

*Russia and the Unresolved*  
***Conflicts in***  
***Eurasia***

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**Abstract**

*Relations between Russia and the West have normalized greatly since the Russian invasion of Georgia in 2008. While the war initially led to questioning of Russia's credibility as a mediator in Eurasia's other conflicts, such criticism has taken a backseat to the improvements in relations that have followed. However, while Russia's policies toward the West have changed, this article suggests that Moscow continues to pursue the quest for a zone of privileged interests in Eurasia, and that a chief instrument in this respect is the manipulation of unresolved conflicts. While Russia continues to undermine Georgia by other means, its role in the conflicts over Transnistria and Nagorno-Karabakh have not changed. In Transnistria, Moscow has failed to respond constructively to German efforts to move toward a resolution, even though the German initiative has gone out of its way to accommodate Russian interests. In the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan, Moscow took the lead in revitalizing peace talks in November 2008, only weeks after the conclusion of the war in Georgia. This suggested that Moscow instrumentalized the peace talks in order to consolidate its position in the South Caucasus rather than seeking to function as an honest broker; this fact, along with continued arms sales to both parties, revealed a lack of credibility as a negotiator that ensured the talks would not succeed. Thus, Moscow's policies continue to form a leading obstacle to conflict resolution in the post-Soviet space.*

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For two decades, Russia has played a leading role in the negotiations surrounding the unresolved conflicts of the post-Soviet space: Abkhazia and South Ossetia in Georgia, the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh between Armenia and Azerbaijan, and the conflict in Moldova's region of Transnistria. Russia's mediation and peacekeeping has on the one hand been praised by Western powers for maintaining stability in these conflicts; on the other hand, numerous critics have detailed Russia's role in instigating these conflicts, as well as Russia's manipulation of the conflicts for its geopolitical purposes.<sup>1</sup>

The perception of Russia as a mediator to Eurasian conflicts has fluctuated greatly over the past three years. In August 2008, Russia's image as a peacemaker was badly damaged by its invasion of Georgia. Following local skirmishes in South Ossetia in late July and early August, Russia launched a mass invasion of not only that region but Abkhazia as well, the nature and speed of which led many observers to conclude had been premeditated. Indeed, subsequent re-

1 See Thomas Goltz, *-Letter from Eurasia: The Hidden Russian Hand, Foreign Policy*, Fall 1993; Evgeni M. Kozhokin, *-Georgia-Abkhazia*, in Jeremy R. Azrael and Emil A. Payin, eds., *US and Russian Policymaking with Regard to the Use of Force*, Santa Monica: Rand Corp., 1996; Alexei Zverev, *-Ethnic Conflict in the Caucasus, 1988-94*, in Bruno Coppieters, ed., *Contested Borders in the Caucasus*, Brussels: VUB Press, 1996; Fiona Hill, and Pamela Jewett, *"Back in the USSR": Russia's Intervention in the Internal Affairs of the Former Soviet Republics and the Implications for United States Policy Toward Russia*, Cambridge, MA: Strengthening Democratic Institutions Project, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, January 1994; Svante E. Cornell, *Small Nations and Great Powers: A Study of Ethnopolitical Conflict in the Caucasus*, 349-51.

search has showed convincingly that Russian leaders had long planned and sought the conflict with Georgia.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, the events of 2008 led Russia belatedly to lose the position as a mediator and peacekeeper in Georgia's conflicts that it had enjoyed, despite growing skepticism, in the eyes of the international community. Moscow has, in the aftermath of the war, tried to re-establish the notion that it is not party to the conflicts in Georgia, but these attempts have so far failed, Russia's military presence on Georgian territory making its role as a party to the conflict clear. Moreover, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev announced an overtly imperialist doctrine, declaring that "Russia, like other countries in the world, has regions where it has privileged interests," and that these include Russia's "border region, but not only."<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, the changes in perceptions of Russia's role in Georgia's conflicts did not automatically translate into a reassessment of Russia's role as a mediator in the Armenian-Azerbaijani and Transnistrian conflicts.

