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NATO Enlargement and Russia’s Balance-of-Power Policy

1. Introduction

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) is a collective defense alliance that ensures the security of its member states through political and military means. It was established in 1949 as a deterrent against military aggression with the principal objective “to defend Western Europe against Soviet expansion, [and] to control West Germany.” 1 Although NATO was focused on European security, the twelve founding members of NATO spanned two continents and included the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom. 2 The alliance has since expanded to include 29 total members. 3 As stated in a mission statement on its official website, in order to ensure the security and prosperity of its member states,

NATO is committed to the peaceful resolution of disputes. If diplomatic efforts fail, it has the military capacity needed to undertake crisis-management operations. These are carried out under Article 5 of the Washington Treaty—NATO’s founding treaty—or under a UN mandate, alone or in cooperation with other countries and international organizations. 4

NATO was a product of the Cold War, a period of intense geopolitical rivalry and hostility between the Soviet Union and the United States. In this highly polarized international system, the two superpowers consolidated their respective ideologically aligned blocs by forming intergovernmental security organizations. In 1955, the Soviet Union united itself with seven other socialist states in the Warsaw Pact partially in response to the inclusion of West Germany.

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1 Gann and Duignan, 3.
2 The other founding members were Belgium, Denmark, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, and Portugal.
3 The following 17 states have joined NATO since the first phase of expansion in 1952: Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Montenegro, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, and Turkey.
4 “What Is NATO?”
into NATO. The creation and early expansion of NATO was designed to deter any potential Soviet invasion of Western Europe. The Soviets’ retaliatory formation of the Warsaw Pact is representative of the geopolitical stalemate that characterized much of the Cold War in Europe. The two superpowers’ nuclear capabilities paradoxically helped maintain a balance of power in Europe, as both sides recognized that the threat of mutually-assured destruction “was critical to maintaining peace through nuclear deterrence.”

Up until the demise of the Soviet Union, deterrence remained NATO’s single most effective policy. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War rendered this deterrence policy obsolete. NATO’s leaders were forced to reconsider its mission in order to maintain the organization or otherwise risk dissolution. Concerns about the threat of instability and disruption of the democratization process in the new states of Central and Eastern Europe prompted decision-makers in the alliance to reorient NATO’s objectives. They decided to focus on establishing security and peace in the region. Adapting to a radically changed security environment, policymakers chose to expand NATO into Central and Eastern Europe.

Moscow perceived the expansion of NATO into the former Eastern Bloc as an attempt by Western countries “to belittle the role of existing mechanisms for international security”—above all the role of the UN—and to challenge its hegemony in what it considered its historic sphere of influence. Russia believed that NATO expansion would exclude it from the new European security structure. The “perception of exclusion” from the dynamics of “European governance” provoked the Russian political elite to reassess and reshape Russia’s foreign policy agenda. Policymakers decided to pursue a balance-of-power policy to countervail the threat of an

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5 Goodby, xix.
6 Gärtner, 271.
7 de Haas, 17.
8 Webber, 65–66.
expanding NATO. Moscow’s priorities shifted toward regional cooperation in Asia, establishing relationships and strengthening strategic partnerships with such key geopolitical actors as China, India, and a number of former Soviet republics in Central Asia. The culmination of this effort was the creation of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). The member and observer states of these two alliances comprise a network that includes four states with nuclear weapons capabilities, accounts for half of the world’s population, 50% of the total known natural gas reserves, and 25% of the world’s oil resources.⁹

NATO’s role in shaping today’s geopolitical environment has been well-documented by specialists in such diverse fields as global history, international relations theory, and political science. The CSTO and SCO, in contrast, have been relatively neglected by scholars and policymakers in the West. The few studies that do focus on the CSTO and SCO examine these organizations as examples of a growing global trend of security regionalism. This may be a consequence of the fact that both organizations were formed relatively recently. Nevertheless, the paucity of studies on the CSTO and SCO has significant ramifications for policymakers in the West seeking to understand Russia’s geopolitical strategy. This paper argues that the eastward expansion of NATO provoked Russia to reshape its foreign policy priorities and focus on the former Soviet republics in Central Asia. In forming the CSTO and SCO, Russia has created a competitive security system in Eurasia that serves as a counterweight to what its leaders consider the West’s incursion into the former Soviet sphere of influence in Eastern and Central Europe.

