo Lo, *Vladimir Putin and the Evolution of Russian Foreign Policy* (London: Blackwell Publishing, 2003). Bobo Lo discusses the concept of the economization of Russian foreign policy at some length, arguing that it is an agenda of a specifically economic nature (rather than ideological or political) that has now become the central factor of influence in Moscow's strategy of engaging the international community.

2.4 Timid relations between Moscow and the GCC states during the 1990s

A significant part of Moscow's Middle Eastern foreign policy realignment of the early 1990s involved the withdrawal from many of its traditional proxy states in the region and a concerted attempt to construct new, productive relations with the states of the GCC. This was evident through the articulations of several senior Russian foreign policy officials, as well as a number of high-level delegations sent from Moscow to the Gulf region. For example, Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister at the time, Victor Posuvalyuk, published several articles in the London based Arabic newspaper *Al-Hayat* in early 1995 discussing developments of Russian relations with the Arabian Gulf. With reference to Russian relations with the states of the GCC, his comments included statements such as:

> There are people who are trying to instill doubts in the Gulf states about Moscow's policy. I do not think they have succeeded. [Foreign Minister] Kozyrev's tour of the three Gulf States (in April-May 1992) and his talks with their leaders convinced me that mutual confidence and good relations between Russia and the Gulf States are continuously growing.[30]

When speaking of Prime Minister Victor Chernomyrdin's tour of four GCC states in November 1994, Posuvalyuk proclaimed that:

> The basis of the political dialogue was Moscow's appreciation of the importance of the Gulf community and recognition on the part of our Gulf partners of Russia's

[30]- Stephen Grummon, "Russian Ambitions in the Persian Gulf," *Middle East Quarterly* (March 1995).

> special importance to them. I would note that the agenda of the political dialogue between Russia and the Gulf states is becoming broader and deeper on the level of confidence and trust.[31]

Much of the emphasis of development of relations with the GCC was driven by the new foreign policy rationales of economic priorities over politics—given the economic downturn that Russia was going through during the early 1990s—and focusing on Russian national interest and security ahead of other priorities of a more internationalist character, as was the case in the past. Although Moscow's main foreign policy objectives of the early 1990s were to develop harmonious relations with Washington and the European Union in order to assist Russia's transition to democracy and a market economy, building relations with the Gulf monarchies was a high enough priority for Kozyrev and Chernomyrdin to visit the GCC capitals. These were the first visits of a Russian foreign minister and prime minister to the GCC states and were motivated by interrelated political and economic factors that stemmed back to the Iraq-Kuwait war. Moscow had been partially compensated by the international community for its support of the allied coalition to free Kuwait, with Saudi Arabia alone extending around $2.5 billion in financial assistance to the USSR in 1991.[32] However, the Russian side expected this to be only the beginning of investment inflows from Saudi Arabia and the broader GCC into Russia, and saw potential for Russian arms manufacturers to penetrate the lucrative market for arms sales to the wealthy monarchies of the Gulf. Furthermore, as the 1990s wore on, the UN sanctions regime and the oil embargo against Iraq began to have dire consequences for Moscow's previously flourishing

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[31]- Ibid., 5.

[32]- Andrej Kreutz, "Russia and the Arabian Peninsula," *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies* 7 (2004): 11.

economic relations and positive trade balance with Iraq, with Russian sources estimating that Moscow lost some $40 billion as a result of the Gulf War and the ensuing sanctions against Iraq.[33]

It is evident that the high-level feelers that Moscow sent to the GCC during the early to mid-1990s extended the arm of Russia's declining diplomatic strength. The gestures also attempted to secure further economic aid and entice the Gulf states with new scope for trade relations and investment opportunities with Russia's emerging market economy. Although Moscow could not challenge the *Pax Americana* that had rooted itself in the region since the liberation of Kuwait, Russian diplomatic efforts helped secure the somewhat historic decision by Iraq to recognize the sovereignty of Kuwait in November 1994,[34] helping to reduce regional tension and winning further votes of confidence for Moscow from the GCC.

On the economic front, however, Moscow has been less successful; such high level visits have failed to facilitate any noticeable growth in economic relations between Russia and the GCC during the 1990s. Nor did they secure the type of financial assistance from the Gulf that Moscow had expected would offset its losses resulting from the sanctions regime against Iraq. The tour of Prime Minster Chernomyrdin in particular—his delegation visited Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the UAE and Oman in November 1994—was viewed by many commentators as an attempt to ask for money and sell weapons. The prime minister repeatedly proclaimed to the Gulf business community that the time was now ripe for them to invest in the vast Russian market, that many farsighted foreign companies were already taking advantage of such opportunities,

[33]- Ibid., 41
[34]- Ibid.

and that it would be better for Gulf businesses not to delay.[35] However, the Russian prime minister was questioned constantly about guarantees for the safety of foreign capital invested in the Russian economy. During the 1990s, Gulf business has generally kept away from Russia, continuing, instead to express concern about the risks associated with investing in the country despite high-level visits of that nature.[36]

Not only did the GCC business community prove reluctant to invest in the Russian economy during the 1990s, but hopes that Russia would be able to enter the lucrative GCC arms market failed to materialize. This was despite the fact that senior Russian officials—such as Defense Minister Pavel Grachev—toured the region to promote the Russian defense industry and Russian arms manufacturers showed off their hardware at a number of GCC arms fairs.[37] The United States remained the main provider for security to the GCC region and American and British arms manufacturers maintained dominant positions in the GCC arms market.[38] Despite the high level visits from Russian officials and the fact that Moscow continued to view the Gulf as a strategic region, the stability of which was vital to its national interests, Russian relations with the major states of the GCC remained rather limited and peripheral in

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[35]- Stephen Grummon, "Russian Ambitions in the Persian Gulf," *Middle East Quarterly* (March 1995).

[36]- Mohiaddin Mesbahi, *Russia and the Third World in the Post-Soviet Era* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1994).

[37]- Roland Dannreuther, "Russia, Central Asia and the Persian Gulf," *Survival* 35 (Winter 1993): 107.

[38]- In terms of providing regional security for the Gulf, by 1992 the US already had agreements in place with the main GCC states to store military equipment, aircraft and ships in the Gulf and to conduct military exercises with the GCC armed forces. See Mohiaddin Mesbahi, *Russia and the Third World in the Post-Soviet Era* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1994).

character.[39] GCC leaders also clearly understood that Russia was losing its power and prestige on the international arena and although the Arabs have traditionally preferred a bipolar global political system where Soviet power countered the otherwise unchecked American hegemony, it seemed that the GCC states were no longer treating Russia with the previous degree of seriousness. As one Russian political analyst noted, "obviously Russia cannot be compared with the Soviet Union, which nobody would dare to offend."[40]

Initially, it may have seemed that high level visits such as that of Prime Minister Chernomyrdin were successful in developing relations between Moscow and the GCC states. Russia and Saudi Arabia concluded agreements on cultural, economic and financial cooperation, while Russia and Kuwait jointly established the Russian-Kuwaiti Commission for Trade, Economic, Scientific and Technological Cooperation. However, for the most part, such agreements continued to exist on paper only; the Russian-Kuwait committee did not conduct its first official meeting until August 2002.[41] Commodity trading between Russia and the states of the GCC remained miniscule. While there was interest in developing energy cooperation between Russian and GCC-based companies, there were complaints from the former that Russian oil companies had been denied access to the Saudi oil fields.[42]

Relations between Kuwait and Russia have, on occasion, become strained during the 1990s due to the latter's conciliatory

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[39]- Andrej Kreutz, "Russia and the Arabian Peninsula," *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies* 7 (2004): 41.
[40]- Sergei Markov, "RAI"; available from www.novosti.co.yu; Internet; accessed 30- June 2004.
[41]- Ibid., 19 and 41.
[42]- Ibid.

stance on Iraq, while the Islamicization of the Chechen conflict and Moscow's escalation of force against the Chechen separatists has generally been met with widespread disapproval throughout the GCC. Moscow, although exercising caution to preserve newly developing relations with the states of the GCC, has been likewise very suspicious of the supportive overtures towards its Chechen enemies from their alleged backers in the Gulf. Numerous reports have emerged in the Russian press during the 1990s accusing the Gulf as being a primary source of spiritual and financial support for the Chechen cause.[43]

2.5 Assertive relations between Russia and the GCC: the Saudi-Russian rapprochement

Compared to the first decade of Russia's existence as an independent state, the country's relations with the states of the GCC have been taking a more assertive character in recent years; there is strong evidence available suggesting that Moscow's political ties with the Arabian Gulf have strengthened considerably. Russian relations with Saudi Arabia have been boosted significantly since a senior Saudi delegation visited Moscow in 2003, effecting some tangible improvement in relations between Moscow and Riyadh in the ensuing months. Russian sources admitted that the financial backing that Chechen separatists received from within the Saudi Kingdom had declined significantly, whilst unlike the situation during the 1990s, Riyadh has made some meaningful economic

[43]- See for example the article in *Ruskii Zhurnal*, "*Chechenskiye Arabee Uezhayut Domoy*"; available from www.russ.ru/politics/20020520-fal.html; Internet; 20 May 2002. The article cites the Russian Minister of Defense, Sergei Ivanov, stating in October 2001 that an "enormous level of financial support, which helps to sustain the activities of terrorists (in Chechnya) originates in Saudi Arabia [and] such support continues to be extended (by Saudi Arabia) at present."

openings for Russian business.[44] As was the case after Moscow intervened in favor of Kuwait's liberation during the Gulf War, improving relations between Saudi Arabia and the Russian Federation during 2003 were reflected in an improvement in Russian relations with other states of the GCC. The GCC states have now increasingly taken the position that the Chechen conflict is an internal Russian matter to be decided within the framework of the laws of the Russian Federation and have backed Russia's efforts to join the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC). Furthermore, the GCC—particularly the UAE—arms market has welcomed new business from Russian arms manufacturers, while a constructive energy dialogue has started to emerge between Moscow and the Gulf, with a number of investment projects materializing.

Undoubtedly, the major event defining Russian-GCC relations in recent years has been then Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah Bin Abdul Aziz al-Saud's three-day visit to Moscow in September 2003. While diplomatic relations were restored between Moscow and Riyadh in 1990, the Saudi-Russian relationship had been rather timid and standoffish since that time. Neither party was comfortable with the attitude the other had taken regarding the conflict in Chechnya, while competition—rather than cooperation—had governed Moscow's diplomacy with OPEC, the cartel composed of the world's leading oil producing nations. As was the case with the Saudi-Soviet rapprochement in 1990, the objectives of the prince's visit to Moscow had their roots in a major Middle Eastern political crisis during the preceding months, as well as the historical low point in US-Saudi relations resulting from the terrorist attacks on New York on September 11, 2001.

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[44]- Andrej Kreutz, "Russia and the Arabian Peninsula," *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies* 7 (2004): 29 and 31.

With the possible exceptions of Egypt and pre-revolutionary Iran, Saudi Arabia has traditionally been America's most vital strategic partner in the Middle East. It has served as Washington's main ally in ensuring the stability and security of the strategically vital Arabian Gulf region.[45] However, relations between the two traditional allies reached an all-time low during 2002-2003, when a scathing anti-Saudi campaign steadfastly developed in the American press and segments of the policymaking establishment over the alleged presence of Al-Qaeda sympathizers in the kingdom, together with their allegations of terror financing and links between Saudi officials and some of the hijackers taking part in the September 11 attacks.[46] In July 2002, one Pentagon expert, Laurent Muraviec, published a report in which he claimed that Saudi Arabia was the center of evil and America's most dangerous opponent in the Middle East.[47] The Saudi response was to start repatriating some of its impressive capital investments in the US economy and to express interest in the purchase of Russian weapons.[48]

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[45]- Kenneth M. Pollack, "Securing the Gulf," *Foreign Affairs* 82 (July/August 2003): 2.

[46]- Abdulaziz Sager, "Abdullah's Visit Signals New Saudi-Russian Era"; available from www.arabnews.com; Internet; 3 September 2003.

[47]- Andrej Kreutz, "Russia and the Arabian Peninsula," *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies* 7 (2004): 21.

[48]- Alexander Shumilin, "The Prince and Putin"; available from www.moscowtimes.ru; Internet; accessed 10 September 2003. The article claims that Saudi investments and bank deposits in the US total somewhere between $400-600 billion. Other estimates are more conservative, citing the figure of $200 billion, see Natalia Starichkova, "Russia and Saudi Arabia: New Friendship," *Rosbalt*, 10 September 2003. Several reports in the Russian daily, *Pravda*, during October 2002 claimed that the Saudi government considered paying Russia $4 billion for the development of an anti-ballistic missile system of the fifth generation. See *Pravda*, 15 October 2002, and *Pravda* online, October 2 and 30, 2002.

American and Saudi interests clashed further during 2002 and early 2003 as the American campaign for the invasion of Iraq in March 2003 gained momentum. The Russian stance against the American-led aggression against Iraq reflected public opinion within Saudi Arabia. Riyadh and Moscow now each saw the American threat and unilateral domination of the region as a stark reality and a challenge to the position of both countries.[49] From a political perspective, substantial grounds now existed for closer relations between Moscow and Riyadh, with one Russian newspaper reporting that, "Saudi Arabia, whose relations with the US have worsened, desperately needs new partners in the international arena, particularly among the UN Security Council permanent members."[50]

Saudi-Russian diplomacy

As Andrej Kreutz pointed out, three major developments have surrounded the accelerating Saudi-Russian rapprochement during the last 18 months: the visit of then Crown Prince Abdullah to Moscow in September 2003; Russian President Putin's participation in the OIC Summit the following month; and, the Saudi government's official welcome to Riyadh of the Moscow-appointed Chechen President, Ahmed Kadyrov, as the legitimate representative of Chechnya in January 2004.[51] The Moscow visit of the crown prince underscored the new energy dialogue that some analysts claimed Saudi Arabia desired with Moscow;[52] during his

[49]- Andrej Kreutz, "Russia and the Arabian Peninsula," *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies* 7 (2004): 23.
[50]- *Izvestia*, 3 September 2003.
[51]- Andrej Kreutz, "Russia and the Arabian Peninsula," *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies* 7 (2004): 23.
[52]- Ariel Cohen, "Beware of Saudi-Saudi Rapprochement"; available from www.washingtontimes.com; Internet; accessed 18 September 2003.

short stay in the Russian capital Prince Abdullah sought to persuade Russia to cooperate rather than compete with OPEC and also offered to open the desert kingdom's vast oil and gas sector to investment from Russian energy companies.[53] The two countries subsequently signed an international five-year agreement for cooperation in the oil and gas sectors through which they intended to work together to stabilize world crude markets and agreed to simplify the process of creating joint venture companies in the energy sectors of both countries.[54]

A joint Saudi-Russian working group comprising representatives of the Russian Energy Ministry and the Saudi Oil Ministry was established, while President Putin and Crown Prince Abdullah oversaw the signing of a range of several other less significant documents promoting Saudi-Russian cooperation at the level of science, culture, technology, sports and youth affairs, as well as a memorandum of understanding between the two countries' Chambers of Commerce and Industry.[55] The latter agreement was already reflecting improving economic relations between the two countries, since a three-dozen member delegation from the Russian Chamber of Commerce—led by the renowned Russian Arabist and former Prime Minister Yevgeniy Primakov—had already attended an economic forum in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, in January 2003. The Russian Chamber of Commerce visit to Saudi Arabia was made by numerous senior figures representing a broad range of industrial branches of the Russian economy, including banking, building and construction, mining, metallurgy,

[53]- Marwan Al-Kabalan, "Saudi-Russian Détente Driven by Need to Control Oil"; available from www.gulf-news.com; Internet; accessed 19 September 2003.
[54]- Alexander Shumilin, "The Prince and Putin"; available from www.moscowtimes.ru; Internet; accessed 10 September 2003.
[55]- Andrej Kreutz, "Russia and the Arabian Peninsula," *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies* 7 (2004): 24-25.

telecommunications and others.[56] Unlike the visits of the delegations led by Russian Prime Minister Chernomyrdin during the 1990s, Russian delegations visiting Saudi Arabia in recent years, together with the Saudi visit to Moscow, have led to concrete business being established between Moscow and the GCC. Perhaps the most notable of these has been the Russian oil major, Lukoil, winning a bidding contest for the development of several major promising oil and gas condensate fields located in Rub al-Khali, the very heart of Saudi Arabia.[57]

Given the successful entry of one of Russia's blue chip companies into the Saudi oil and gas sector and the general economic recovery that has been taking place in Russia during the years of the Putin presidency, it is not surprising that some observers claimed that the crown prince's visit resulted from the influence of the Russian economic lobby (in particular, interests from the oil and gas industry).[58] However, such trends also reflected the pragmatic nature of Russian foreign policy making, where the country's policy making elite have sought to develop a range of strategic partnerships with a host of countries as present day international relations have leaned more towards models of multi-polarity. Furthermore, some scholars added that despite Moscow's

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[56]- Alexander Shumilin, "The Prince and Putin"; available from www.moscowtimes.ru; Internet; accessed 10 September 2003.