The Russian invasion of Georgia was understood in its immediate aftermath as a watershed event. However, only a few weeks after the invasion, in late September 2008, the U.S. fi-

2 Svante E. Cornell and S. Frederick Starr, *The Guns of August 2008: Russia's War in Georgia* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2009); See also Ronald D. Asmus, *A Little War that Shook the World: Georgia: Russia and the Future of the West* (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 2010).

3 Andrew E. Kramer, "Russia Claims Its Sphere of Influence in the World," *New York Times*, August 31, 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/09/01/world/europe/01russia.html>.

nancial system stood on the verge of collapse, leading to the global financial crisis that still plagues the Euro-Atlantic area. As world leaders struggled to save the world economy, the crisis in Georgia appeared less important. Thus, Russia's stated ambition in November 2008 to take the lead in a new round of negotiations between Baku and Yerevan was generally taken at face value by the international community. In the months and years that have followed, relations between Russia and the West have improved; a consensus has emerged that the economic crisis led to changed Russian attitudes in the international arena. Indeed, Russian policies toward the West have appeared to take on a new and more conciliatory tone. Russia moved to resolve a decades-old dispute with Norway on maritime boundaries, to patch up its longstanding differences with Poland, and in 2010 worked with NATO towards a compromise on the issue of missile defense. It likewise has appeared to reciprocate the Obama administration's "reset" diplomacy, cooperating with the U.S. on sanctions against Iran and logistics in Afghanistan.

The implication of these developments has been to minimize criticism of Russia's role in the unresolved conflicts of Eurasia. Indeed, Western powers lent support to President Dmitry Medvedev's efforts to bring about progress in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, involving a failed summit in Kazan in 2011, and German

leaders have raised the possibility of closer cooperation with Russia on resolving the conflict in Transnistria.

This article strives to assess whether the thaw in Russia's relations with the West has led to any substantial changes in Russia's policy toward the unresolved conflicts of Eurasia. The article will argue that contrary to appearances, these policies have remained essentially the same, and that Moscow's policy continues to be to maintain the status quo in these conflicts until and unless a resolution can be achieved that would cement Russia's geopolitical influence in the countries involved, preferably through a long-term military presence.

### **Georgia: the Conflict Continues**

The ongoing situation concerning Georgia and its secessionist regions—Abkhazia and South Ossetia—remains the main area of discord between Russia and the West. Little has changed in Moscow's policies toward Georgia, and indeed, the war of August 2008 should not be seen as an isolated event, but as the most violent and acute phase of a Russian-Georgian conflict that dates back to the late Soviet period.

Thus, long before the 2008 war, Georgia stood out as the post-Soviet country where Russia had most aggressively asserted itself. In the early 1990s, its military had taken an active role in the secessionist wars. In the mid-1990s, considerable evidence

suggests elements in Moscow were involved in an attempt to assassinate then-Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze. And on several occasions before current President Mikheil Saakashvili's rise to power, Moscow bombed Georgian territory—making it the only country where Russia had used outright military power.<sup>4</sup> This indicates that while the war between Russia and Georgia may be over, the conflict between Moscow and Tbilisi continues at other levels.

The threat of a new Russian invasion cannot be dismissed out of hand. In the early summer of 2009, a considerable number of analysts deemed a renewed Russian military attack on Georgia—one designed to finish the job of ousting the Saakashvili regime—to be likely. While it is nearly impossible to know if such a war was indeed being planned, the diplomatic and military preparations were certainly observable.<sup>5</sup> For reasons that are not known, but which may involve messages sent during President

4 Svante E. Cornell, *Georgia after the Rose Revolution: Geopolitical Predicament and Implications for U.S. Policy* (Carlisle, PA: U.S. Army War College, March 2007), <http://www.silkroadstudies.org/new/docs/publications/2007/0703USAWC.pdf>.

5 Paul Goble, "Russian Experts Divided on Probability of New War with Georgia," *Window on Eurasia*, 1 July 2009, <http://windowoneurasia.blogspot.com/2009/07/window-on-eurasia-russian-experts.html>; "Russia to Plot a Second War Against Georgia?" *Panarmenian.net*, June 29, 2009, <http://www.panarmenian.net/eng/world/news/33516/>; Gregory Feifer, "Friction Feeds Fear of New Russia-Georgia Conflict," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, June 29, 2009, [http://www.rferl.org/content/Fears\\_Grow\\_Of\\_New\\_RussiaGeorgia\\_Conflict/1765258.html](http://www.rferl.org/content/Fears_Grow_Of_New_RussiaGeorgia_Conflict/1765258.html); Yulia Latynina, "New War With Georgia Could Lead to 'Collapse of Russia,'" *Yezhednevnyy Zhurnal (Moscow)*, August 3, 2009.