⁹ de Haas, 45.
2. NATO's Deterrence and Security Governance

In the immediate aftermath of World War II, the United States and its allies in Western Europe grew increasingly concerned about the possible expansion of Soviet influence on the continent. This agitation was increased further by the threat of nuclear war following Soviet successes in developing a nuclear weapons program. In the fall of 1945, months after the first military use of atomic weapons in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Bernard Brodie published the first study to explore the implications of having entered the nuclear age. His assessment would come to define the shape of the West’s policy during the ensuing Cold War: “Thus far the chief purpose of our military establishment has been to win wars. From now on its chief purpose is to avert them.”\(^{10}\) Wielding nuclear weapons and enjoying robust post-war economic growth, the United States pledged economic and military support to its allies in Western Europe to enlist them in a united effort to deter the threat of Soviet military aggression. This so-called “transatlantic bargain” formed the ideological basis for the establishment of NATO in 1949.

Deterrence has long been an important practice among states on the international political stage to contain potential aggressors and to maintain peace. The United States Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms defines deterrence as “the prevention of action by the existence of a credible threat of unacceptable counteraction and/or belief that the cost of action outweighs the perceived benefits.”\(^{11}\) Deterrence is a political strategy that aims to dissuade a potential aggressor from any offensive effort through the use of military and nonmilitary threats. Once the United States and the Soviet Union developed nuclear weapons, the possibility of mutually assured destruction deterred both sides from initiating any direct attack. The deterrence policies developed by both sides produced a balanced, if tense,

\(^{10}\) Brodie, 65.
\(^{11}\) United States Department of Defense, 69.
international order in Europe for the duration of the Cold War. Since the end of the Cold War, however, security issues and the stability of Europe have dominated the political process and decision-making within NATO. As a result of this change, security governance emerged as a top priority. The underlying element of security governance in Europe rests “on the ability of its core organizations (NATO and the EU) to assimilate or manage relations with the states of postcommunist Europe.”

Efforts to integrate the former Eastern Bloc states into the Western European political community resulted in “two conflicting processes of change—the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion.” NATO addressed the need for inclusion by extending membership to the new post-socialist states of Central and Eastern Europe. The dynamic of exclusion emerged when “security governance generated a sense of separation between the alliance and the states remaining outside NATO.”

These dynamics occurred during a period of systemic change in Europe that ushered in an era of uncertainty about the future of NATO and its role in ensuring European security. Many anticipated a diminishing role for NATO, which was reflected in a large number of commentaries that resulted from the NATO Council meeting in May 1990. Policymakers, officials, and heads of states all had doubts about the possibility of maintaining the alliance. Among the commentators at the time, a few “were ready to actively promote the early dissolution of NATO and its total replacement” by an alternative security order that would include all of Europe. Nevertheless, NATO survived. Recognizing that there was no Soviet

12 Webber, 63.
13 Ibid.
14 Ibid.
15 Smith, 99.
16 Ibid.
threat to deter, alliance members focused on new dangers on the periphery of Europe.\textsuperscript{17} Although collective defense remained an important function of the alliance, the emerging “new NATO” focused on peacekeeping, humanitarian aid, and supporting the growth of democracy.\textsuperscript{18} The re-orientation of NATO’s core mission prompted its leaders to consider expanding the organization to include the post-socialist states of the former Eastern Bloc. Representatives from the member states reacted with different degrees of acceptance and interest to the proposition to expand NATO. This ultimately polarizing decision became the subject of an intense public debate. Many NATO officials made an effort to convince the public that “NATO membership for Eastern Europe was key to safeguarding and promoting democracy and free markets there.”\textsuperscript{19} That argument, however, failed to explain how the alliance could best secure those aims for the former member states of the Warsaw Pact.\textsuperscript{20} Nevertheless, NATO leaders asserted that “enlargement would contribute to enhanced stability and security for all countries in the Euro-Atlantic area.”\textsuperscript{21} The proponents of this position claimed that the enlargement of NATO would place the alliance in a firm strategic position between Berlin and Moscow, thus ensuring lasting stability in Central and Eastern Europe. Citing the growing volatility of the Balkans, expansionists concluded that “enlargement would increase the effectiveness of NATO’s deterrents against potential regional aggressors.”\textsuperscript{22} This argument, however, is ultimately self-contradictory: the end of the Cold War had made the deterrence strategy obsolete. Many policymakers rejected the notion that expansion was an anti-Russian move, suggesting that it would stabilize the regions along Russia’s western border and thus resolve one of its major