[57]- Andrej Kreutz, "Russia and the Arabian Peninsula," *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies* 7 (2004): 29.

[58]- "Carnegie-RAND Workshop on the Future of the Greater Middle East and the Prospects for US-Russian Partnership," Moscow (September 8 and 9, 2003): 4. Observers at this seminar claimed that there are individuals who hope eventually to see Russian companies active in Saudi Arabia and Saudi Investment in Russia. Shumilin suggests that optimists in Russia believe that if things go well Saudi Arabia could redirect some $200 billion (of its investments in the US) into the Russian economy in the near future; albeit, one should be cautious about getting too carried away with such suggestions.

reaching out to Washington after the September 11 attacks and Putin's efforts at constructive engagement with the West during 2002-2003, "modern Russia is neither capable of integration nor willing to integrate itself into the structures of the expanded West."[59] Although Putin's government has continued to remain open to Washington and the EU, the Kremlin's enduring Chechen conflict has resulted in Moscow taking active steps to approach the Muslim world with a proposal to join the OIC. Moscow believed that such a move would allow Russia to be more accepted among the nations of the Muslim world, increase its bargaining power among these nations and thereby legitimize Moscow's hard-line position towards the Islamist separatists in Chechnya and the North Caucasus.

Perhaps the most effective factor in Moscow's acceptance by the OIC was its reconciliations of its differences with Riyadh, which, given its wealth and unique position as the guardian of Islam's holiest sites, enjoys special prestige and influence amongst Muslim nations.[60] From this perspective it seems that the visit of the Saudi Crown Prince to Moscow was not devoid of any political significance, since in the joint statement made on the results of the prince's visit, Saudi Arabia backed Russia's initiative on expanding cooperation with the OIC and opened the way for Putin's participation at the OIC summit in Malaysia in October 2003.[61] Furthermore, it appears that the Saudi visit to Moscow furthered Russia's aspirations of securing Saudi recognition that the Chechen problem was a Russian internal matter, as suggested by the

[59]- Dimitry Frenin, "Moscow's Realpolitik," *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*. Quoted in Andrej Kreutz, "Russia and the Arabian Peninsula," *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies* 7 (2004): 20.
[60]- Ibid., 21.
[61]- *ITAR-TASS*, 4 September 2003. Quoted in "FBIS-SOV," 4 September 2003, p. 26.

subsequent statement of then Crown Prince Abdullah: "the lingering Chechen problem should be settled peacefully by means of constitutional procedures within the Russian Federation's framework, based on our conviction that the Chechen question is Russian's internal matter."[62]

The Saudi embracement of Russia's position on the Chechen conflict was underscored further when the both the kingdom and the OIC recognized the victory of the pro-Moscow candidate Ahmed Kadyrov in the Chechen presidential elections on October 5, 2003.[63] Kadyrov was subsequently invited as the guest of the Saudi government on a four-day visit to Saudi Arabia in January 2004 where—despite his Russian puppet image in the Western and Arab press—he was recognized as the formal representative of the Chechen people.[64] Given the harmony that was emerging in Russian-Saudi relations during the previous months, the Kadyrov visit was a clearly noticeable effort by the Saudi Arabian establishment to please Moscow.

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[62]- *Izvestia*, 6 September 2003. Quoted in "FBIS-NES," 8 September 2003, p. 27. We can also add that even before Crown Prince Abdullah flew to Moscow, the Saudi Ambassador to Russia Mohamed Hasan Abdul Wali had already claimed that, "the problem of Chechnya is strictly an internal affair of Russia" and that "the kingdom denounces any forms and types of terrorism." See *ITAR-TASS*, 31 August 2003. Quoted in "FBIS-SOV," 31 August 2003, p. 27.

[63]- Ibid., 27. Representatives of the OIC—including the Deputy-Director of the OIC General Secretary's Department of Political Affairs, Hamdi Imrak, who is also a leading Saudi specialist on Russia—monitored the Chechen presidential elections and recognized Kadyrov's victory as legitimate, despite the fact that the US and other Western countries expressed their skepticism at the elections and the meaning of the victory by the pro-Moscow Kadyrov.

[64]- Ibid.

Russia and other GCC states

While Chechnya has remained a source of friction in the development of Moscow's relations with other states of the GCC, all the Gulf states now recognize Chechnya as being part of the Russian Federation, officially condemning any acts of terrorism by Chechen separatists.[65] For example, Qatar—which in June 2004 sentenced two Russian intelligence agents to life imprisonment for the alleged assassination of Chechen leader Seliman Yanderbayev in Doha on February 13, 2004—condemned the political killing of Ahmed Kadyrov in Grozny on May 9, 2004 as an act of terrorism against Russia.[66]

In fact, Doha and Moscow had been developing relatively close relations since the late 1990s, culminating in the December 2001 arrival in Moscow of the ruler of Qatar, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani. He proclaimed that his country was "hopeful about the development of relations with Russia in all areas and will do everything to achieve this."[67] Relations between the two countries developed further in subsequent years in several areas, with Doha proposing in May 2003 that the Russian gas monopoly, Gazprom, join a large-scale project to build a gas pipeline to the UAE and Oman. In November of the same year, Russia and Qatar jointly called for effective measures to combat international terrorism.[68]

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[65]- Ibid.
[66]- Ibid. Kadyrov was killed in a major bomb blast as he witnessed the annual ceremony commemorating the Soviet Union's defeat of Nazism at the end of World War II, in an incident somewhat reminiscent of the assassination of the late Egyptian President, Anwar Sadat, in October 1981.
[67]- *ITAR-TASS*, 24 December 2001. Quoted in "FBIS-SOV," 24 December 2001, p. 45. Russia and Qatar had already signed an agreement on military cooperation between the two countries in April 1998, following meetings between the foreign ministers of both countries.
[68]- Ibid., 45.

Although the Qatari trial of the Russian agents accused of the Yanderbayev assassination was a source of both friction and embarrassment in relations between the two countries during much of 2004, Russian diplomatic efforts—which helped secure the release of the convicted agents in late 2004—re-confirmed the largely positive direction in which Moscow's relations with Doha have been heading**.**

As Moscow has continued to engage the states of the GCC in a more assertive manner in recent years—and taking into account both the expanding economic cooperation and constructive dialogue at the level of international institutions such as the OIC[69]—Russia's interest in the GCC states is currently expanding on the basis of several important developments. The first relates to the international arms trade, in which the GCC is one of the leading recipient regions and chief importers of high-technology, top-shelf military hardware. Although Russia has been eyeing the GCC market for armaments since the Gulf visits of Foreign Minister Kozyrev and Defense Minister Grachev in the early 1990s, Russian participation in the major regional arms fairs and exhibitions is becoming more prominent. Although Russian arms manufactures still play a distant second fiddle to their American and British counterparts in the GCC arms market, the volume of bilateral

[69]- It is interesting to note that Russia, as a predominantly Christian nation, should seek to leverage its multilateral influence over the Islamic world through international institutions such as the OIC. Formal discussions should not even have taken place over the Russian Federation's membership to such an overwhelmingly Muslim organization. However, Russia's dialogue with Saudi Arabia and other GCC states through the OIC has aided Moscow's cause in having the GCC bloc increasingly recognize that the Chechen conflict is an internal Russian matter. Moreover, it also demonstrated Russia's own recognition that it needs to establish close cooperation with the Gulf states through formal institutions in order to more effectively monitor Gulf based Islamic charities suspected of supporting Islamic fundamentalism in the Russian Caucasus.

military-technical cooperation between Russia and the UAE alone is now in the billions of dollars[70]. As of the mid-1990s, Russia began to negotiate small arms deals with the UAE, supplying the Emirates with armored fighting vehicles. In 2000, Russia concluded a $500 million agreement to supply the UAE with the Pantsir S-1 air defense missile system.[71] The arms trade has likewise facilitated greater levels of coordination between Russia and the GCC states on a range of crucial international and regional issues; for example the UAE and Russia called for "the efficient tapping of the two countries' potential for cooperation in trade, economic and investment spheres" in December 2003.[72] Similarly, in May 2004 Russia and Oman signed a protocol on the completion of bilateral talks on Russia's admission to the World Trade Organization.

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[70]- *ITAR-TASS*, 18 March 2001. Quoted in Andrej Kreutz, "Russia and the Arabian Peninsula," *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies* 7 (2004): 47. According to the DISAM Journal of International Security and Assistance Management, the UAE concluded $1 billion worth of arms transfer agreements with Russia during 1998-2001. See Richard Grimmet, "Conventional Arms Transfers to Developing Nations 1994-2001: Legislation and Policy," *DISAM Journal* (Summer 2002). During the preceding four years (1993-1997), Russia had already supplied the UAE with some $300 million worth of conventional weapons.

[71]- Richard Grimmet, "Conventional Arms Transfers to Developing Nations 1993-2000," *CRS Report for Congress*, 16 August 2001. According to this author, during the period 1997-2001, the UAE ranked first among all developing nations in the value of arms transfer agreements it had concluded with supplier nations, totaling $16 billion. The USA and the major West European supplier nations continued to be the main source of UAE weapons procurement, concluding $9.2 billion in arms transfer agreements with the Emirates during the years 1998-2001 alone. However, the fact that Russia also concluded $1 billion in arms deals with the UAE during the same period, suggests that a variety of developing countries—including non-traditional clients of the ex-USSR, such as the UAE—view Russia as a major source of military equipment. Furthermore, the country has a wide variety of weaponry to sell at highly competitive prices, ranging from the most basic to the highly sophisticated.

[72]- Andrej Kreutz, "Russia and the Arabian Peninsula," *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies* 7 (2004): 48.

According to diplomatic sources, the dialogue between the two countries has been developing in an amicable atmosphere.[73]

Russia remains uneasy about Islamic extremism and international terrorism; the Russian government is giving both issues the highest levels of priority within the context of its outlook on national security. The Russian government's concern with these two reinvigorated threats primarily relates to the ongoing conflict in Chechnya and some of the most infamous acts of terrorism in Russia in recent years. Such acts include the Moscow theatre hostage crisis in October 2002 and the Beslan school massacre in September 2004, both committed by Islamic Chechen militants. Given that the anti-Moscow Chechen radicals are widely perceived to have been receiving moral and financial support from wealthy donors living in the GCC states, it has been vital for Russian national security to maintain close links with GCC governments in order to secure their support in suppressing Chechnya's patrons in the Gulf.

It should also be mentioned that there are now substantial Russian diasporas that have settled in GCC states, such as the UAE where between 5,000-8,000 Russians reside.[74] Most of them are involved in small- and medium-sized business. In a similar manner to Cyprus, the GCC states—with their pro-business economic approach—have become an ideal haven for numerous Russian companies and businessmen seeking to avoid taxation or even criminal prosecution in Russia.[75] It has been added by some Russian sources that Gulf states are becoming even more significant in the eyes of the Russian government, which is likely to want the

[73]- Muawia E. Ibrahim and Haseeb Haider, "Russia Eyes Big Slice of UAE Energy Market"; available from www.khaleejtimes.com; Internet; accessed 3 June 2004.
[74]- Ibid.
[75]- Ibid.

repayment of taxes owed by Russian expatriates and also to keep an eye on the criminal activities of a certain number among them.[76] There exist a number of vital security/economic and Russian diaspora-related interests that are emerging within a more assertive framework for relations between Russia and the Arabian states of the GCC. Therefore, it is not surprising that Ambassador Yakovlev is recently cited making statements to the effect that, "cooperation in different fields with Arab Gulf states has always been a prominent direction of [Moscow's] foreign policy to ensure security, stability and prosperity in this region."[77] The Ambassador's sentiments about Russian-GCC relations are further reflected by Andrej Kreutz, who adds that, "in spite of some temporary and perhaps externally inspired incidents, both sides have now too many common interests to disrupt their cooperation."[78]

[76]- Ibid., 49.
[77]- Muawia E. Ibrahim and Haseeb Haider, "Russia vows to boost ties with UAE"; available from www.khaleejtimes.com; Internet; accessed 11 June 2004.
[78]- Ibid.

Chapter Three

An Islamic Revival in the former Soviet Union: Questions of Political or Cultural Significance?

3.1 Russia, Islam and the Soviet Union

In the West, it can generally be said that neither society at large nor the more enlightened sectors of the policymaking and scholarly elite have fully accepted Islam as part of the social, political or economic mainstream. Muslims living in Western countries are still far too often the victims of negative stereotypes created by images of Islamic terrorism in the popular media or by the discourse of the clash of civilization in more scholarly-oriented circles. Since the times of Queen Isabella's expulsion of the last indigenous Muslims from mainland Spain in the 16th century, Muslim communities in the West have for the most part been comprised of communities of migrants, often arriving in their newly adopted countries as refugees or as individuals seeking economic enhancement. A majority of Muslim communities in the West constitute part of their societies' periphery and face many problems associated with the integration of migrants and other disadvantaged groups seeking upward mobility in the social hierarchy.

By contrast, in Russia and the newly independent states of the former Soviet Union, Islam is very far from being an alien element in society. To the contrary, in the greater Russian state territories of Eurasia, Islam should be treated as one of the vital characteristics

upon which society is founded. Muslims and Christians have coexisted there for the better part of half a millennium. As one scholar observed:

> By contrast to Muslim immigrant communities in the West, for Russia, and the Southern Republics of the ex-USSR, Islam is an organic part of the history, culture and way of life for a large proportion of the population who lived in the Russian Federation for years and so they treat it not as a means of economic betterment in a far-off land, but as a historical homeland.[79]

The process of the incorporation of the Islamic people into the greater Russian state took place between the 15th and 19th centuries. It resulted from both military annexations by Russian imperial forces, as well as voluntary transfers by some Islamic rulers of their territories to Russian jurisdiction.[80] Despite the fact that Russian policies of imperial expansion have often been similar to those of other European powers, the level of general tolerance that Muslims enjoyed within the Russian state was not necessarily compromised.[81] The Russian ruling elites have long considered

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[79]- Galina Yemelianova, "Ethnic Nationalism, Islam and Russian Politics in the North Caucasus." Quoted in Christopher Williams and T. Sfikas, *Ethnicity and Nationalism in Russia, the CIS and the Baltic States* (Ashgate: London, 1999): 123.

[80]- Ibid., 123. Muslim regions that were annexed by the Russian state included the Khanates of Kazan, Astrakhan and the Siberian Khanates, most of the North Caucasus and a good part of the territories of present day Central Asia; while Kasimov Khanate, the Bashkirs, Karbada and North Ossetia voluntarily joined the Russian empire.

[81]- Andrej Kreutz, "The Geopolitics of post-Soviet Russia and the Middle East," *Arab Studies Quarterly* (Winter 2002). Indeed, as added by Galina Yemelianova relations between the bulk of ordinary Russians and Muslims—in the Soviet Union and Tsarist Russia—were largely shaped by common problems, such as their equal

Muslims to be part of greater Russia's native population, making Islam an inner political reality in Russia.[82] Furthermore, Russian nationalists reawakened during the 1990s—because of the dissolution of the USSR—and tended to look at Islam in a fairly objective light. Islam was thereby seen as an ally in Russia's struggle against expansion from the West, which they dread far more than they do that with the East.[83] Even maverick ultra-nationalist leaders such as Vladimir Zhirinovsky—who has spoken openly of the Muslim peril and called for the "ringing of Russian Orthodox church bells on the shores of the Indian Ocean"—recognized the originality of Islam in Russia and the naturalness of Islamic fundamentalism, which he equates to radical nationalism.[84]

It is estimated that 15-20 million Muslims live within the Russian Federation today, with approximately 48 million more

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suffering from the oppression and arbitrariness of the state, as well as by their relatively similar living standards.

[82]- Alexei Chistyakov, "The Middle East in the Light of Geopolitical Changes," *International Affairs* 8 (1995): 52.

[83]- Alexei Malashenko, "Russian Nationalism and Islam." Quoted in Michael Waller, Bruno Coppieters and Alexei Malashenko, eds. *Conflicting Loyalties and the State in Post-Soviet Russia and Eurasia* (London: Frank Cass, 1998). Western scholars, such as Roland Dannreuther, often claim that since subjection to Tatar rule under the vassalage of the Golden Horde during the Middle Ages, Russia has tended to view the Muslim world as a threat to its national security. However, outspoken Russian nationalists such as Vladimir Zhirinovsky and Alexander Solzhenitsyn do not tend to feel a particular fear of Islamic expansion. They and their supporters feel an inherent confidence in Russia's superiority over Mohammedanism and claim that if Islam does present a danger to Russia, it does so only as a component part of some Western strategy aimed at pitting Russia against the Muslim world. Indeed, the Islamic territories of Eurasia have been in retreat in wake of Russian imperial expansion for much of the past four centuries. The major military incursions into Russian territories that have taken place during this time have been initiated in the capitals of the great European—rather than Muslim—powers.