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Barack Obama's July 2009 visit to Moscow, these plans were not implemented.<sup>6</sup>

Russia continues to violate the 2008 cease-fire agreement negotiated by the European Union, and to overtly seek regime change in Georgia. Russia likewise has rapidly expanded its military presence in the territories that it effectively occupies. On the basis of agreements with the de facto governments in Sukhumi and Tskhinvali, Moscow has built permanent military bases in both territories.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, these include sophisticated hardware, some of which appears directed at threatening the Georgian capital. In late 2010 and early 2011, it was reported that Russia had deployed Smerch (Tornado) multiple-launch rocket systems and Tochka-U (SS-21 Scarab B) short-range tactical ballistic missile systems in South Os-

6 Brian Whitmore, "Is a Russia-Georgia War Off the Table?" *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, July 14, 2009, [http://www.rferl.org/content/Is\\_War\\_Off\\_The\\_Table\\_In\\_Georgia/1776909.html](http://www.rferl.org/content/Is_War_Off_The_Table_In_Georgia/1776909.html).

7 Philip P. Pan, "Putin Visits Breakaway Georgian Region, Unveils Plan for Military Base," *Washington Post*, August 13, 2009.

setia, less than 60 miles from Tbilisi.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, Russia continues to block the unarmed EU Monitoring Mission from accessing either Abkhazia or South Ossetia, as well as preventing the return to their homes of a quarter million ethnic Georgians displaced by the conflicts.

In addition to the military build-up, Russia's wholesale economic embargo on Georgia is still in place, and Russian activities to undermine the Georgian government have not ceased. First, Moscow funds and supports the most radical elements of the Georgian opposition. For example, the Georgian Interior Ministry released a recording in which the leader of the Democratic Movement-United Georgia Party Nino Burjanadze and her son are overheard while planning the May 2011 attempted coup d'état, openly discussing the possibility of assistance from Russian commandos.<sup>9</sup> (Burjanadze has failed to deny the authenticity of the recording.) Secondly, Moscow continues to publicly accuse Georgia of assisting Islamist terrorism in the North Caucasus, in spite of the total absence of evidence to that effect. Conversely, however, Russia's hand is visible behind a string of a dozen bombings that has rocked Georgia in the past year. These were all conducted with

RDX explosives, targeting opposition party offices, railway bridges, supermarkets, as well as the NATO liaison office in Tbilisi and perhaps most alarmingly, a bomb that went off outside the wall of the U.S. Embassy in Tbilisi. Thanks to investigative reporting by the Washington Times, it is now known that the U.S. intelligence community has endorsed the conclusions of the Georgian government's investigation, which identifies an Abkhazia-based Russian Military Intelligence officer as the mastermind of the bombing spree, including the one targeting the U.S. Embassy.<sup>10</sup>

These events all suggest that in its long-standing conflict with Georgia, Moscow currently emphasizes subversive and covert strategies rather than overt military action. But there should be little doubt that Russia continues to actively undermine the development and security of Georgia.

On the diplomatic front, Moscow has engaged in two key efforts toward Georgia. First, while building up its own military capabilities on Georgian territory, it has successfully forced the equivalent of an international arms embargo on the country. The method has been to falsely accuse the U.S. and other Western states of supplying large quantities of weapons to Georgia, thus obtaining assurances that such deliveries have not been made—and an implicit acceptance

8 "Tbilisi Condemns Russia's Smerch Rocket Systems in S. Ossetia," *Civil Georgia*, December 7, 2010, <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=22932>; "Reports: Russia Deploys Tochka-U Rockets in S. Ossetia," *Civil Georgia*, January 24, 2011, <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=23077>.