\textsuperscript{17} Gärtnert, 271.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{19} Barany, 13.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 14.
\textsuperscript{21} Gärtnert, 276.
\textsuperscript{22} Barany, 14.
security concerns. Others contended that, given its sheer size and history of aggression toward its weaker neighbors, a resurgent Russia could threaten the security of Eastern Europe in the future. Thus, many backers of the policy insisted that, “not to expand NATO would be taken by the Russians as tacit U.S. acceptance of Moscow’s right to define Eastern Europe as its own security sphere.”

On the other hand, many experts warned about the negative consequences of expansion. George F. Kennan, an American diplomat who was among the initial political architects of NATO, warned that expansion “would be the most fateful error of American policy in the entire post-Cold War era.” One of the main arguments against expansion was that NATO’s goals of promoting security, stability, and democratization and preventing violent internal conflict could not be achieved without political and economic leverage. From its inception, NATO had laid the foundation for a collaborative partnership among its members to counter disruptive external forces. It did not have the necessary administrative, political, economic or military provisions in its framework to address the internal challenges and security issues that would result from expanding the alliance. Experts concluded that alliances such as NATO “lack the tools that are required to help prevent ethnic tensions from escalating into outright conflict” as they “have few positive incentives at their disposal to encourage peaceful settlement.” Membership in the alliance would not in itself prevent internal or ethnic violence.

These potential problems with the fundamentals of security governance aided the argument against NATO enlargement. The consequences of a dynamic of exclusion reinforced

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23 Ibid, 16.
24 Kennan.
25 Gärtnert, 294.
the “importance of embracing defeated adversaries.” If NATO were to establish and maintain peace and stability throughout Europe, it would have to avoid excluding and humiliating Russia, a former rival superpower. Many suggested that Central and Eastern European countries could be granted membership if an imminent threat from Russia were to emerge, but antagonizing Russia for a non-existent threat would not “make strategic sense.” Jeopardizing the rapprochement between the West and Russia would have significant consequences. Excluding Russia might reinstate the atmosphere and attitudes of the Cold War. The fundamental arrangements for the security order of the post-Cold War era, a “remarkable series of arms control accords, covering nuclear (START II and III) and conventional weapons (CFE),” hinged on the nature of East-West relations. Opponents of the expansion proposal argued that Russia, plagued with internal problems, could not pose any threat to the West, and that antagonizing Russia would only impede the progress of talks over arms control. Given the chaos in the region, if the talks were to fail, the security of Europe would be at serious risk.

Despite the arguments against eastward expansion into the former Eastern Bloc, NATO ultimately decided to move forward with the enlargement policy. At the 1997 Madrid summit, NATO officials developed a comprehensive program of action to adjust the alliance to this new security framework and to achieve the objectives of this transformation. According to this program, the enlargement of the alliance would be a necessary part of the agenda. Since then, thirteen new member states have been integrated into NATO in four phases: Poland, the Czech

26 Kupchan, 129.
27 Ibid.
28 Gärtner, 295.
Republic, and Hungary joined in 1999; Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia,
and Slovenia in 2004; Albania and Croatia in 2009; and Montenegro in 2017.29

3. Russia’s Balance-of-Power Policy

On December 5, 1994, a few days after NATO foreign ministers arrived at the decision to
initiate a process of examination for future expansion, Russian President Boris Yeltsin responded
to NATO’s announcement during his speech at the Budapest summit of the Conference on
Security and Cooperation in Europe:

Europe, even before it has managed to shrug off the legacy of the Cold War, is
risking encumbering itself with a cold peace … NATO was created in Cold War
times. Today, it is trying to find its place in Europe, not without difficulty. It is
important that this search not create new divisions, but promote European unity.
We believe that the plans of expanding NATO are contrary to this logic. Why sow
the seeds of distrust? After all, we are no longer adversaries, we are
partners.30

At the time, NATO officials considered Yeltsin’s remarks as possibly tailored for domestic
consumption, perhaps intended to sway potential voters in the upcoming parliamentary and
presidential elections. Indeed, Russia’s foreign minister, Andrei Kozyrev, signaled his
willingness to work with NATO officials to find a middle ground on the enlargement issue and
other ensuing concerns. Moderate Russian officials routinely cited the upcoming elections and
the importance of public opinion as reasons for NATO “not to wave a red flag.”31 They sensed
that anti-West groups could easily manipulate public opinion by invoking the specter of an
expansionist, hostile NATO moving toward Russian borders.

In retrospect, the concerns of moderates and reformers were legitimate. The anti-West,
anti-NATO campaign of the hardliners gained momentum and swayed public opinion. Even

29 Sloan, 11.
30 Goldgeier and McFaul, 191.
31 Solomon, 79.
reformers could not escape from the influence of the anti-NATO rhetoric. While NATO considered the planned eastward expansion as part of a more general plan to integrate Russia into the post-Cold War European community, “Moscow always interpreted it as a disadvantageous shift in the geopolitical zones of influence, and in doing so paid particular attention primarily to military and strategic (rather than political) factors.”32 Capitalizing on “traditional Russian fears of encirclement,” communists won the largest number of Duma seats in the December 1995 parliamentary election.33 The consensus grew to such an extent that an anti-NATO union of deputies formed in the Duma in which 300 of 450 members participated.34 Russia’s foreign policy was no longer centered on integration with the West. Instead, Western institutions such as NATO were considered a threat that had to be deliberately addressed. This change in the political climate would ultimately lead Moscow to adopt strategies to balance with the West.

Russia’s foreign policy had to change in order to counter an expanding NATO. Anti-West hardliners in Moscow resorted to balance-of-power politics—“an ordering principle for international relations,”35 the basic motivation of which is a state’s pursuit of security. When the balance of power is tilted, a weaker state “attempts to strengthen itself by increasing its own military capabilities … and to form or enter into a defensive coalition against a stronger adversary.”36 In 1996, Russian Foreign Minister Kozyrev had to step down due to accusations of “an overly pro-Western and conspiracy bent” and was replaced by Evgenii Primakov, the former

32 В то время как страны НАТО рассматривали расширение своего союза на Восток как составляющую процесса общеевропейского политического расширения (в контексте интеграционных и объединительных усилий аналогичного процесса расширения ЕС), Москва всегда интерпретировала его как изменение геополитических зон влияния не в ее пользу и при этом особое внимание уделяла прежде всего военно-стратегическим (а не политическим) факторам. Umbakh, 95. Translation provided by the author.
33 Black, 24; Solomon, 156.
34 Umbakh, 91.
35 Chan, 19.
director of the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service.\textsuperscript{37} His appointment was widely regarded as “signaling a more conservative Russian cabinet” and in many ways “marked the definitive end of the Western orientation in Russia’s foreign policy.”\textsuperscript{38} Primakov believed that Moscow had to focus on creating and strengthening centers of power away from Western influence to balance the asymmetrical distribution of power in the world. The “Primakov doctrine” asserted that, as “an independent pole in the increasingly multipolar world,” Russia should “therefore develop relations with all other centres and with the new emerging powers such as China and India in particular.”\textsuperscript{39} Following this political shift, Russia took a more assertive and independent role in the international community. Foreign Minister Lavrov, whom Putin appointed to the post in 2004, has hailed the legacy of Primakov: “The moment he took over the Russian Foreign Ministry heralded a dramatic turn of Russia’s foreign policy. Russia left the path our Western partners had tried to make it follow after the breakup of the Soviet Union and embarked on a track of its own.”\textsuperscript{40}