[84]- Ibid.

living in the predominantly Muslim sovereign republics in the Central Asian and Caspian CIS. This makes the total Muslim population of the former Soviet Union comparable to a major Arab country like Egypt.[85] In Russia, Muslims live in three major regions of the country: the Volga-Urals, the North Caucasus and Central Russia. They are concentrated in the nine so-called Muslim autonomies of Adygeya, Ingushetia, Dagestan, Karbino-Balkaria, Karachi-Cherkasia, North Ossetia, Chechnya, Bashkortastan and Tatarastan.[86] In the rest of the CIS, Muslims now live in their own independent sovereign titular republics, namely Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, while there are also relatively small Muslim minorities living in

[85]- Ibid. While the population of the present day Russian Federation stands at some 150 million people, it is not easy to establish the precise numbers of her Muslim minorities. Figures have varied as widely as those given by Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev, who cited a figure of 20 million (which is also the figure given by Alexei Chistyakov) to as little as just over 3 million people cited by a poll conducted in 1993 by the All-Russian Center for Public Opinion. While it is possible to determine the number of Russian Muslims by adding up the total number of Muslim ethnic groups in the country, in Russia—unlike the Middle East—one should not necessarily assume that anyone with a Muslim surname should be duly considered to be professing Islam. Nevertheless, Russian Muslims can be counted in the millions, although just like in other parts of the Muslim world, their degree of adherence to Islam varies from person to person and region to region. A similar comment could be made about Muslims in the Central Asian republics of the CIS. In these areas, one is likely to encounter a high degree of adherence to Islam in rural Uzbekistan and a very low degree of adherence to Islam in urban Kazakhstan, where Russian culture and secularism tends to be dominant amongst the native population. For a relatively accurate breakdown of the religious and ethnic compositions of the populations in the titular Muslim republics of Central Asia, see the appendix in Yuriy Kulchak

[86]- Galina Yemelianova, "Ethnic Nationalism, Islam and Russian Politics in the North Caucasus." Quoted in Christopher Williams and T. Sfikas, *Ethnicity and Nationalism in Russia, the CIS and the Baltic States* (Ashgate: London, 1999): 122.

other autonomous regions of the Caucasus, such as Adjaria and South Ossetia in Georgia.[87]

However, despite the fact the Muslims are so numerous in the former Soviet Union, one should not necessarily assume that ex-Soviet Muslims share identical religious and cultural values to the *Ummah* outside of the CIS. Muslims in the CIS represent dozens of ethnic groups predominantly of Turkic, but also of Finno-Ugaric, Caucasian and Persian origins and vary significantly in the degree of integration into the all-Russian social and cultural dynamic unifying the countless ethnic groups of the Tsarist Russian and Soviet states.[88] Furthermore, given the suppression that all religions suffered during the Soviet Union—and that countless non-Russian citizens of the Soviet state adopted Russian culture, language and social institutions as a means of progressing within the socio-political framework of the country—many Muslims of the CIS have far more in common with the Slav nations of the Western CIS and

[87]- One can also suggest that there are Muslims living in the small, mountainous, autonomous Republic of Abkhazia, where the ethnic Abkhaz population numbered slightly under 95,000 people—a little under 18 percent of the Republic's total population—when the last proper census was conducted over a decade ago. However, Abkhazia is an ancient Christian land from the 4th century AD, where both Islam and Christianity have influenced the development of the national culture and local traditions. The Abkhaz were originally a Christian nation—or in this case, ethnic group—adopting Christianity during the period of the Byzantine Empire. During the 16th century, Abkhazia was brought under the control of the Ottoman Turkish Empire and the Abkhaz were partially converted to Islam. Since the mid-19th century, however, Abkhazia has been under Russian domination. In contrast to other parts of the ex-Soviet Caucasus where Islam has also established a historical presence, Abkhazia is generally not at present regarded as an area where the post-Soviet Islamic revival has reached any notably significant levels.

[88]- Ibid., 122. Compared to the relatively well-integrated Russian Muslims of the Volga-Urals, Siberia and Central Russia, the Muslims of the North Caucasus have been traditionally less effected by the above mentioned all-Russian social and cultural dynamic.

Eastern Europe than they do with their co-religionists in the Arab world, North Africa, Iran, Pakistan or other parts of the Muslim world.

3.2 An Islamic revival in the former Soviet Union

Despite Russia's established history of relations with the Islamic world on the one hand and the tolerance of the Russian state towards its Muslim minorities on the other, cultural ties between the Muslims of the Soviet Union and the mainstream global *Ummah* were minimal.[89] The borders of the Soviet Union remained largely closed for travel to and from the country for the majority of the average Soviet and foreign citizen. There was little prospect for Soviet Muslims to travel abroad for religious pilgrimages such as the *Hajj*. Indeed, due to Soviet state policies—which persecuted all religions—mainstream knowledge of Islam by Soviet Muslims was rudimentary and for the great majority it was more of a cultural identity rather than an active commitment.[90]

However, the liberalization of the political regime that started taking place under Gorbachevian *Perestroika* during the second half of the 1980s would bring a drastic transformation of the state of affairs for Islam in the Soviet Union. It led to numerous commentators observing that an Islamic revival has been taking

[89]- Indeed, as well noted by Shireen Hunter, some of the most prominent contact between Soviet Muslims and the global *Ummah* took place after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, when Soviet soldiers of Central Asian (Muslim) origin came into contact with the Afghan *Mujahideen* and their Saudi and Pakistani allies on the battlefields of that country. See Shireen T. Hunter, *Central Asia Since Independence* (Washington DC, Preager: Westport, 1996).

[90]- Shirin Akiner, "Political Trends in the New Caspian States: Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan." Quoted in "The Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research (ECSSR)," (Abu Dhabi: Caspian Energy Resource, 2000): 80.

place in the USSR's former Muslim dominions during the 1990s and up to the present day. The rapid nature of the Soviet collapse and the resulting levels of sovereignty—both de facto and de jure—that it bequeathed upon the Central Asian republics left the ruling elites in these countries ill-prepared to fill the ideological void created by the decline of Marxism. This led to the proliferation of a variety of ideological trends in the region, the roots of which were nurtured by the liberalization that took place during the Gorbachev era. This included various strands of ethno-nationalism, democratization and Islam.[91]

Despite the strong legacy of secularism in the former Soviet Union and hope for democratic change in the region during the initial years of independence, many factors weighed in to ensure that Islam would be amongst the most prominent of the newly emerging ideologies in the post-Soviet Central Asia. As noted by one scholar:

> The overwhelming majority of Central Asia's indigenous population is at least nominally Muslim. Until the establishment of Soviet rule, Islam provided both the legal and moral framework within which Central Asian society operated. Islam's legacy thus has important implications for the current process of nation-and-institution-building and the governance of Central Asia.[92]

The fact that millions of Soviet Muslims never lost touch with their religious heritage during the Soviet years—coupled with the efforts of the Central Asian governments to encourage an official version

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[91]- Mehrdad Heghayeghi, *Islam and Politics in Central Asia* (London: Macmillan, 1995).
[92]- Shireen T. Hunter, *Central Asia Since Independence* (Washington DC, Preager: Westport, 1996).

of Islam as part of the reinvention of national identities[93]—resulted in Islam manifesting itself both as a component of each of the new ideologies sweeping the region and as an all-encompassing ideology in its own right. Although the constitutions adopted by the Central Asian republics specified secular democracy as the form of government, the fact that Islam was emerging at the ideological level and was supported by the governments themselves as a chief symbol of national independence paved the way for a cultural Islamic revival and at least the partial integration of these nominally Muslim republics into the mainstream Muslim world.

3.3 What constitutes the Islamic revival in the former Soviet Union and what role have the countries of the GCC played in it?

From the outset, the states of the GCC have played an active role in the Islamic revival of the Central Asian states and other Muslim regions of the Russian Federation. This is evident in the visit to the Central Asian states of Saudi Foreign Minister Saud al-Faisal. He came there in February 1992 to establish formal relations. It appears that a decision was made by the Saudi government to support these countries financially.[94] The Saudis had already sponsored the first mass *Hajj* for Muslims from the Soviet Union in 1990, bringing some 1,500 people to Jeddah en route to the holy city of Mecca

[93]- In newly independent Uzbekistan, following a visit to Saudi Arabia and performing an *umra* (a short pilgrimage to Mecca) in 1992, President Islam Karimov began prefacing his public speeches with the phrase from the Qur'an, "*Bismallah al Rahman al Rahim*" (In the name of God the Merciful and the Compassionate), whilst earlier, Karimov had taken the oath of his presidential office on the Qur'an. See Dilip Hiro, *Between Marx and Muhammad: The Changing Face of Central Asia* (London: HarperCollins, 1994).

[94]- Mohiaddin Mesbahi, *Russia and the Third World in the Post-Soviet Era* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1994).

from many Soviet cities on chartered Aeroflot planes.[95] However, after the 1992 visit and following several visits to the Gulf states by leaders of the Central Asian Republics, significant donations began to arrive from the Gulf to Central Asia, thereby providing crucial financial assistance allowing an Islamic revival to take place.

The Islamic revival in the former Soviet Union has essentially consisted of the proliferation of mosques and prayer houses, a growth in Islamic education through the establishment of *madrasahs* for teaching the Qur'an and the Arabic language, and the spread of a wide diversity of Islamic printed publications and video and audio cassettes, all of which have made Islam readily accessible to a population previously deprived. This has allowed the faithful amongst the former Soviet Muslim population to become far more aware about their religious heritage and become more active adherents to their faith. As a consequence, one will notice Muslims in various parts of the former Soviet Union actively engaging in public prayer sessions, observing various Islamic rituals, fasting during Ramadan and when possible, making a pilgrimage to Mecca. Funding and various other forms of support from the Gulf, as well as many other countries of the Muslim world, have played a central role in fostering the revival.

The proliferation of mosques has perhaps been the most visible element of the Islamic revival in the former Soviet Union. Existing records suggest that prior to the revolutions of 1917, the Central Asian territories of the Russian empire had been home to some 26,279 mosques, 6,000 *maktabs*, 300 *madrasahs* and 45,399 members of the Muslim clergy.[96] By 1942, in the wake of the

[95]- Ibid., 340. Prior to the 1990 mass *Hajj* by Soviet Muslims, only several dozen Muslims from the USSR had been able to perform the *Hajj*.
[96]- Mehrdad Heghayeghi, *Islam and Politics in Central Asia* (London: Macmillan, 1995).

consolidation of Marxist-Leninist ideology in the Soviet Union, the number of mosques was reduced to 1,312 and was later reduced further still.[97] However, by the mid-1990s, with the Central Asian Islamic revival well under way, it is estimated that 7,800 mosques had been re-opened in Central Asia, with nearly half of them located in Uzbekistan.[98] The most elaborate mosques built in the major cities of Central Asia have been financed by both private donations and public funding from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and other GCC states, as well as Turkey, which has been an active player both economically and politically in the region.[99] In Russia—then part of the Soviet Union—while there were only 179 functioning mosques amongst a Muslim population numbering well into the millions during the 1980s, the number had jumped to over 5,500 registered mosques during the late 1990s. Financial support from the Gulf has also been active in the proliferation of mosques in Russia's Islamic revival.[100]

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[97]- Ibid., 23.

[98]- Ibid. The figures for the numbers of mosques in Central Asia are of course educated estimates and it is difficult to establish precise numbers, especially with the spread of Islamic fundamentalism in the rural regions of Uzbekistan, such as the densely populated Ferghana Valley. While mosques officially registered with the religious organs of the state are easily accountable in government statistics, much smaller, informal and makeshift prayer centers—the equivalent of Egyptian *Zawayas*, or prayer rooms—are not. One specialist on Islam in Central Asia, Dr Dilshod Rasulov from the Al-Beruni Institute of Oriental Studies in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, suggested to me that in the Uzbek capital, each *mahalla* (a local term for neighborhood quarter) had its own impromptu mosque. Dr Dilshod Rasulov, interview held in Oxford, United Kingdom, December 20 2004.

[99]- Ibid.

[100]- Galina Yemelianova, *Russia and Islam: A Historic Survey* (London: Palgrave, 2002). Of the newly opened mosques in the Russian Federation, about 2,000 were in Chechnya, 1,670 in Dagestan, 1,000 in Tatarastan and 400 in Ingushetia. The number of Islamic clergymen had also risen significantly, from just 30 active Muslim religious figures in Russia in the late 1980s, to some 5,000 a decade later.

The spread of Islamic education has also been a central feature of the Islamic revival in the region. It has been gaining popularity amongst many young ex-Soviet Muslims seeking a more meaningful level of participation in the formation of new national identities. Enrollment in the hundreds of *madrasahs* that have been opening in Central Asia since independence has been increasing very noticeably, while in Uzbekistan—the most populous and religiously active state in the region—as many as 5,000 students have been receiving an Islamic education in various mosques throughout the country.[101] The curriculums of the Central Asian Islamic schools cover courses in Arabic, *Shari`ah* law, *Fiqh*, Islamic history and civilization and Islamic culture, with the most comprehensive training being offered in Uzbek schools, where the Arabic language and culture are taught intensively.[102]

In Soviet Russia during the 1980s, there was only one *madrasah* at the level of secondary education. By the end of the 1990s, there were 106 religious schools and 51 registered religious centers and societies which provided at the least a basic level of Islamic education.[103] In the North Caucasus republic of Dagestan alone, the

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[101]- Mehrdad Heghayeghi, *Islam and Politics in Central Asia* (London: Macmillan, 1995).

[102]- Ibid., 97. It should be noted that shortages of qualified instructors and particularly of teachers of Arabic language has been a major problem for many Central Asian schools in trying to provide high levels of Islamic education. In Kazakhstan for example, the mufti has translated the Qur'an into Kazakh, but most Central Asian clerics agree that the real meaning of Islam can only be conveyed through a comprehensive understanding of Arabic. This is where assistance from the Gulf has been particularly important, as finance from the region has been able to provide for at least some level of quality instructors – both by sending individuals from the Muslim world to Central Asia and by receiving Central Asian students of Islam at training centers in the Gulf and other parts of the Muslim world.

[103]- Galina Yemelianova, *Russia and Islam: A Historic Survey* (London: Palgrave, 2002).

Islamic revival in religious education had comprised the establishment of nine Islamic institutes, 25 *madrasahs*, 570 *maktabs* and 11 Islamic cultural and charity centers, resulting in over 200,000 Dagestanis—equivalent to around 20 percent of the ethnic Dagestani population in the republic—being involved in some kind of religious education.[104] With the proliferation of institutes of Islamic learning becoming such a prevalent feature of Russia's Islamic revival, the study of Islam and the *Shari`ah* has been increasingly introduced into the curriculum of comprehensive schools in densely Muslim-populated regions of the Russian Federation.[105]

Muslim students from the former Soviet Union numbering in the thousands have also taken up the study of Islam at various institutions of Islamic learning in the GCC states and other parts of the broader Middle East. Dozens of official scholarships have been provided by the government of Saudi Arabia to ex-Soviet Muslims wanting to study at Islamic universities in Saudi Arabia, other Gulf States and the Muslim world in general. The Saudi government has also been quite active in supporting the export of Islamic publications, periodicals and other forms of literature, as well as audio and video materials from the Gulf, Pakistan, Great Britain and other foreign countries directly to the Muslim regions of the former Soviet Union.[106] In 1990, at the height of Gorbachevian political liberalization, Saudi Arabia had already donated one million copies of the Qur'an to the religious board of Uzbekistan for distribution inside the country.[107] Since that time, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and other states of the GCC have contributed further

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[104]- Ibid., 138.
[105]- Ibid.
[106]- Ibid.
[107]- Mehrdad Heghayeghi, *Islam and Politics in Central Asia* (London: Macmillan, 1995).

volumes of Islamic literature, but demand has often outstripped supply, particularly given the expense involved in printing such materials and the inability of imports to cover the growing demand for greater knowledge of Islam. [108]

A number of official and semi-official Islamic publishing houses engaged in the production of Islamic literature have established themselves in the former Soviet Union; they are believed to be linked to the Gulf. However, given the politicization of Islam and the fact that a sizeable volume of illegal Islamic literature is smuggled into the Muslim regions of the former Soviet Union, many of the Islamic publishing houses prefer to maintain their anonymity.[109] As previously mentioned, Gulf money has also sponsored the annual *Hajj* for thousands of former Soviet Muslims, with the late King Fahd of Saudi Arabia—under the banner of *Al-Da'awa*—becoming one of the major patrons sponsoring the pilgrimages and helping make a once-in-a-lifetime journey that would have been impossible during Soviet times accessible to many ordinary Muslims from the region. There are currently some 20,000 Russian Muslims who conduct the *Hajj* annually.[110] In Central Asia, there are also thousands of pilgrims making the trip to Mecca each year. The trips of some 3,000 annual Central Asian pilgrims to

[108]- Ibid., 97
[109]- Galina Yemelianova, *Russia and Islam: A Historic Survey* (London: Palgrave, 2002). Some of the leading specialized Islamic publishing houses in Russia include Santlada in Moscow and Iman Publishers in Tatarastan. Other semi-official publishers engaged in the production of Islamic literature include Tonar Publishers (Moscow); Kamaz Kitap Nashriyati; Naberezhnie Chelny (Tatarastan); Kitap (Bashkurtastan) and Foliant (Karachevo-Cherkassia).
[110]- Ibid.

Mecca originate in Uzbekistan and many of the pilgrims are benefactors of subsidized journeys resulting from Gulf patronage.[111]

The annual *Hajj* has been perhaps the main cultural vehicle available for ex-Soviet Muslims to enhance contact with their fellow co-religionists from other parts of the Middle East and the remainder of the Islamic world. This has resulted in the familiarization of ex-Soviet *Hajjis* with other interpretations of Islam—including *Salafi* and *Wahhabi* Islam—different from the largely moderate versions of the mainly *Sufi* Islam traditionally prevalent in ex-Soviet Central Asia. Some observers suggest this Islamic sect has brought with it controversial consequences including fundamentalism.[112] Furthermore, one can suggest that many foreign Islamic charities—and their official backing for the ex-Soviet Islamic revival—have furthered the CIS *Ummah's* exposure to different interpretations of Islam. This is due to their support of the proselytizing activities of Islamic missionaries that have been active in the region and the latter's establishment of various Islamic training camps and religious programs.[113] The list of official and unofficial Islamic organizations supporting such activities within the context of the Islamic revival in the former

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[111]- Dr Dilshod Rasulov, Interview with the author. During the 1990s, it was estimated that an average journey for the *Hajj* from Central Asia would incur expenses of some $800, which was of course well beyond the financial capabilities of most Central Asian Muslims. This made the financial support from Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states absolutely vital if such pilgrimages were to become a reality. However, Heghayeghi notes that despite the generosity towards Central Asian Muslims coming from the Gulf, such funding for the *Hajj* (from Saudi Arabia) was not necessarily guaranteed and was not provided for Central Asian Muslims in some years of the 1990s. See Mehrdad Heghayeghi, *Islam and Politics in Central Asia* (London: Macmillan, 1995).

[112]- Galina Yemelianova, *Russia and Islam: A Historic Survey* (London: Palgrave, 2002).

[113]- Ibid., 139.

Soviet Union in general is impressive and includes many with direct and indirect links to the GCC: (official) University of Muhammad Bin Saud; the Islamic Development Bank; the Organization of Islamic Conference; the Islamic Fund for Cooperation; the World Islamic League; the World Association of Islamic Youth; (unofficial) the Committee of Muslims in Asia in Kuwait; the Islamic Charities of *al-Waqf al-Islamii*; *Taiba* and *Ibrahim al-Ibrahim* of Saudi Arabia; the International Islamic Charities of *Ibrahim Hayri, Igatha, Zamzam*; and finally, the UAE Islamic Charity Organization a*l-Khairiyya*.[114]

Clearly, such a significant level of support from international Islamic institutions is fuelling an Islamic revival in the former Soviet Union's Muslim territories in a symbolic sense. Moreover, it is also facilitating some notable qualitative changes among the region's Muslims, including steady growth in mosque and Friday prayer attendances, greater observance of various Islamic rituals and fasting during the holy month of Ramadan, and the rise of interest in Islamic education among the regions youth.[115] While mosque attendances and participation in Friday prayers vary from region to region—despite the deeply ingrained traditions of the USSR's secular practices as well as the lack of local resources capable of facilitating an even deeper level of Islamic penetration—

[114]- Ibid.

[115]- Ibid. It is pretty safe to say that participation in Friday prayer has been steadily rising in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, while in the other three Central Asian republics, mosque attendances have not increased in proportion to the numbers of mosques that have opened their doors to the faithful during the 1990s. The most devout adherence to Islam in Central Asia has been observed in the Ferghana Valley and other rural regions of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan (see Mehrdad Heghayeghi). In Russia, Dagestan and other parts of the North Caucasus have been amongst the Muslim regions most deeply absorbed in the Islamic revival, and mosque attendances have been most evident in these areas.

we are presently witnessing a Muslim religious revival in the former Soviet Union unparalleled by anything in living memory.

3.4 Islamicization of regional politics and the Islamic revival in the CIS

For the most part, the Islamic revival in the former Soviet Union has taken on a moderate character[116] and has taken place outside of the context of the mainstream political culture of the region. However, the revival has largely retained the Soviet tradition of authoritarianism and has not been devoid of violence. Rising mosque attendances and public gathering of Muslims at proceedings such as Friday prayer have not necessarily been supported by religious sermons criticizing the state or mobilizing opposition groups, as has been witnessed in Muslim countries like Iran, Algeria, Egypt or Pakistan at various times during the 1970s-1990s.[117] Students from the various Islamic centers of learning that have mushroomed in the Muslims regions of the CIS—such as the

[116]- It should be noted that Islam in the Muslim territories of Turkistan has traditionally been more of *Sufi* character and less politically strident than has traditionally been the case in the Middle East.

[117]- Despite the introduction of secular politics through the advent of various strands of Arab nationalism—which were for a time dominant in the politics of the post-colonial state in the Middle East (e.g., Baathism, Nasserism)—a clear demarcation between religion and politics has yet to take place in the Arab-Muslim world. Many of the dominant formal and unofficial opposition groups in the Middle East tend to be advocates of a religious agenda as the main element of their politics, be they the Iranian Shi'ite clergy in the 1970s, the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood in the 1980s, Algeria's FIS or even Turkey's *Refah* party during the 1990s. In Muslim ex-Soviet Central Asia and other parts of former Turkistan, seven decades of Marxist-Leninism has done much to do away with any association that Islam may have had with politics in the region in pre-Soviet times and there is presently a clear precedent for the separation of religion and politics – as is stipulated in the constitutions of the newly independent Central Asian states.

nearly 200,000 Dagestanis engaged in Islamic education in that republic—have not necessarily gone on to join Islamic political movements or employed their greater knowledge of Islam to propagate a religious influence on regional politics. In Muslim regions of the CIS where the Islamic revival has been less prevalent amongst the population, discussions of an Islamic revival and its association with politics bear even less relevance. However, it should be noted that the post-Soviet states of the region have, certainly since the Afghan war of the 1980s, been very sensitive towards the question of Muslim militancy and have consequently sought to maintain a tight degree of regulation over the Islamic religious institutions which have nurtured the Islamic revival.[118]

Nevertheless, a strong tendency of what one might refer to as the Islamicization of regional politics in certain Muslim dominated areas of the former Soviet Union has been taking place in parallel to the mainstream Islamic revival. Unfortunately, it has been accompanied by some of the worst political violence seen in the region since the end of the USSR. Three regions in particular have become notoriously engulfed by the coalescence of Islam and chronic political violence in the CIS: the autonomous Republic of Chechnya within the Russian Federation; the Ferghana Valley region of the Republic of Uzbekistan in Central Asia; and,

[118]- Most of the CIS states have created a political culture of relatively limited political plurality since independence. It has resulted in relatively tight control over civil society organizations, including NGOs and any independent forms of political or religious activity. Since governments in the largely authoritarian states of Central Asia—such as Uzbekistan—are very sensitive towards Islamist opposition groups, they have made it very difficult for religious organizations to obtain licenses for the legalization of their activities. Political parties based on religious principles are banned in Uzbekistan under the constitution. However, in a similar manner to Middle Eastern states, the government encourages a state-sanctioned Islamic discourse to be channeled into society.

Uzbekistan's neighboring country, the Republic of Tajikistan.[119] Chechnya has been the scene of two full-scale wars waged by Moscow against Chechen rebels. The Kremlin has accused the rebels of seeking to break their peripheral republic away from the federal center, as well as waging terrorist acts against Russian citizens and territory. Since the late 1990s, the Chechen conflict has taken on an increasingly Islamic dimension as Chechen separatists have promoted the wide use of Islamic *Jihadist* rhetoric and insurgent strategies in their stance. Meanwhile, Moscow has sought to associate Chechen Islamists with international Islamic terrorist networks, such as Al-Qaeda.[120] In Uzbekistan's Ferghana Valley, the traditional hotbed of Islamic radicalism in Central Asia, Islamists initially sought to impose their own version of a local Islamic state governed by the *Shari`ah*, and more recently have been using the region as a base from which to conduct terrorist raids against the Uzbek government. In Tajikistan—in what has

[119]- There have been further incidents of violence involving Islam in other Muslim regions of the CIS that one could classify as sociopolitical, particularly in Kyrgyzstan, where foreign workers have been kidnapped and a number of recent terror acts by Islamic groups have claimed the lives of innocent civilians. However, the level of alleged Islamist militancy in Kyrgyzstan, while clearly a concern for the authorities in the country, is by no means comparable to that which has engulfed Chechnya or other parts of Central Asia. Furthermore, Kyrgyzstan's Islamism has been centered in the region of the town of *Osh*, on the Republic's border with Uzbekistan in the Ferghana Valley, a hotbed of Islamic militancy in the CIS. The Kyrgyz authorities themselves have alluded to the fact that recent terror acts taking place in *Osh* (and further acts of violence in the Kyrgyz capital, Bishkek) are a spill-over from Uzbek Islamism cultivated in the Ferghana Valley, and that the *Hizb-al-Tahrir* (an underground Islamic group accused of promoting terror in Kyrgyzstan) is closely linked to the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (an established Islamic insurgent group operating from the Ferghana Valley).

[120]- As Galina Yemelianova says, "In contrast with the rest of the Muslim regions of Russia, Islamic principles have actually been translated into political and military actions in post-Soviet Chechnya" and we have seen the "intertwining of the Chechens' struggle for freedom with their Islamicization."

perhaps been the most bloody and least publicized of the former Soviet Union's Islam-associated conflicts—a civil war raged for most of the 1990s and Islamists made several concerted attempts to take power in the country. These conflicts, which cost thousands of military and civilian lives, have helped nurture the now widespread perception that Islam in the CIS is becoming intricately linked to international terrorist organizations and that foreign organizations (including foreign governments) are aiding CIS Muslim terrorists.

In recent years, Russian societal perception of Islam has been increasingly shaped by television images of bearded Chechen fighters wearing green Islamic bands around their heads.[121] Such images have tended to foster the view that Islam is a violent religion. Given the fact that Muslims have lived side by side with Christians, Jews and other religious groups in the Russian speaking territories of Eurasia for centuries, many people within the CIS claim that this wave of Islamic fundamentalism in their lands is a new trend resulting from alien interpretations of Islam brought in from the Gulf, Afghanistan and other parts of the Muslim world.

As both state and society in the CIS have become more sensitive about Islam during the last decade, particular attention has been paid to the activities of foreign Islamic charities and governments that have helped nurture the Islamic revival in the region. There are those holding the conviction, for example, that Saudi assistance in providing an Islamic education to the Muslim youth of the CIS increases the likelihood of the spread of Islamic fundamentalism.[122] New interpretations of Islam, such as those

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[121]- Alexei Malashenko, "Russian Nationalism and Islam." Quoted in Michael Waller, Bruno Coppieters and Alexei Malashenko, eds. *Conflicting Loyalties and the State in Post-Soviet Russia and Eurasia* (London: Frank Cass, 1998): 192.
[122]- "Carnegie-RAND Workshop on the Future of the Greater Middle East and the Prospects for US-Russian Partnership," Moscow (September 8 and 9, 2003): 14.

propagated by *Salafi* or *Wahhabi* Islam, were rarely encountered in the CIS at the start of the 1990s and both originate from Saudi Arabia. Although the Saudi government has strongly denied any links with Islamic-related terrorism in the CIS and is in fact engaged in substantial conflict against Islamic fundamentalists in its own country, *Wahhabism* has at present become a de facto name for Islamic fundamentalism in the former Soviet Union.[123] Therefore, Islamic charitable assistance coming from Saudi Arabia and other parts of the Gulf has become the subject of considerable concern for CIS countries—which are home to substantial Muslim populations—and has caused occasional tension in relations between Moscow and the GCC states.

The current Russian government in particular, rocked by numerous high profile and bloody terrorist raids that have their source in the Chechen conflict, has been highly suspicious of the

[123]- For all intents and purposes, one may consider it inaccurate to refer to present day Islamists in the CIS as *Wahhabis*, given that *Wahhabism* refers to the strict doctrine of Islam founded by Mohammad Ibn Abdul Wahhab, the 18th century tribal leader of the Arabian Peninsula in whose teachings the present day Saudi state has its origins. Ibn Abdul Wahhab's followers became known as *Wahhabis* and today, *Wahhabi* Islam is the official state ideology of Saudi Arabia, with the Qur'an serving as the kingdom's constitution (see As'ad Abukhalil, *The Battle for Saudi Arabia: Royalty, Fundamentalism and Global Power* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2004)). In the context of the usage of the term in the CIS, it is believed that the concept was introduced by the KGB and the mass media in the late 1980s in reference to Islamic fundamentalist activities in the Ferghana Valley. Within the context of the Islamic revival taking place in the CIS, *Wahhabism* advocated a return to true Islam after decades of absence under communism. It was based on wider doctrinal foundations than those of Ibn Abdul Wahhab, including those of A. Maududi, Sayyid Qutb, Hasan Turabi and other contemporary ideologues of Islam. By the mid-to-late 1990s, the term *Wahhabism* acquired a derogatory meaning in the CIS and became synonymous with international Islamic extremism, which presented a major threat to the integrity and national security of Russia and the other former Soviet Muslim republics, see Galina Yemelianova, *Russia and Islam: A Historic Survey* (London: Palgrave, 2002).

influence that North Caucasus-based Islamic schools allegedly supported by Gulf funding may have had on the activities of anti-Russian Muslim groups in the region.[124] President Putin, holding the conviction that international terrorism is currently Russia's number one foreign policy threat, has made a vociferous case to the international community linking Chechnya-related acts of terrorism to international terrorist networks, some of which have strong links to Saudi Arabia.[125] The Russian president has also been ready to use the September 11 attacks in New York to his advantage in pursuing his anti-terrorism crusade, nurturing the idea of an association between Saudi Arabia and international terrorist networks. This was reflected in Putin's public comment during a recent meeting with US President George W. Bush in St. Petersburg: "We will not forget that 16 of the 19 hijackers on September 11 2001 were Saudis."[126]

According to some sources, references to Saudi links to international terrorism and support for anti-Russian government groups in the North Caucasus are not unfounded, as it has been suggested that Gulf-based charities and wealthy individuals contributed more than $100 million in support of Chechen separatists between 1997 and 1999 alone.[127] The Saudi government, while denying any association with terrorist groups either in Russia

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[124]- Andrej Kreutz, "Russia and the Arabian Peninsula," *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies* 7 (2004): 17.

[125]- As Bobo Lo puts it, "for much of [Putin's] presidency, Moscow has sought to internationalize the Chechen war in order to legitimize Russian military operations in the republic (amongst as many international constituencies as possible)." See Bobo Lo, *Vladimir Putin and the Evolution of Russian Foreign Policy* (London: Blackwell Publishing, 2003).

[126]- Andrej Kreutz, "Russia and the Arabian Peninsula," *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies* 7 (2004): 22.

[127]- Ariel Cohen, "Beware of Saudi-Saudi Rapprochement"; available from www.washingtontimes.com; Internet; accessed 18 September 2003.

or elsewhere in the world, has been a vociferous critic of the Kremlin's hard-line stance towards Chechnya; statements from Saudi officials have on occasion described the Russian military operation in Chechnya as inhumane acts against the Muslim people and claimed that the events taking place in the breakaway republic are a tragedy.[128] However, such statements have been toned down in more recent years as Moscow and Riyadh have been forging closer ties due to their convergence of strategic interests, as has already been referred to in the previous section.

International pressure exerted upon Riyadh from Moscow—and more usually, Washington—has resulted in the Saudi government clamping down on the activities of charities and private foundations operating in the kingdom. In late February 2004, Riyadh announced a new royal decree under which a new legal body was established to control and restructure overseas charities run by Saudi Arabia.[129] Although it is difficult to judge whether such steps by the Saudi government will have any relevance for a desired reduction of Chechnya-related terrorist incidents taking place in the Russian Federation, a comment made by former Russian Prime Minister Sergei Stepashin in 2004, suggests the optimism of the Russian government in this respect: "the financial backing of Chechen fighters, which largely originated from the Saudi Kingdom and other Arab Gulf countries, is declining noticeably."[130] However, the terrible massacre of hundreds of children by Chechen militants in September 2004 at a primary school in the town of Beslan, North

[128]- The first of these two statements was made by a Saudi representative during an OIC meeting in June 2000 in Kuala Lumpur, while the second was made during 2000 and called for "a quick end to the fighting and a peaceful solution to the North Caucasus conflict." See Andrej Kreutz, "Russia and the Arabian Peninsula," *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies* 7 (2004): 18.
[129]- Ibid., 30.
[130]- *ITAR-TASS*, 8 April 2004. Quoted in "FBIS-SOV," 8 April 2004.

Ossetia, clearly suggests that the basis for such optimism is not at all well-founded.