As the communists gained a platform on the Russian political arena and Yeltsin’s government distanced itself from the reformers, Russian officials reached a consensus to address the threat of NATO advancing toward Russian borders. The pro-Western course of action was significantly reversed, and Russia took a defensive approach, preparing itself to offset any threats imposed by NATO expansion. Moscow has since resorted to a balance-of-power policy. Following this dramatic change in Russia’s foreign policy, the political leadership in Russia began the process of drafting new security documents to tailor policy instruments that would strengthen Russia’s position vis-à-vis NATO. These documents painted a clear picture of the

\textsuperscript{37} Solomon, 93.
\textsuperscript{38} Ibid., 156; Forsberg and Haukkala, 21.
\textsuperscript{39} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{40} Ibid.
policy priorities of the Russian leadership. In 2000, President Vladimir Putin signed the new National Security Concept of the Russian Federation (NSC), the Military Doctrine, and the Foreign Policy Concept (FPC), three key security documents that delineate the country’s internal concerns, including “security perceptions, international motives and goals, as well as their sources.” These documents have since been updated to adjust Russian policies in response to the government’s evolving objectives. They collectively emphasize cooperation and integration within the Commonwealth of Independent States as the top priority for Moscow and encourage Russia’s foreign policy pivot toward Asia.

Moscow has since pursued these goals by forming two Russo-centric political, economic, and military structures in Central Asia: the CSTO and SCO. Russia’s foreign policy of alignment with other states has focused on facilitating integration and reducing tension in the region in order to “promote the identity of Central Asia as a post-Soviet space.” Having largely abandoned its short-lived hopes of integrating with Europe, Russia now seeks to form strong partnerships and avoid instability in Asia. To achieve this goal of a unified and powerful Eurasian region, Moscow has moved away from domination and unilateral leadership toward power-sharing strategies and cooperation. In this capacity, it has increased its presence and influence in Central Asia, which has emerged as a newly defined geopolitical space since the end of Cold War. This region includes five former Soviet republics: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. Russia is also focusing on Caspian littoral states such as Iran and Azerbaijan. The two regions account for about “18% of the world’s total proven oil reserve and 45% of the world’s proven gas reserves.” A nexus between Asia and Europe, the

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41 Facon, 4.  
42 Marketos, 2.  
43 Ibid.
regions are strategically important as “the only practical corridor connecting NATO territory with Central Asia and Afghanistan.”

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Commonwealth of Independent States struggled to integrate itself economically and militarily. Moscow decided to implement a “collective security force that had been worked out bilaterally between Russia and Kazakhstan.” The idea appealed to other CIS states, and by 1994, Russia had joined Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan in signing the Collective Security Treaty. Set to last for five years, the treaty created a defensive alliance “whose ultimate decision-making authority was to be a collective security council.” At the end of the five-year term, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Uzbekistan withdrew from the treaty (Uzbekistan later returned in 2006, only to withdraw once again in 2012). In 2002, the six remaining members signed a charter that redefined the partnership as a military alliance and renamed it the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). The CSTO enables cooperation in providing training and supplies for member states’ military forces. Russia, the main provider of military arms and equipment for the alliance, allows fellow member states to purchase weapons at domestic Russian prices. The alliance’s Collective Rapid Reaction Force has been continuously building up its military forces in Central Asia. The enlargement of the CSTO military presence serves Moscow’s commitment to “counterbalance NATO’s further eastward expansion and to keep CIS countries under Russia’s military protection.” CSTO officials have warned against

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44 Ibid.
45 Donaldson and Nogee, 178.
46 Ibid, 179.
47 de Haas, 40.
48 Ibid., 41.
large-scale efforts aimed at creating “Western/American military infrastructure around Russia, Belarus, and other CSTO countries.”

The second important alliance Russia formed in Asia was the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). In 1996, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, and Tajikistan signed the Shanghai Five Agreement, forming a loosely defined alliance. In 2000, its members declared their intention to transform the alliance into a closer form of cooperation in order to maintain peace, security, and stability in the region. Uzbekistan joined the original five members at the official declaration and signing of the SCO in 2001. The SCO’s main objectives were political, military, and economic cooperation, with particular emphasis on arms and energy trade. Since 2001, India, Iran, and Pakistan, initially participating as observers, have applied for full membership. India and Pakistan were recently granted membership in June 2017, significantly raising the SCO’s strategic significance. If Iran were granted membership, the organization would encompass nearly half the world’s population and four nuclear states, some of which have had tense external relations with the West. Moreover, the alliance would possess more than 25% of the world’s hydrocarbon energy reserves.