3.5 Islamicization of regional politics in the CIS: Is there a link to the Gulf?

It is very difficult to establish whether the Islamicization of regional politics in the CIS—such as that which has taken place during the Chechen conflict or Islamist militancy in Uzbekistan's Ferghana Valley—has a causal link to the states of the GCC, as has been widely suggested by the regional political establishments and often perceived by society at large. It is unclear as to what extent Russian President Putin really believes that international, rather than domestic, terrorism is the overriding security threat facing Russia today.[131] The Russian government, although consistent in its position that Chechen separatists have been receiving various forms of support from the Gulf during the 1990s, only seems to have started actively making the case for associating the Chechen conflict with networks of international terrorism after the New York attacks of September 11.

Increasingly frustrated by the devastating raids launched by Chechen militants against the Russian Federation during 2002-2004,[132] the Russian government has hardened its position of non-

[131]- Bobo Lo, *Vladimir Putin and the Evolution of Russian Foreign Policy* (London: Blackwell Publishing, 2003).

[132]- The most prominent of these attacks against Russian citizenry and state property during this period have included the seizure by Islamist Chechens of a Moscow theatre with several hundred hostages (October 2002), the alleged downing of two civilian passenger planes (August 2004), suicide bombings in the Moscow metro (February 2004) and the recent Beslan school hostage massacre (September 2004), where up to 1,000 school children, parents and staff were taken

negotiation with the Chechens; however, unable to quell the rising terrorist tide, the government has also sought to internationalize the conflict. Most analysts seem to agree that the claims made by the Russian authorities that Chechen separatists are building close ties with international Islamic terrorist networks are difficult to confirm. Albeit, the emergence of international terrorism as a global strategic priority after September 11 has clearly aided the Russian government's cause in "siding itself with the forces of Western civilization increasingly confronted by the hordes of Islamic barbarism."[133] The events of September 11 and terrorist raids, such as the Beslan massacre of schoolchildren, have helped bring Russia and the West closer together in their common struggle against this newfound menace to international security in the years following the Cold War. This view is supported further by comments such as the following by William Kristol, the influential editor of the neoconservative publication, *The Weekly Standard*, who expressed his solidarity to Russia's government and its people after the Beslan massacre:

> We, the forces of civilization, are confronted by barbarism and should regard *jihadist* terror—the impulse at work in Beslan—as comparable to the genocidal totalitarianism of a Hitler or a Stalin. We should condemn as appeasers those who seek to address the causes of terrorist acts and place pursuit of the war against terror ahead of a search for a

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hostage by a group of Chechen terrorists. Hundred of civilian deaths resulted from these incidents, as well as the deaths of terrorists and Russian security forces.

[133]- Bobo Lo, *Vladimir Putin and the Evolution of Russian Foreign Policy* (London: Blackwell Publishing, 2003); Stefan Wagstyl and Arkady Ostrovsky, "Is Putin too Authoritarian for His Own Good?"; available from www.financialtimes.com; Internet; accessed 16 December 2004.

> "better diplomacy." We must, above all, join in common cause against our terrorist foes.[134]

While the governments of the GCC states are increasingly taking the position that Chechen-related terrorism in Russia is an internal affair to be settled within the framework of Russian laws, the Russian government has continued to accuse various governments in the region of supporting the Chechen cause and has threatened sanctions against any government found guilty of aiding Chechnya's Muslim militants.[135] The Russian position is supported further by some Moscow based analysts, who claim that "there is no denying Middle Eastern influence on the development of radical Islam in the Caucasus" and that alleged Saudi support of the rebel groups in the Northern Caucasus and Uzbekistan's Ferghana Valley—described as Wahabite—has been one of the main difficulties in truly normalizing relations between Moscow and Riyadh."[136]

The Russian government's efforts to internationalize its conflict with the Chechen separatists and its wholehearted support for the

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[134]- This extract from William Kristol's article—which originally appeared in the Financial Times Comment Page on September 8, 2004—was cited in the article by Martin Wolf, "We Embrace Putin at our Peril"; available from www.financialtimes.com; Internet; accessed 21 September 2004.

[135]- Brian Glyn Williams, "The Russo-Chechen War: A Threat to Stability in the Middle East and Eurasia?," *Middle East Policy* 8 (March 2001): 128. The tension in relations between Russia and Qatar, which resulted after Russian agents allegedly assassinated Chechen leader Seliman Yanderbayev in Qatar in early 2004, suggests that the Russian government is very sensitive towards any semblance of support for Chechen separatists that may originate from the Gulf, whether it be state-sponsored or independent from the government.

[136]- The Saudi government has vehemently denied such accusations. See the comments by Alexei Malashenko, "Carnegie Center Moscow." Quoted in Andrej Kreutz, "The Geopolitics of post-Soviet Russia and the Middle East," *Arab Studies Quarterly* (Winter 2002): 3.

global fight against international terrorism has assisted in its efforts to divert attention away from other factors which may be more pivotal in understanding both the roots of Chechen-associated terrorism in Russia and the trend of Islamicization of regional politics in the CIS. From the outset, the reader should note that audacious terrorist raids by Chechen separatists—such as those taking place during the Putin presidency—are hardly a new phenomenon in Russia. Such attacks have likewise been perpetrated during much earlier stages of Russia's Chechen wars, when the Russian government hardly made such an active case of the linkages to international Islamic terrorist networks. Close observers of the Chechen conflict of the 1990s will recall the daring raid led by the Chechen field commander Shamil Basayev, who took some 1,500 Russian civilians hostage in a hospital in the town of Budyenovsk, in Russia's Stavropol Region in June 1995.[137] Basayev demanded an end to Russian military operations in Chechnya and for immediate negotiations with Russian Prime Minister Victor Chernomyrdin.[138] Shamil Basayev—perhaps the most notorious of the Chechen separatist on-field military commanders—is thought to be the mastermind behind the Moscow theatre hostage taking in 2002 and the Beslan massacre in 2004. The Russian government now claims that Basayev and his followers are linked to Al-Qaeda and international Islamic terrorist networks, despite the fact that Basayev's current wave of attacks were motivated by the same reasons as those for the raids of the mid-1990s.

Despite the obvious concerns of the Russian government, there seems to be no concrete evidence available to suggest that foreign

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[137]- Ibid., 130.

[138]- Ibid. Chernomyrdin agreed to Basayev's demand to bring an immediate cessation to Russian military hostilities against Chechnya. Basayev and his marauders—together with several hundred hostages—escaped back to the mountains of Chechnya, where they were greeted as heroes.

governments—particularly those in the Gulf or broader Middle East—have supported either Chechen Islamists in the North Caucasus or Islamic fundamentalists in the Ferghana Valley. While there is little debate about the fact that Riyadh and governments in the Gulf gave financial backing to the Afghan *Mujahideen* in their *Jihad* against the Soviet Union during the 1980s, we are in no position to make a similar comparison in the case of Moscow's ongoing Chechen conflict. However, it can plausibly be argued that an association can be made between a cultural revival of Islam in the Muslim regions of the CIS and the Islamicization of politics in some of the CIS regions on the one hand and various developments which have their source within the states of the GCC on the other. A brief examination of Russia's Chechen conflict will assist in illustrating this association and will be discussed below.

The Islamicization of the Chechen conflict

There is little doubt that the brutal manner in which Moscow handled both the first (1994-1995) and second (1999-2000) Chechen war has shocked many people around the world, particularly in Muslim countries.[139] Moscow's uncompromising military invasion of Chechnya, the revival of ethnic identities that has been taking place in the former Soviet Union since the decline of communism, and the export of cultural Islam region from the broader Muslim world into the have all served to transform the Chechen conflict from a struggle for greater levels of Chechen

[139]- Some sources, such as Martin Wolf suggest that some 250,000 Chechens have died as a result of the two Russian-Chechen wars, while the population of Chechnya has fallen from 1.25 million to around 500,000. Others, such as Galina Yemelianova assert that 90,000 Chechen civilians have perished in the ongoing Russo-Chechen conflict.

independence into what has effectively become Moscow's war with Russia's Islamic fundamentalists.[140]

The Islamicization of the Chechen conflict became evident soon after the Russian invasion of Chechnya, when the late Chechen President Zhokar Dudayev—a former Soviet military officer of some distinction—turned to Islam as an ideological tool to unite the largely autonomous Chechen *taips* (clans) and ward off the threat of the Russian invasion.[141] During the ensuing (first) Chechen war, Dudayev increasingly incorporated Islam into his political vocabulary and official ceremonies, introduced the practice of swearing in on the Qur'an and had Chechen fighters put on green headbands with imprinted verses from the Qur'an.[142] While it would be reasonable to suggest that Dudayev's new appeal to Islam was significantly motivated by the important propaganda function of attracting international Islamic support for the Chechen cause, this strategy—together with Russian escalation of the conflict—coincided with the arrival of hundreds of Arab militants from various Middle Eastern countries who came to Chechnya in a show of Islamic solidarity.[143] The most prominent among the newly arrived Chechen Arabs, many of who were veterans of the Afghan *Jihad* against the Soviet Union during the 1980s, was a fundamentalist from Saudi Arabia known by the *nom de guerre*

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[140]- As the well known Russian columnist Yulia Latinina recently put it, "In the past, Russia fought Chechen field commanders. Now it is fighting *Wahhabi jamaats*, or religious cells. What began as a civil war in Chechnya has now turned into a holy war across the entire North Caucasus." See Yulia Latinina, "With Maskhadov, Hope Dies"; available from www.moscowtimes.ru; Internet; accessed 10 March 2005.

[141]- Galina Yemelianova, *Russia and Islam: A Historic Survey* (London: Palgrave, 2002).

[142]- Ibid., 181.

[143]- Brian Glyn Williams, "The Russo-Chechen War: A Threat to Stability in the Middle East and Eurasia?," *Middle East Policy* 8 (March 2001): 132.

Emir Khattab, who brought his brand of *Wahhabi* Islam and small group of fighters with him to the North Caucasus.[144]

The introduction of the Arab fighters into the Chechen conflict brought a new dimension to Chechen Islamicization and has led to what some observers have described as the "growing grassroots *Wahhabization* of the Chechen resistance" during the period 1996-1999.[145] During the inter-war period, when Chechnya maintained relative autonomy from Moscow and the two sides upheld a cautious truce, a major split began to emerge within the Chechen political leadership. Officially, President Aslan Maskhadov and his supporters—who maintained the traditional Chechen preference for moderate Sufi Islam and willingness to compromise with the Russians—claimed to uphold political power in the breakaway republic. However, other factions within the Chechen political leadership soon began to emerge and propagated imported *Salafi* and *Wahhabi* doctrines of Islam, which reflected their growing financial and ideological dependence on foreign Islamic radicals and Islamic funding bodies.[146] Chechnya's pro-*Wahhabi* factions were led by individuals such as Movladi Udugov—who was

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[144]- Ibid., 131. Khattab's ethnic identity and his link to the Gulf is the subject of some debate between analysts of the Chechen conflict. See Rajan Menon and Graham E. Fuller, "Russia's Ruinous Chechen War," *Foreign Affairs* 79 (March/April 2000): 38. The authors suggest that although Khattab is often dubbed a fanatical Arab and Muslim zealot in the Russian press, he is actually of Chechen origin—a holy soldier who has resumed the fight for Caucasian independence decades and centuries after his ancestors fled the violence of commissars and Tsars alike. Galina Yemelianova suggests that he is of Jordanian origin. There does seem to be consensus over the fact that Khattab is a convicted Islamic fundamentalist, a *Wahhabi*, and ultimately a skilled military commander whose daring raids have earned the wrath of the Russian military.

[145]- Galina Yemelianova, *Russia and Islam: A Historic Survey* (London: Palgrave, 2002).

[146]- Ibid., 175

initially Maskhadov's first deputy prime minister—who founded the *Islamskaya Natsia* (Islamic Nation) party, which claimed to represent over 30 Muslim organizations in the North Caucasus and propagated its declared aim of obtaining this region's political independence and its unification on the basis of Islam.[147]

During 1997-1998, Udugov and his supporters ceased to recognize the authority of President Maskhadov's government, advocated Sudan and Afghanistan under the Taliban regime as appropriate models for the foundation of an Islamic state in Chechnya and began to introduce certain puritanical Islamic norms into the legal codes of the war-torn republic.[148] Under the influence of Khattab and his Arab *Mujahideen*, Chechen leaders and heroes of the Chechen independence movement such as Shamil Basayev seemed to undergo a metamorphosis from Chechen nationalists into Chechen Muslims.[149] Both the rhetoric and objectives of the Chechen *Wahhabis* took on a similar tone to that of Islamic fundamentalists in other parts of the Muslim world. Basayev and Khattab now spoke of a *Jihad* against the Russian infidels, which would revive the theocratic imamate of legendary Chechen leader Imam Shamil that thrived in the North Caucasus in the 19th century.[150]

Khattab and his allies established several *Wahhabi* training camps in the rugged areas of South Eastern Chechnya near the

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[147]- Ibid.
[148]- Ibid. For example, under Udugov's guidance the Chechen criminal code of the *Shari`ah* courts was copied from the *Shariat* criminal code of Sudan.
[149]- Brian Glyn Williams, "The Russo-Chechen War: A Threat to Stability in the Middle East and Eurasia?," *Middle East Policy* 8 (March 2001): 133.
[150]- Ibid., 132. Their stated objective now became the liberation of the Muslim people of the entire North Caucasus region from the infidel Russian colonizers and their unification into a puritanical Islamic state.

Dagestani border[151] and the rhetoric of the *Wahhabi* factions and their militias—known as the Islamic Liberation Forces—became more bellicose. Strong evidence exists that such training camps were benefactors of generous funding from non-governmental organizations from several countries in the GCC, including Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Qatar, as well as from other Muslim countries in general.[152] As the activities of the *Wahhabi* factions gained momentum, Basayev, Khattab and their Islamic Liberation Forces launched a full-scale invasion of Western Dagestan with the intended aim of an Islamic unification of the North Caucasus and the establishment of an Islamic state in the region.[153]

The invasion failed. This was due partly to the strong resistance of the Dagestanis themselves—the majority of who perceived Chechen Islamic liberation as a form of external aggression[154]—and precipitated the second Russo-Chechen war, which ended in May 2000. Taking account the Chechen experience, it seems quite plausible to suggest that during the second half of the 1990s non-government related foreign elements have fuelled both the Islamicization, as well as the internationalization of Russia's Chechen conflict. The influx of hundreds of Arab fighters, many of

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[151]- Ibid. The four camps were located near Nozhai Yurt, on the Chechen side of the border with the Russian Republic of Dagestan.
[152]- Galina Yemelianova, *Russia and Islam: A Historic Survey* (London: Palgrave, 2002).
[153]- Ibid., 184. The 1,200 strong Chechen, Dagestani and Arab militant force invaded the *Botlikhskii*, *Tsumadinskii*, *Novolakskii and Buynakskii raions* (districts) of Western Dagestan's Avaria Province and took control of nine mountain villages. In the *Botlikhskii raion* they proclaimed an Islamic Republic of Dagestan and appointed various *Wahhabi* converts to act as leaders of the newly conquered territories. See Brian Glyn Williams, "The Russo-Chechen War: A Threat to Stability in the Middle East and Eurasia?," *Middle East Policy* 8 (March 2001): 133.
[154]- Ibid.

them with extensive war experience in Afghanistan and other regions of conflict, the proselytizing activities of Arab *Wahabite* missionaries in the villages of the North Caucasus, and the lavish foreign financial assistance to break-away Chechnya all reinforce the notion that by no means can an insignificant association be made between the Islamicization of Russia's Chechen conflict and various forms of non-governmental support for the Chechen cause that have their origins in the Arabian Gulf.

Chapter Four

The CIS and the GCC from an Economic Perspective: Economic Relations or Economic Diplomacy?

4.1 Overview of economic relations: Russia, the GCC and the new geopolitical competition in Eurasia (Central Asia and the Caspian)

Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, bilateral economic relations between the newly emerged states of the CIS and the countries of the GCC have been comparatively minimal, despite the existence of a number of bilateral trade agreements between Moscow and Riyadh (e.g., commodity trade turnover between the Russian Federation and Saudi Arabia amounted to just $57 million in 2000, $67 million in 2001 and $66 million in 2002).[155] Similar

[155]- A number of analysts in Moscow suggest that the Russian government has been particularly frustrated at the underdevelopment of Russian-Saudi trade relations since Russia played such a supportive role to the West in the Gulf War of 1990-1991 and is said to have built up substantial expectations of large-scale financial support and investment into its economy from the wealthy GCC monarchies in return. For the most part, large-scale trade relations between Moscow and the GCC and investment into the Russian economy from the Arabian Gulf monarchies has not eventuated, while some Russian sources claim that the crippling of Iraq—which was a major trading partner for the Soviet Union—by the Gulf War and the ensuing sanctions regime cost Russia as much as $40 billion in

agreements have existed between Russia and Kuwait since the time of the visit of then Prime Minister Chernomyrdin delegation to the GCC states in 1994, but the trade turnover between the two countries in 2001 was even smaller than between Moscow and Riyadh, standing at just $19 million.[156] Commodity trade volumes have also been low between Russia and the UAE, although Abu Dhabi has proven a worthy client for the Russian armaments industry and Russians have come to the UAE in significant numbers for the purpose of suitcase trading.[157] Likewise. bilateral trade relations between Russia and Bahrain, Oman and Qatar have been minimal, although Moscow and Doha have enjoyed relatively close ties in recent years and have discussed large-scale cooperation in the energy sector despite the two countries' occasional moments of tension (such as those occurring in the wake of the Yanderbayev assassination in February 2004).