The two organizations officially established their relationship with the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding in 2007, opening the door for military cooperation between the two organizations. The cooperation between the CSTO and SCO, both of which have moved toward full-blown security organizations with political and military agendas, “could give the impression to the outside world that the SCO endeavored to become a NATO of the East.”

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49 Ibid.
50 Melville and Shakleina, 181.
51 de Haas, 42
52 Ibid.
53 Ibid, 42–43.
so-called “color revolutions” of the 2000s, which challenged and even ousted Russian-aligned governments, caused concern among SCO leaders, who sought to prevent what they perceived as outside political intervention from gaining traction in the region. The orchestrated anti-Western stance of the organization was made clear in 2005, when the Council of Heads of State of the SCO concluded their annual meeting with a joint declaration that “urged the United States to set a timetable for withdrawing its military troops from the bases of SCO member states.”\footnote{Weiming, 121.} The United States was notified to give up its air bases within six months, and Kyrgyz President Kurmanbek Bakiev complied with the SCO’s resolution “after receiving substantial financial aid from Moscow.”\footnote{Donaldson and Nogee, 214.} Moscow succeeded in challenging the West, reclaiming its hegemony over its sphere of influence “in the East to compensate for what had been lost in the West.”\footnote{Ibid.}

4. Conclusion

During the Cold War, NATO’s primary objective was to deter the Soviet Union and contain the threat of an expanding Warsaw Pact, a mission that it successfully achieved. With the collapse of Soviet Union, and in the absence of an immediate threat to its territory, NATO undertook a reassessment of its priorities and objectives. NATO member states decided to reorganize the alliance to address the challenges of a rapidly integrating Europe. As a result, the “new NATO” mission focused on collective security and economic cooperation rather than military defense with the goal of deterrence.

To consolidate the structure and organization of the “new NATO,” its member states decided to expand the borders of the alliance eastward. In four phases since the end of the Cold War, the alliance has absorbed into itself thirteen new members, ten of which occupy territory of
the former Warsaw Pact. In the eyes of its proponents, the policy to enlarge NATO was well-intentioned: it was designed to promote and maintain peace, security, and stability in a region undergoing difficult socioeconomic transformation. Preoccupied, however, with addressing security issues and expansion, NATO officials overlooked some of the consequences of the enlargement strategy. The first thing that was ignored in the process of expansion was the deterrence capability of the alliance. In changing from a collective defense organization to one focused on collective security, the member states undermined the principal pillar of NATO that had preserved the alliance throughout the Cold War. Another unintended implication of the enlargement was the fact that in their calculations, the allies neglected the principles of security governance and excluded Russia from the new European security structure they were designing.

Moscow’s cynical interpretation of the NATO’s eastward expansion was influenced by a siege mentality historically rooted in the Russian political subconscious. As a result, hardliners and communists were propelled back into powerful positions within the government and successfully helped turn Russian political discourse against the West. Beset by economic and political turmoil, Moscow began to take aggressive countermeasures to reinstate Russia’s status as a great power. To create a balance of power, Russian officials focused on making strategic alliances in Asia. Through the first such alliance, the CSTO, Russia regained its hegemony over the oil and gas-rich former Soviet republics of Central Asia and maintained its security interests by promoting economic and political stability in the region. With the second alliance, the SCO, Russia brought to its side the strategic weight of China, India, and Pakistan. The two alliances together encompass multiple geopolitically important regions that can now be considered within Russia’s self-defined sphere of influence. Russian trading in military equipment has already begun meeting the security concerns of member states in Central Asia. More importantly, the
combined natural energy reserves of the two organizations’ member states help allow Russia to occupy an advantageous position in energy export negotiations. Russia continues to expand and reinforce its ties with states in the geopolitically important region of Central Asia, posing a significant challenge to the global hegemony of the West.
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