These trade volumes can be compared to Moscow's trade relations with Middle Eastern states outside of the GCC—such as Syria—where trade turnover between the two countries reached $163 million in 2001 and has been increasing, where Russian

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lost contracts and unpaid debts. See Andrej Kreutz, "Russia and the Arabian Peninsula," *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies* 7 (2004): 19.

[156]- Ibid., 42. Russia has been providing Kuwait with Kamaz trucks, Lada cars, Niva ATVs, timber, rolled metal, cement, cellulose, barely and kitchen utensils. There were no exports from Kuwait to Russia.

[157]- Statistics from the government of Dubai show that visitors from Russia and the rest of the CIS now constitute roughly 10 percent of tourists coming to this emirate of the UAE. However, unlike tourists from Europe, North America and other parts of the Gulf—who come to Dubai largely for the purpose of consuming leisure and doing some shopping—Russian and CIS visitors have converged on Dubai for the purpose of buying various products and commodities which they could potentially resell back in the CIS countries, or for the purpose of initiating some other form of business with the UAE. See the report by Government of Dubai, Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing, Consolidated Report: Dubai Visitor Survey 1998/99 (2000): 9 and 45.

assistance schemes have helped establish more than 200 major economic facilities (in areas such as energy, transport, oil and the processing industry). The Russian overseas oil company *Zarubezhneft* has also been a leading player in both exploration and drilling activities in the Syrian petroleum sector.[158] Furthermore, Russian trade with Turkey reached a staggering $10 billion in 2004 and Moscow has become Ankara's second-largest foreign trading partner, with analysts forecasting that trade between the two countries could reach $25 billion by 2007.[159]

While Turkish businessmen have also been quick to exploit the advantages of language and cultural ties with the Turkic-speaking nationalities of the former Soviet Union's Caspian and Central Asian territories as a conduit for facilitating their investments, the GCC business community has been far more prudent in its outlook towards the emerging markets of the CIS-Eurasian states. The appearance of newly independent states in resource-rich Central Asia and the Caspian basin—which emerged after the dissolution of the Soviet Union—opened up new scope for intensive geopolitical competition in the region of a type that had not been witnessed since the "Great Game" between the British and tsarist Russian Empires during the 19th century. Although the region has for all intents and purposes remained a Russian sphere of influence,

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[158]- Oxford Business Group, "Syria: Trading Ahead"; available from www.oxfordbusinessgroup.com; Internet; accessed 19 January 2005.

[159]- The Associated Press, "Putin $25 Billion Goal for Trade With Turkey"; available from www.moscowtimes.ru; Internet; accessed 12 January 2005. Turkey has been one of the most active foreign participants in the Russian and CIS economies since the fall of the Soviet Union and Turkish companies have numerous investments there. To give an idea of the magnitude in economic relations between Turkey and Russia, for example, we should note that when Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan flew to Moscow to meet with President Putin in January 2005, he headed a delegation comprising no fewer than 600 Turkish business executives.

Moscow's hegemony in greater Central Asia is now challenged not only by the West—which has consistently pursued both economic and geopolitical opportunities in the area after the end of the USSR—but also by neighboring states such as Iran and Turkey, whose foreign and economic policy making towards the region has been energetic.

Turkey enjoys certain advantages in establishing relations with the Turkic Central Asian states. Azerbaijan in particular has a considerable degree of ethnic and linguistic affinity with it; with a vibrant private sector and well-developed industrial base, it is also often promoted by the West as a modern secular Islamist state.[160] Turkey was one of the first countries to establish diplomatic missions in Central Asian states, as shown through relations with Uzbekistan. Businessmen from Turkey have shown substantially less concern than other foreign counterparts when investing their capital in what is still largely perceived to be a high-risk region. Iran has also asserted its position as a key player in the new geopolitical competition for influence in Central Asia. Tehran has primarily advocated its pivotal geo-strategic position, offering Central Asian trade relations the shortest and most economic means of connecting with global markets. Tehran also allows Turkey to exploit its relatively well-developed transport infrastructure, including its railway network and ports in the Persian Gulf and Sea of Oman.[161] Iran is the most logical route for export of Central Asia's energy resources to the Black Sea and Western markets.[162] The prospects of oil and gas pipelines linking Central Asia and Europe through Iran gives CIS-Eurasian states a new strategic

[160]- Shireen T. Hunter, *Central Asia Since Independence* (Washington DC, Preager: Westport, 1996).
[161]- Ibid., 129.
[162]- Ibid.,130.

option in circumventing Russia—the traditional route for exporting Central Asian energy resources to global markets.

Within this new geopolitical playing field in the Eurasian regions of the CIS, it was initially presumed that Arab states—primarily Egypt backed by the financial power of the GCC—should also compete with Turkey, Iran and other regional countries for economic and political influence. The main argument voiced in Arab-GCC circles in the early-to-mid 1990s was that the newly independent states of Central Asia and the Caspian, with their very low development indicators, were in substantial need of financial aid, capital investment and new technology; something that could hardly be provided in necessary quantities by either Iran or Turkey.[163] On the other hand, the cash-rich and pro-Western GCC states had already established a Saudi-Kazakh banking joint venture in the Kazakh capital of Almaty before the collapse of the Soviet Union.[164] Other banking ventures followed, with a group of Arab bankers founding another bank in Baku, Azerbaijan, and several other similar ventures opening in Kazakhstan during the 1990s. Kazakhstan is a country which has attracted the interest of the GCC financial community due to its vast potential of untapped reserves of oil and gas and comparatively liberalized approach to economic policy making.[165] For their part, the Central Asian states have welcomed the prospect of Gulf money coming into their countries. In a similar manner to the efforts of Russian economic diplomacy towards the GCC, the states have made noticeable attempts to court

[163]- Mohiaddin Mesbahi, *Russia and the Third World in the Post-Soviet Era* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1994).
[164] Ibid., 344.
[165]- Mr. Denzil Pereira. Interview with author. Manama, Kingdom of Bahrain (March 15, 2004). Arab Bank Plc was itself opening a representative office in Almaty at the time of the interview mentioned here.

the Arabian Gulf states.[166] Furthermore, it seems that the GCC, particularly Saudi Arabia, has viewed the pursuit of geo-strategic involvement in Central Asia and the Caspian as a measure necessary to counter the influence of Iran, which in Arab circles is perceived as a source of Islamic fundamentalism that could be exported to the region.

Despite the GCC's initial interest in Caspian economies and establishment of a number of banking joint ventures in Central Asia, actual economic relations between the GCC and these countries has been even of less significance than between the GCC and Russia. Mainstream commodity trade turnover between the GCC and Central Asia has been comparatively tiny, while Arab businessmen who held the general view that these countries were not ready for real economic cooperation during the early-to-mid 1990s,[167] have not altered their positions noticeably in recent years. With the possible partial exception of Kazakhstan—which is increasingly being perceived as an acceptable country for investment internationally—the Central Asian and Caspian states of the CIS are regarded as high-risk investment destinations, with high volumes of state-sponsored corruption and rent-seeking bureaucrats playing too dominant a part in national economies. GCC business communities—which largely assess their foreign investment perspectives on information provided by Western business risk consultancies and international monetary institutions—have chosen

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[166]- Most of the leaders of the Central Asian Muslim Republics have visited the GCC states to promote both cultural and economic ties with the region. The president of Kyrgyzstan Askar Akayev was asked upon one such visit to Saudi Arabia whether he would be happy to perform the *Hajj* in Mecca, to which he is said to have replied that he "would be happy to make the *Hajj* for $100 million." See Shireen T. Hunter, *Central Asia Since Independence* (Washington DC, Preager: Westport, 1996).

[167]- Mohiaddin Mesbahi, *Russia and the Third World in the Post-Soviet Era* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1994).

to stay well away from the region, preferring to direct their investments into the more familiar destinations of the Western markets. While it is still possible to argue that the Arab states and the GCC in particular have remained as participants in the geopolitical rivalry for influence in Central Asia and the Caspian, it has largely remained so on the basis of providing generous volumes of financial support for the cultural Islamic revival.

4.2 Energy diplomacy in place of economic relations

While economic relations between both Russia and the GCC on the one hand and the newly independent Central Asian and Caspian states of the CIS on the other have been comparatively minimal, there are still several very significant issues that link the two regions economically. The first is the issue of interregional energy sector diplomacy, which has risen to new levels of importance in contemporary international relations since Russian oil production regained global significance in the late 1990s. The second issue is the international arms trade, a factor of traditional relevance in the Soviet Union's relations with the Middle East and developing world in general.

Russian and CIS oil potential

In a recent article entitled "The Battle for Energy Dominance," Edward Morse and James Richard created substantial debate amongst energy analysts when they asserted that "Russia's petroleum revival... coincided with the terrorist attacks of September 11… have provided Moscow [with] a chance to displace

OPEC as the key energy supplier to the West."[168] The de facto effect of the Morse and Richard article was to raise the question of whether the West was starting to lose its reliance on Persian Gulf oil in the post-September 11 international environment and whether Russia and the Caspian-CIS countries could become a key oil partner supplying the needs of the West as a reliable, politically stable alternative to the Gulf.[169] To illustrate their point, Morse and Richard presented the following facts. During the last years of the 1990s, and particularly the very first years of the 21st century, the Russian and CIS oil industries began to show substantial recovery from their trough of the early-to-mid 1990s. As recently as 1998 Russian oil production amounted to barely 6.17 million barrels per day (bpd), but Russia has since been increasing its annual oil output by nearly half a million barrels per day, with total output reaching 8.54 million bpd in 2003 (representing an average annual percentage growth rate of some 6.7 percent).[170] During the same period, Russian oil exports grew from 2.51 million bpd in 1998 to 4.56 million bpd in 2003, an average annual percentage growth rate of 10.5 percent.[171] The Russian annual increase in oil production during this period represents the largest single increment of increased output of any country in the world and has been coming

[168]- Edward L. Morse and James Richard, "The Battle for Energy Dominance," *Foreign Affairs* 81 (March-April 2002): 2.
[169]- As the authors themselves put it, "If the concrete plans of Russian and Central Asian oil companies and their international partners come to fruition, total CIS oil exports from the former Soviet Union could equal Saudi exports within four years. The threat of a northern oil boom that Middle Eastern producers first feared in the early 1990s is now real." Ibid., 5.
[170]- See the report by the auditing firm PriceWaterhouseCoopers, "The Business Climate in the Russian Oil and Gas Industry." Quoted in Marat Terterov, eds. *Doing Business with Russia: A Guide to Investment Opportunities and Business Practice* (4th ed. London: GMB Publishing, 2004): 116.
[171]- Ibid., 116.

at a time when the GCC states of the OPEC cartel have been opting to reduce their output.[172]

Given that it is now established that Russian and CIS oil reserves are much larger than previously presumed, Russia and the Soviet successor states are in a position whereby they can easily continue to increase their oil output at an impressive rate for years to come.[173] While oil producers in the Middle East have no proven ability to exploit their oil resources beyond the levels that international companies achieved before they were nationalized in the 1970s, Russian and foreign oil companies operating in the CIS continue to make substantial new discoveries of oil reserves in Kazakhstan and the Caspian shelf.[174] Furthermore, the renaissance

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[172]- Edward L. Morse and James Richard, "The Battle for Energy Dominance," *Foreign Affairs* 81 (March-April 2002): 1.
[173]- Ibid., 4.
[174]- Ibid. Russia's proven levels of oil reserves equal around 50 billion barrels, or some 5 percent of the world's total. The proven levels of oil reserves of the Caspian region of the CIS—defined as Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan—equal approximately 25-30 billion barrels. While this collective CIS total of less than 80 billion barrels is substantially less then the Middle East, exploration and production advances in various parts of Russia and the Caspian will without doubt enlarge the reserve potential of CIS in a substantial manner. To illustrate this further, the reader might like to note that a consortium of international oil companies are presently developing what may be a giant oil field in Kashagan, Kazakhstan, estimated to contain 50 billion barrels. Lukoil recently discovered a field of 5 billion barrels of proven reserves in the Russian part of the Caspian shelf, which may actually produce at least three times the initial proven discovery. Further sources: on Caspian oil reserves see Laurent Ruseckas, "Caspian Oil Development: an Overview." Quoted in "The Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research (ECSSR)," (Abu Dhabi: Caspian Energy Resource, 2000): 15; for Russian oil reserves in percentage terms see Shibley Telhami and Fiona Hill, "America's Vital Stakes in Saudi Arabia," *Foreign Affairs* 81 (November/December 2002): 168; for Russian oil reserves in volume see the report by the Renaissance Capital, "The Russian Oil Industry." Quoted in Marat

of the Russian oil industry has been led in no small way by Russian domestic private sector oil majors, which, since the late 1990s, have grown impressively and shown substantial dynamism and management strategies in order to increase output and export capacities. Companies such as Yukos, Sibneft and TNK—which were privatized amidst controversial circumstances in the mid-1990s—as well as state-owned firms such as Lukoil, have adopted more than adequately to international business practices and have helped Moscow assume a far more significant position in the world petroleum sector than ever before.[175] The ensuing consolidation of the Russian oil industry and private sector-driven managerial efficiency of the Russian oil majors since the 1998 financial crisis has worked to the benefit of the Russian oil sector, which is now further expected to increase its oil exports by at least 2 million bpd between 2002 and 2006.[176] Thus, in an international oil market where global demand is currently estimated to be more than 81 million bpd,[177] Russia is presently producing around 8.9 million bpd[178] and exporting roughly half that amount. This clearly makes Russia, together with the rest of the CIS, a key player and a leading

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Terterov, eds. *Doing Business with Russia* (2nd ed. London: Kogan Page Publishers, 2004): 205.

[175]- Ibid., 2. See also PriceWaterhouseCoopers, "The Business Climate in the Russian Oil and Gas Industry." Quoted in Marat Terterov, eds. *Doing Business with Russia: A Guide to Investment Opportunities and Business Practice* (4th ed. London: GMB Publishing, 2004).

[176]- Ibid., 4.

[177]- Toby Shelley, "FT Briefing: High Oil Prices"; available from www.financialtimes.com; Internet; accessed 1 September 2004. Although recent years have demonstrated the first major reduction in the global demand for oil since the early 1980s, the US Department of Energy and the International Energy Agency both forecast that the global demand for oil could grow from its current level to 120 million bpd by 2020. See ibid.

[178]- Production figures are average daily-production-figures for 2004. See Laza Kekic, "Slowdown is Not the Result of Politics"; available from www.moscowtimes.ru; Internet; accessed 12 January 2005.

competitor to the Saudi-led OPEC countries in the global oil market.

While Russian and CIS oil output and export capacity has been increasing, oil production capacity in the Middle East has stagnated for 20 years.[179] As some analysts point out, overall OPEC production capacity is actually lower today than in 1980 and concerns had already been raised about America's reliance on Middle East oil supplies even before the low point in Saudi-US relations stemming from the New York attacks of September 11.[180] Efforts by OPEC to persuade Russia to reduce its oil output in line with OPEC reductions in order to better coordinate international oil prices during 2001-2002 were largely unsuccessful and the two oil producing blocs remained suspicious of each other's motives. The OPEC member states were annoyed at Russia's insistence on aggressively increasing output at a time when OPEC was restraining itself and reached the opinion that Russia was stealing market share that rightfully belonged to countries with far deeper oil reserves.[181] For its part, Russia believed that it was regaining market share that had been stolen by Saudi Arabia, OPEC's leading member, as a result of the Saudi-engineered price collapse of 1985-1986, which had very negative consequences on the Soviet oil industry at the time.[182] Relations between Russia and the Saudi-led OPEC cartel remained volatile.

While a price war between OPEC and Moscow was averted in 2002, Russia's persistent levels of higher output are still viewed with suspicion by OPEC and have been seen in international energy

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[179]- Edward L. Morse and James Richard, "The Battle for Energy Dominance," *Foreign Affairs* 81 (March-April 2002): 4.
[180]- Ibid., 2.
[181]- Ibid., 7.
[182]- Ibid.

diplomacy as an attempt by Moscow to reclaim greater power in global policy making.[183] The Russian government—together with Russian corporate leaders in the energy sector—has been portraying Russia's oil firms as a stable source of supply, capable of adding output to the international market and assisting in maintaining prices at reasonable levels.[184] In the eyes of the Russian political and economic elite, such an approach could rapidly accelerate the country's development and thereby allow it to integrate itself into the industrialized West, as well as further reconfirm Moscow's objective of becoming a key partner to the United States[185] in the post-September 11 global environment. Indeed, energy has become a new hot topic in Russian-American relations. At a Kremlin Summit in May 2002, the Russian and American presidents pledged to work together to reduce volatility in global energy markets and promote investment in the Russian oil industry.[186] Energy dialogue between Moscow and Washington has continued and the two countries have created a special working group on energy

[183]- Ibid., 2.

[184]- Ibid. One would of course have to be fairly skeptical about the argument that the Russian political and economic elites favor reasonable oil prices as opposed to maintaining them at reasonably high levels. While it is in nobody's interest to keep oil prices at unsustainably high levels, the Russian economic recovery since the 1998 financial crisis has primarily been achieved on the back of high oil prices. One cannot speak of the relevance of the energy sector to the Russian economy with anything but the highest levels of importance. Oil, together with gas—of which Russia is the world's leading producer and supplier—account for roughly 20 percent of the Russian economy, 55 percent of the country's export earnings and provide 40 percent of its total tax revenues (see the article by Moises Naim, "Russia's Oily Future," *Foreign Policy* (January/February 2004): 94). Every $1 shift in world oil prices translates into about $1 billion for the Russian state budget. No price alterations in any other commodity have the capacity to make such a difference to the Russian state budget.

[185]- Ibid.

[186]- David G. Victor and Nadejda M. Victor, "Axis of Oil," *Foreign Affairs* 82 (March/April 2003): 47.

cooperation. Amidst the symbolic arrival of Russian oil deliveries to the US in 2003,[187] the US-Russian energy relationship has attracted substantial media attention as various high-profile public figures—such as outspoken Russian opposition politician and leader of the Yabloko Party, Grigory Yavlinsky—have continued to suggest that together with the United States, Russia could sideline OPEC as the arbiter of world oil prices.[188]

Saudi Arabian oil reserves: the source of international energy security

As a result of increased Russian oil capacity, in recent years an energy dialogue has been emerging between Russia and the West. Dialogue may prove to be one thing, unraveling the enduring geo-strategic relationship that the United States has with Saudi Arabia and the other GCC states is quite another. Oil is one of the world's most important commodities. It fuels the present day international economy which governs our way of life. The fundamental role that oil plays in the world today automatically elevates anyone who controls this vital resource to a level of strategic importance—the greater the levels of oil one controls, the greater the level of strategic significance that one takes on. While the Russian and CIS oil ascendancy of recent years has been premised on the basis of producing to full capacity in exploiting the proven 7-8 percent of the world's oil reserves that are located in the territories of the former Soviet Union, the Middle East provides a home for 63

[187]- According to US Department of Energy figures, Russia delivered 424,000 bpd in oil exports to the US in June 2003, a major increase, which elevated Russia into the top six exporters of oil in the US market, joining Saudi Arabia, Canada, Mexico, Venezuela and Nigeria. See Alexander Shumilin, "The Prince and Putin"; available from www.moscowtimes.ru; Internet; accessed 10 September 2003.
[188]- David G. Victor and Nadejda M. Victor, "Axis of Oil," *Foreign Affairs* 82 (March/April 2003): 48.

percent of the world's proven reserves.[189] With its 261 billion barrels of proven reserves, Saudi Arabia alone is home to 25 percent of the world's oil reserves and is the source of the world's largest individual supply of oil.[190] Out of the GCC states, Kuwait and the UAE each possess close to 100 billion barrels of further proven reserves, nearing 10 percent each of the world's total.[191]

Virtually any account of contemporary international relations will point to the axiom that the Middle East—particularly the Persian Gulf—is one of the world's most strategic regions because of the vast amount of vital commodities located in the Middle East; the security and stability of which is vital to the international system as it currently stands. Since 1968, when the United Kingdom formally relinquished its security responsibilities east of Suez, the United States has taken on the primary obligation of providing security for this strategically important region.[192] One analyst aptly describes the significance of the Persian Gulf region to the US in maintaining the present day international economic order, highlighting the special role played by Saudi Arabia as the world largest single sources of oil reserves:

> America's primary interest in the Persian Gulf lies in ensuring the free and stable flow of oil from the region to

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[189]- Edward L. Morse and James Richard, "The Battle for Energy Dominance," *Foreign Affairs* 81 (March-April 2002): 2.
[190]- Ibid.
[191]- Iran and Iraq are the other major oil producers in the Gulf, while Libya and Algeria are also major Middle Eastern producers, giving the Middle Eastern region a total of some 675 billion barrels of the world's proven oil reserves. See Julia Nanay, "The Industry's Race for Caspian Oil Reserves." Quoted in "The Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research (ECSSR)," (Abu Dhabi: Caspian Energy Resource, 2000): 115 and 119.
[192]- Kenneth M. Pollack, "Securing the Gulf," *Foreign Affairs* 82 (July/August 2003): 2.

> the world at large. The reason that the United States has a legitimate and critical interest in seeing that Persian Gulf oil continues to flow copiously and relatively cheaply is simply that the global economy built over the last 50 years rests on a foundation of inexpensive, plentiful oil, and if that foundation were removed, the global economy would collapse. Today, roughly 25 percent of the world's oil production comes from the Persian Gulf, with Saudi Arabia alone responsible for roughly 15 percent—a figure expected to increase rather than decrease in the future…Persian Gulf…oil is absurdly economical to produce, with a barrel in Saudi Arabia costing anywhere from a fifth to a tenth of the price of a barrel from Russia. Saudi Arabia is not only the world's largest producer and holder of the world's largest reserves, but it also has a majority of the world's excess production capacity, which the Saudis use to stabilize and control the price of oil by increasing and decreasing production as needed. Because of the importance of both Saudi production and Saudi slack capacity, the sudden loss of the Saudi oil network would paralyze the global economy, probably causing a global downturn at least as devastating as the Great Depression of the 1930s, if not worse. If Saudi oil production were to vanish, the price of oil...would shoot through the ceiling, destroying the American economy along with everybody else's. [193]

Saudi Arabia has consistently been the leading producer and source of oil reserves to the global economy. As a result, it has formulated a strategic partnership with the United States to maintain global energy security, which it has done more on the basis of its spare production capacity rather than on its actual production; it currently equates to around 8.6 million bpd.[194] Spare production capacity—

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[193]- Ibid.

[194]- Abdulaziz Sager, "Abdullah's Visit Signals New Saudi-Russian Era"; available from www.arabnews.com; Internet; accessed 3 September 2003.

which Riyadh can deploy at any time to shift world oil prices into an upward or downward direction—is one Saudi trump card that Russia does not have, thus clearly forming the centerpiece of US-Saudi relations.[195] Even Morse and Richard themselves refer to Saudi spare capacity as the energy equivalent of nuclear weapons—a powerful deterrent to those who try to challenge Saudi energy leadership and a blunt instrument that makes policymakers elsewhere beholden to Riyadh for energy security.[196] While Russia's energy dialogue and newfound cordiality with the US are relatively recent phenomena, Saudi oil policy has been consistently oriented for years towards providing for Western oil requirements at more economic prices and easing apprehensions about oil shortages.[197] Using its spare capacity to prevent oil shortages—and hence preventing global oil prices from rising too high—has become the characteristic feature of Riyadh's oil policy.[198] Saudi Arabia is the only single country in the world able to influence world oil prices in this manner.[199] Another analyst wisely sums up the irreplaceable significance of Saudi Arabian oil for the international economy in his rebuttal of the campaign that emerged inside the US to effect a divorce between American and Arab interests after September 11 and the discussions pushing for the replacement of Arab oil with Russian oil:

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[195]- Shibley Telhami and Fiona Hill, "America's Vital Stakes in Saudi Arabia," *Foreign Affairs* 81 (November/December 2002): 169.
[196]- Edward L. Morse and James Richard, "The Battle for Energy Dominance," *Foreign Affairs* 81 (March-April 2002): 3.
[197]- Sarah Yizraeli, "How Important is Saudi Oil?," *Middle East Quarterly* (March 2000): 42.
[198]- Edward L. Morse and James Richard, "The Battle for Energy Dominance," *Foreign Affairs* 81 (March-April 2002): 2.
[199]- With global demand for oil in 2004 standing at 81 million bpd, global spare capacity is just 1.5 million bpd—with most of this being centered on the spare capacity available from Saudi Arabia's proven oil reserves. See Toby Shelley, "FT Briefing: High Oil Prices," *The Financial Times*, 1 September 2004.

> There are only a few countries that can produce more [oil] than what they are pumping out right now. Saudi Arabia is the only producer of oil that can produce a lot more immediately, as much as 3 to 4 million barrels [per day] more. No country, including Russia, can do that. The net result of this quest to cut off Saudi oil is very short-sighted.[200]

The battle for energy dominance: a counter-argument

Despite talk about CIS oil ascending onto the international markets in recent years, as well as references to other new producing regions in Latin America and West Africa, most reliable indicators point to the fact that the world is likely to become more dependant on Middle Eastern oil production in the years to come.[201] Acknowledging the fact that global demand for oil is set to rise from current levels of around 81 million bpd to forecasted levels of some 120 million bpd by 2020, the US Department of Energy and the International Energy Agency both assume that the supply required to meet this growth in demand will come from the Middle Eastern members of OPEC.[202] While Russian increases in oil output have been significant to international markets, CIS oil output has been operating at full capacity. CIS proven reserves, at 7-8 percent of world totals, are substantially smaller than those of the Middle

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[200]- Youssef Michel Ibrahim, "The Arab-American Divorce: Gains and Losses"; available from www.arabnews.com; Internet; accessed 8 August 2002.

[201]- Toby Shelley, "FT Briefing: High Oil Prices"; available from www.financialtimes.com; Internet; accessed 1 September 2004.

[202]- Edward L. Morse and James Richard, "The Battle for Energy Dominance," *Foreign Affairs* 81 (March-April 2002): 2. The agencies forecast that in order to meet the rising global demand for oil, OPEC's production is expected to more than double in just over 20 years – from 28 million bpd in 1998 to 60 million bpd in 2020. Most of this increase in output will come from the Gulf, especially Saudi Arabia.

East. However, there are undoubtedly greater expectations about new oil discoveries in the CIS (e.g., in the Caspian, in Kazakhstan, in Sakhalin island on Russia's Pacific coast, in Siberia and in the Russian north of the Arctic Circle[203]). Realizing this potential will require ongoing investments of an enormous magnitude from Russian and international oil companies for years to come. The enormous oil reserves located in the Gulf, on the other hand, are already proven and are comparatively cheap to exploit, while the transport infrastructure and transportation routes linking the Middle East to Western markets are well developed, allowing for relatively efficient delivery of oil supplies.

For the Russian oil industry to operate at its full capacity, the tightest bottlenecks are not just the capital requirements needed in order to develop new oil fields, but also the infrastructure of pipeline and adequate port facilities needed to get oil to international markets.[204] Unlike the Persian Gulf, which is crisscrossed by pipelines and dotted with well-equipped ports, the bulk of the Russian oil industry is located in distant Siberia— several thousand miles by pipeline from markets in Western Europe.[205] While new investments resulted in over 1,030 km of new pipeline built during 2000-2003, the Russian government's pipeline monopoly, *Transneft*, has not been able to keep up with growth in output— the result has been that while oil production reached a

[203]- Shibley Telhami and Fiona Hill, "America's Vital Stakes in Saudi Arabia," *Foreign Affairs* 81 (November/December 2002): 168-69.
[204]- David G. Victor and Nadejda M. Victor, "Axis of Oil," *Foreign Affairs* 82 (March/April 2003): 53.
[205]- Ibid., 54.

post-Soviet high of 8.84 million bpd in January 2004, Russian oil exports actually fell by 5 percent.[206]

Not only do oil and gas pipelines require huge state and private sector investments, they are also a highly politicized affair. During the 1990s, pipelines for the export of Caspian oil were the source of notable political tension between Russia, the newly independent Caspian states of the CIS—namely Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan—and the West, which supported the Caspian states in developing and exporting their own hydrocarbons through the development of pipeline routes, which avoided Russia (e.g. via Turkey and the trans-Caucasus).[207] While there have been far greater levels of cooperation between Moscow, the Russian oil companies and the Caspian states in developing independent export pipeline routes to Western markets, the relative absence of bottlenecks in infrastructure is a distinct advantage that the Gulf oil industry is likely to retain over the CIS into the foreseeable future.

Furthermore, much of Morse and Richard's argument describing the transition of the Russian oil industry and the new challenge it poses to OPEC and Saudi Arabia, has been based on the authors' praise for Russia's dynamic private sector oil majors cooperating with an increasingly non-interventionist, representative state apparatus which no longer enjoys a monopoly over the oil industry.[208] The effect of this public-private coordination of the oil

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[206]- See the report by the auditing firm Deloitte and Touche, "Russian Oil and Gas." Quoted in Quoted in Marat Terterov, eds. *Doing Business with Russia: A Guide to Investment Opportunities and Business Practice* (4th ed. London: GMB Publishing, 2004): 111.

[207]- Edward L. Morse and James Richard, "The Battle for Energy Dominance," *Foreign Affairs* 81 (March-April 2002): 5; See also the article by Robert V. Barylski, "Russia, the West and the Caspian Energy Hub," *Middle East Journal* 49 (Spring 1995).

[208]- Ibid.

sector has been a vast improvement in the industry's investment climate and a subsequent commitment to the Russian oil industry from the likes of Royal Dutch Schell, TotalFinaElf and British Petroleum, which could bring billions of dollars of new investments over the next five years.[209] In contrast, the Saudi oil industry is controlled by a royal family that makes little corporate separation between family and oil industry and which operates as a closed state monopoly in a vastly different operational culture to that of the Russian oil industry. History, Morse and Richard add, does not look kindly on monopoly-company countries.[210]

Morse and Richard's praise for the dynamism of the Russian oil industry, however, was made before the Russian state conducted its own act of vengeance against Yukos, the country's leading private sector oil company. The arrest in October 2003 of Mikhayil Khodorkovsky, the founder of the Yukos oil company and Russia's richest man, and the state's sequestration of a 42 percent stake in the company sent both Yukos shares and the Russian stock exchange—as well as Morse and Richard's argument—tumbling.[211] In a much-publicized and persistent attack, which lasted throughout 2004, the Putin government accused Yukos of foregoing its tax commitment of an unjustified sum of $25 billion.[212] Putin's administration prosecuted Yukos through the state courts. By forcing the company to make good on the amount of the

[209]- Edward L. Morse and James Richard, "Does Saudi Arabia Still Matter? A Reply," *Foreign Affairs* 81 (November/December 2002): 177.
[210]- Edward L. Morse and James Richard, "The Battle for Energy Dominance," *Foreign Affairs* 81 (March-April 2002): 7.
[211]- Deloitte and Touche, "Russian Oil and Gas." Quoted in Quoted in Marat Terterov, eds. *Doing Business with Russia: A Guide to Investment Opportunities and Business Practice* (4th ed. London: GMB Publishing, 2004): 111.
[212]- Stefan Wagstyl and Arkady Ostrovsky, "Is Putin Too Authoritarian For His Own Good?"; available from www.financialtimes.com; Internet; accessed 16 December 2004.

unrealistically high unpaid tax arrears by selling off its main production asset, *Yuganskneftegas*, Yukos was forced to file for bankruptcy, effectively destroying it. The Russian state's relentless campaign against Yukos—which many analysts saw as a personal attack by the Kremlin on the outspoken, politically active Khodorkovsky—caused major concern amongst investor circles over the safety of their investments in Russia, as well as about the attitude of the Russian government towards investors in general.

While the Russian oil sector was able to withstand the attacks on Yukos—by 2003 the sector's leading producer[213]—and maintain production levels of close to nine million bpd during 2004, the destruction of Russia's leading private sector oil company by the Russian state and the re-nationalization of its leading production asset strongly alludes to the fact that the Russian government is once again seeking to reassert its control over the country's crown jewel- its energy sector. With the restructuring and liberalization of the Russia's state monopolies in electricity (RAU UES) and gas (Gazprom) moving at a snail's pace—along with the state's recapturing of the country's leading oil industry assets—the governance of the Russian oil sector is moving into the direction of a regime more reflective of Saudi Arabia and the OPEC countries. The battle for energy dominance between Moscow and Riyadh, although set to continue into the medium term, may not be one between two such radically different cultures after all.

[213]- Ibid. During 2003 Yukos had overtaken Lukoil in oil output to become Russia's leading producer, with output of 1,615,000 bpd—an increase of 15.5 percent on 2002).

4.3 Foreign trade relations of the not-so-mainstream kind

As one of the world's most highly intense conflict zones since decolonization actively began after World War II, the Middle East has been one of the most important market destinations for the international arms trade. From the 1950s to the end of the Cold War, the arms trade was dominated from the supply side by the two super-powers—the United States and the Soviet Union—both of whom used arms transfers as a foreign policy mechanism in support of their ideological and security objectives of that period.[214] For its part, towards the end of the Cold War in 1987, the USSR accounted for 38 percent of the worldwide trade in major conventional weapons[215] and was without doubt a major supplier of arms to the Arab states, to whom it delivered some $55 billion in conventional weaponry between 1983 and 1990.[216] However, virtually none of these arms deliveries were transferred to the states of the GCC. They were primarily bound for the Soviet Union's allies amongst the socialist Arab regimes of the Middle East including: Iraq ($24 billion); Syria ($11 billion); and, Libya ($7 billion).[217] The pro-Western Gulf monarchies maintained very close relations with the Western powers who provided for their security needs both through

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[214]- Ian Anthony, *Russia and the Arms Trade* (London: Oxford University Press, 1998).
[215]- Ibid., 5.
[216]- Abdulaziz Sager, "Abdullah's Visit Signals New Saudi-Russian Era"; available from www.arabnews.com; Internet; 3 September 2003. In 1988 alone, the USSR, with its US$14.5 billion worth of arms transfers to the Middle East for that year, was outstripping the United States in arms transfers to the region (the USA supplied the Middle East with US$12.2 billion for that year); See Andrej Kreutz, "The Geopolitics of post-Soviet Russia and the Middle East," *Arab Studies Quarterly* (Winter 2002): 5.
[217]- Ibid.

the maintenance of significant volumes of military manpower and materials in the states of the GCC, as well as through the supply of some of the most sophisticated military equipment available, albeit increasingly on a commercial basis.[218]

With the onset of the new international environment after the end of the Cold War in which ideologically driven foreign policies have given way to those based on geopolitical competition, national interest and market relations, a noticeable restructuring in the nature of Moscow's arms trade with the Middle East became evident. The Soviet Union's support for the allied coalition to liberate Kuwait in 1991 was a watershed in Moscow's relations with the Arab world and facilitated the restoration of ties with Saudi Arabia, the major Gulf power which had also been supporting the anti-Soviet *Mujahideen* fighters in Afghanistan during the 1980s. The Soviet Union's stance against Iraq during the 1990-1991 Gulf War not only won billions of dollars in financial aid for the ailing Soviet economy from the Gulf monarchies, but also—given the new diplomatic harmony that was now emerging between Moscow and the Gulf—created the expectation that trade and investment between Russia and the Gulf would start to materialize. As the dissolving Soviet Union gave way to the formation of the Commonwealth of Independent States, and with the Gulf states spending some $40 billion on arms purchases during 1991-1992 alone,[219] it can be said with relative certainty that Moscow expected that Russian arms supplies to the Gulf would constitute a significant part of the unfolding economic relations between the regions.

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[218]- It is estimated that the US spends around $30-60 billion annually for the defense of the Gulf. See Graham E. Fuller and Ian Lesser, "Persian Gulf Myths," *Foreign Affairs* 76 (May/June 1997): 42-52.

[219]- Alexei Tchistiakov, "Changes in the Middle East and the Outside World," *International Affairs* 5 (May 1994): 111.

Given the changing nature of diplomatic relations between Moscow and the Gulf on the one hand, and the de-ideologization of the ex-Soviet arms trade on the other, Russia made its first major push into the GCC arms market in January 1993, when Russian Defense Minister Pavel Grachev visited the UAE promoting Russian arms such as the T-72 tank.[220] Barely one month after the Grachev visit, Russian arms manufacturers were present in full force at the Abu Dhabi arms trade fair and there were optimistic expectations on the Russian side that arms deals worth up to $5 billion would be done.[221] Further high-level visits by Russian delegations to the Gulf during the 1990s also had the agenda of pushing Russian arms supplies into the GCC market. However, with Russian-GCC relations taking on a peripheral character during the 1990s, little came from the marketing of Russian arms to the GCC states, which continued to rely on American and British manufacturers as the main source for their supply of weapons. Unlike the burgeoning Western arms production industry, with the ex-Soviet military machine in disarray, Russia's arms production and exports virtually collapsed, falling to their ultimate low in 1994 when Russian arms exports reached just $1.7 billion and Moscow's share of the global arms trade fell to as little as 3 percent.[222]

However, as has been the general case with the Russian economy the Russian arms industry has been recovering since the

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[220]- Roland Dannreuther, "Russia, Central Asia and the Persian Gulf," *Survival* 35 (Winter 1993): 107. The Russian Defense Minister is said to have made the case for the T-72, stating "our T-72 tank proved itself brilliantly during the war against Iraq as part of the Syrian troops' arsenal."
[221]- Ibid.
[222]- Ian Anthony, *Russia and the Arms Trade* (London: Oxford University Press, 1998). At the same time as the Russian arms industry was experiencing its lows, the United States controlled up to 70 percent of the arms market for the entire Middle East; See Alexei Chistyakov, "The Middle East in the Light of Geopolitical Changes," *International Affairs* 8 (1995): 48.

lows of the mid-1990s and arms exports have been rising noticeably since that time. *Rosvooruzhenie*, the Russian government monopoly for the sale and export of arms, was restructured into a more commercialized legal entity in 1997 with the goal of making it behave like a corporation charged with the management of major, complex arms deals with foreign states.[223] Furthermore, Russian industrialists engaged in arms production have come to realize that they can no longer depend on orders from the domestic Russian and CIS defense industries given their low capacity to finance the purchase of sophisticated arms orders.[224] The choice remaining for Russian arms producers has consequently been twofold: either pursuing export contracts or converting their production to non-military industries. Exports contracts, when they can be won, are seen by Russians arms producers as extremely profitable.[225] Thus, by 2000 Russia had already recaptured the position as the world's second largest exporter of conventional weapons, with other member states of the CIS, such as Ukraine and Belarus, also ranking among the world's top ten arms suppliers to the international market.[226] By 2002, Russia was exporting over $6 billion in arms—not quite matching Soviet levels of the mid-1980s, but a significant recovery from the low-points of the mid-1990s nonetheless.[227]

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[223]- Ibid., 10.
[224]- Ibid.
[225]- Ibid.
[226]- Gideon Burrows, *The No-Nonsense Guide to the Arms Trade* (Oxford, New Internationalist Publications, 2002). Between 1996-2000, Russia supplied nearly $15.7 billion worth of arms exports to the international arms market, making it the second largest supplier after the United States (over $49 billion). Ukraine was ranked seventh, with $1.72 billion, and Belarus tenth, with $1.24 billion in arms exports.
[227]- Ariel Cohen, "Beware of Saudi-Saudi Rapprochement"; available from www.washingtontimes.com; Internet; accessed 18 September 2003.

What relevance has the recovery in Russian arms exports had for the GCC arms market and for Russian-CIS-GCC economic relations in general? Given that two GCC member states—Saudi Arabia and the UAE—are presently amongst the 10 largest buyers of arms in the world, while a third, Kuwait, was ranked as number 14 in year 2000,[228] and given that the agents of *Rosvooruzhenie* are constantly on the lookout for lucrative export contracts, Moscow's chances to make an impact on the GCC arms market seem to be improving. This optimism is reflected in Russia's new arms trade relations with the UAE, the latter having recently been listed by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) as one of the top ten recipients of major conventional weapons from the Russian Federation.[229] Various sources suggest that Russia has reached an agreement with the UAE over the supply of a highly sophisticated air defense system, a contract estimated to be worth around $4 billion.[230] Now that it has been acknowledged that the UAE is one of Russia's newly established major clients in the arms trade, Russian firms have been highly visible participants at the UAE's major international arms fairs in recent years, including the IDEX-2003 International Defense and Weaponry Exhibition in Abu Dhabi in March 2003, where some 50 Russian companies demonstrated over 500 new kinds of arms and military

[228]- Gideon Burrows, *The No-Nonsense Guide to the Arms Trade* (Oxford, New Internationalist Publications, 2002). Saudi Arabia was the second-largest (after Taiwan) importer of arms during 1996-2000, with purchases totaling some $8.3 billion. The UAE and Kuwait also made arms purchases totaling several billion dollars during this period.

[229]- Ian Anthony, *Russia and the Arms Trade* (London: Oxford University Press, 1998).

[230]- Ariel Cohen, "Beware of Saudi-Saudi Rapprochement"; available from www.washingtontimes.com; Internet; accessed 18 September 2003; [230] Abdulaziz Sager, "Abdullah's Visit Signals New Saudi-Russian Era"; available from www.arabnews.com; Internet; 3 September 2003.

equipment.[231] Similarly, at the 8th International Dubai Air Show in late 2003, Russia displayed more than 200 kinds of military hardware, armaments ammunition and auxiliary systems.[232]

However, despite the talk of Saudi Arabia sourcing weaponry from Russia after relations between Riyadh and Washington experienced strains in recent years, Russian and CIS arms manufacturers have yet to show any meaningful sign of penetrating the lucrative Saudi arms market. The scenario is similar to the one regarding Kuwait and the other states of the GCC, which continue to rely on the West for satisfaction of their defense industry and security needs. Despite more assertive relations between Moscow and the GCC states after the Russian-Saudi rapprochement of latter 2003, the evident recovery of the Russian arms production industry and the continued marketing of Russian weaponry at regional military exhibitions, Russian arms dealers have been finding the GCC market a tough nut to crack. The answer to the question of why some governments are willing or able to buy arms from a particular country and not from others, is a difficult one to answer and lies in a basket of political, military, economic, industrial and technological issues, developed over a period of years or longer.[233]

Longstanding supplier-recipient relationships tend to endure in the arms trade, with the exception of anomaly cases like those of Russia and Iraq, where a longstanding military-economic relationship has been effectively destroyed by UN sanctions and the wrath of Washington's foreign policy caprice. Saudi Arabia is one of the world's leading customers in the global arms trade and given

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[231]- Andrej Kreutz, "Russia and the Arabian Peninsula," *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies* 7 (2004): 47.
[232]- Ibid.
[233]- Ian Anthony, *Russia and the Arms Trade* (London: Oxford University Press, 1998).

the longstanding strategic relationship between Riyadh, London and Washington, British and American firms continue to hold the Saudis' favor as the preferred supplier of the kingdom's defense needs. The arms trade relationship between Saudi Arabia and the West is underscored by multibillion dollar agreements such as *Al-Yamamah I* (1986) and *Al-Yamamah II* (1988), which were estimated to have a combined value of over $50 billion and under which Britain was to supply the Saudis with scores of different types of military aircraft including Tornado fighters, Hawk advanced trainers, Pilatus PC-9 trainers and Westland helicopters.[234] Despite some recent strain in Riyadh's relations with Washington, Russian and CIS arms firms have been unable to break into the Saudi arms market; It is worth noting that not one GCC state has been listed by SIRPI as being amongst the 25 largest recipients of Soviet and Russian arms during the 1980s and 90s.[235] While it is fairly certain that Moscow will continue its efforts to enter the GCC arms market more broadly, the Russian arms export industry will continue to derive the majority of its revenues from traditionally consistent clients such as the government of India[236] as well as other states in the developing world (e.g., Syria, Iran and China). Such states are not able to source the majority of their defense

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[234]- Gideon Burrows, *The No-Nonsense Guide to the Arms Trade* (Oxford, New Internationalist Publications, 2002). The *Al-Yamamah* deal was the biggest ever arms deal involving British firms and was described at the time as "the biggest [British] sale of anything to anyone." The majority of *Al-Yamamah* was not a very transparent affair and involved controversy involving UK government ministers—a not at all atypical scenario for arms deals of this magnitude.

[235]- Ian Anthony, *Russia and the Arms Trade* (London: Oxford University Press, 1998).

[236]- Ibid., 30. India has been consistently the single largest customer of Soviet and Russian arms for roughly two decades and its armed forces have become heavily reliant on equipment of Soviet origin. The bilateral arms relationship with India has been the single most stable element in Moscow's military-technical cooperation with New Delhi.

requirements from the major suppliers in the West due to their generally cautious foreign policy relations with the major Western powers.

Chapter Five

Conclusion

Russia, the CIS and the GCC – An Afterthought

Although present-day Russia and its sphere of influence in the former Soviet Union can no longer be compared in political power to that which was wielded by the USSR, this discussion has sought to demonstrate that Moscow and the CIS continue to play a significant role in current international relations. By the start of the 21st century, the Russian Federation had accomplished a substantial economic and foreign policy recovery and has sought to demonstrate itself as a pragmatic power and strategic partner in the major international political events of the day. As part of the rearrangement of Russian (and CIS) foreign policy priorities during the decade-and-a-half-long period of transition from the Soviet Union to Russian Federation, Moscow has been pushing for closer ties with non-traditional allies in the Middle East, namely the states of the GCC. Moscow's support for the anti-Iraqi coalition during the Gulf War of 1990-1991 set the stage for a rapprochement in its relations with some of the leading Gulf States, which were largely devoid of mutual ties for most of the 1960s to 1980s period. The Soviet Union's role in the Gulf War consolidated the establishment of formal political ties with the GCC states and brought about expectations of constructive political and economic relations between the regions.

However, as has been noted in Chapter 2 of this report, relations between Russia, the CIS and the states of the GCC remained rather

peripheral for most of the 1990s. It was not until very recent years that we have started to note a more assertive series of international engagements between these regions. The Russian Federation and Saudi Arabia, for example, have been driven closer to one another as a result of strategic developments taking place at the levels of international politics and economics. Major international political crises such as the September 11 terrorist attacks in New York and the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003—as well as the onset of Russian oil output onto the international energy market—have realigned Moscow's and Riyadh's strategic interests to new levels of convergence unseen in the past. A new level of dialogue had commenced between Saudi Arabia and the Russia Federation in the post-September 11 international environment and culminated symbolically in the official three-day visit to Moscow by then Saudi Arabian Crown Prince Abdullah Bin Abdul Aziz in September 2003.

While political and economic developments of major international significance are fostering new levels of concerted engagement between the CIS and the Gulf, cultural dynamics are also driving the CIS and GCC closer together. We have noted in some detail the role that the Gulf has played in the Islamic revival taking place in the Muslim regions of the former Soviet Union, including the provision of funds for the expansion of Islamic education and distribution of religious literature, investment in the construction of new mosques and the sponsoring of CIS-Muslim pilgrims for their once-in-a-lifetime *Hajj* to the Muslim holy sites located in the Arabian Peninsula. However, the spread of Islamic fundamentalism is currently on the rise in the former Soviet Union and there is noticeable concern amongst CIS authorities that Gulf support for the Islamic revival in the CIS may have an association with Islamist militancy. Chechen Islamic fundamentalists claim responsibility for horrific acts of terrorism, such as the Moscow theatre hostage crisis in 2002 and the Beslan school massacre in 2004. The Russian government claims that these terrorists are

linked to international Islamic terrorist networks such as Al-Qaeda. International terrorism and the Islamicization of the politics of certain CIS regions are therefore also leading to Russia having to engage the Gulf region, whether in order to join international Islamic institutions such as the OIC or to confront the government of Qatar over the alleged assassination of Chechen leaders in the Qatari capital.

Relations between Russia, the CIS and the GCC are likely to expand further in the medium-term, as there are now many strategic issues compelling the regions to maintain mutual ties. As already suggested above, these include: the realignment of international politics in the post-Cold War and more particularly, the post-September 11 global political order; international terrorism and Islamic fundamentalism; international energy issues; and finally, global energy security. The consolidation of GCC-CIS mutual ties is reflected by the high-level delegations moving between the regions in the course of official business, be it then Crown Prince Abdullah's visit to Moscow, Russian President Putin's participation in the OIC Summit in Malaysia in 2003, or the visit of the late Chechen President Ahmed Kadyrov to Saudi Arabia in January 2004. Furthermore, apart from the macro-level, official state-to-state relations between the regions, we are also seeing GCC-CIS relations develop at the micro-level with noticeable momentum. This is particularly visible through the fact that CIS citizens in their thousands are coming to the Gulf both as tourists, religious pilgrims and suitcase traders in a trend that was simply not conceivable a little over a decade ago. Many CIS citizens are now resident in the Gulf, having taken up positions of employment or started their own small business. While the newfound macro- and micro-level ties between the CIS and the GCC are unlikely to make any inroads into the Gulf's well-established pro-Western political and economic orientations, the major international political, cultural and economic developments currently taking place provide no other conclusion

other than the fact that GCC-CIS relations are only likely to consolidate further.

About the Author

Dr. Marat Terterov is a political scientist and Ph.D. graduate from St.Antony's College, University of Oxford. Fluent in English and Russian and strong in (Egyptian) Arabic, he is the editor or author of over a dozen major books addressing the business and foreign investment environment in countries of the former Soviet Union and the Middle East. During the last decade, Dr Terterov has researched the political systems and economic reform programs of a number of countries of the former Soviet Union and the Middle East as a USAID consultant, an independent book author, and a Ph.D. scholar. His doctoral dissertation addressed the way in which the state continued to control privatized enterprises in Egypt and was the first recorded study to address the topic in such detail.

He has co-authored a major USAID policy study for the Carana Corporation evaluating the impact of over a decade of privatization in Egypt on that country's public policy framework. The corporation advised the Egyptian government on economic reform from 1999 to 2002. However, his recent work has centered upon researching and editing a series of books on the business and foreign investment in Georgia, Russia, Ukraine, Kazakhstan and other states of the former-Soviet Union for GMB Publishing, a major independent British publishing house. He also authored and edited such books on some major Arab countries including Egypt and Libya and on Gulf states including Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates.

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