9 Recording available with English translation at [<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qJDd8wL8AaE>].

10 Eli Lake, "Classified Report: Russia Tied to Blast at the U.S. Embassy – Supports Local Findings", *Washington Times*, 27 July 2011. [<http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2011/jul/26/us-report-russia-tied-to-embassy-blast/>]

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that they should not in the future. As analyst Vladimir Socor has observed, “[t]he claim about those arms deliveries is intended for a U.S. and NATO audience. The Russian government must know that this audience knows that their claim is false. The purpose of such statements is simply to draw, or reinforce, Moscow’s red lines regarding Western policies”.<sup>11</sup> This effectively serves to sustain Georgia’s acute vulnerability, leaving Tbilisi defenseless to a renewed Russian invasion at some point in the future, and enabling Moscow to intimidate the present and future governments there.

Secondly, Moscow is seeking to distort the reality in the conflict zones. Before the 2008 war, Moscow interfered increasingly directly in the affairs of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, for example through the illegal distribution of Russian passports, economic investments, and through the direct

<sup>11</sup> Vladimir Socor, “Russia Calls for Arms Embargo on Georgia after War’s Second Anniversary,” *Jamestown Foundation Eurasia Daily Monitor* 7 no. 157, August 13, 2010.

appointment of Russian state employees to the unrecognized governments of the two entities. At the same time, it sought to portray itself as an honest broker, mediator and peacekeeper in the conflict—and obtained Western confirmation of this status, as well as regular praise in UN resolutions.

Moscow maintains that it is not a party to the conflict—that the conflicts are between Georgia on the one hand and the “independent states” of South Ossetia and Abkhazia on the other.<sup>12</sup> This strategy became most obvious in December 2010, after Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili made a unilateral pledge in the European Parliament not to use force to recover the secessionist territories. In response, Moscow refused to follow suit and make a pledge not to use force against Georgia, arguing that it is not a party to the conflict.<sup>13</sup> This diplomatic initiative has not met with success, and indeed, Georgia has remained the main thorn in Russia’s relationship with the West and in its international image. Contrary to the case before August 2008, the world firmly views Russia as a party to the conflict.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*; “We Don’t See Conflict Between Russia and Georgia—Lavrov,” *News.az*, December 3, 2010, <http://news.az/articles/georgia/27708>; “Russia Warns of ‘Confrontational’ UN Document on Refugees,” *Russia Today*, August 26, 2009, <http://rt.com/politics/russia-warns-confrontational-document/>.

<sup>13</sup> “Moscow Responds to Saakashvili’s Non-Use of Force Pledge,” *Civil Georgia*, November 24, 2010, <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=22891>.

## Armenia and Azerbaijan

During 2009 and 2010, the unresolved conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan has been slowly escalating, with the war of words between the two countries mounting and skirmishes along the cease-fire line increasing.<sup>14</sup> Unfortunately, this evolution is partly a result of Western neglect of the conflict, and the collapse of the U.S.-sponsored Turkish-Armenian reconciliation process. Moscow's policies have been two-fold: asserting its role as the primary mediator between the parties, and stepping up its provision of military hardware to both of them.

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Two decades in the making, the conflict is often considered the quintessential "frozen" conflict, eliciting comparisons to the Cyprus conflict. However, the conflict is far from frozen, and unlike in Cyprus, the risk of renewed hostilities is very much present. In fact, the status quo is un-

<sup>14</sup> Nina Caspersen, "Mounting Tensions over Nagorno-Karabakh", *Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst* 7, no. 13, July 7, 2010, <http://www.cacianalyst.org/?q=node/5363>; Armenia and Azerbaijan: Preventing War, International Crisis Group Europe Briefing no. 60, February 8, 2011.

tenable for one simple reason: the balance of power between the two protagonists is changing rapidly. Although Armenia sits on the land occupied since 1992-94, its population has shrunk considerably since independence due to emigration. By contrast, oil and gas riches have made Azerbaijan the fastest-growing economy of the world in the past five years. Its economy is now almost five times larger than Armenia's; its defense budget alone far surpasses Armenia's entire state budget.

Making matters worse are several facts: first, there are no peacekeeping forces separating the Armenian and Azerbaijani armies, which are eyeball to eyeball across the cease-fire line. Second, leaders on both sides have adopted increasingly fierce nationalistic rhetoric as the conflict has gone unresolved, and given the passage of time, most Armenians and Azerbaijani under the age of 40 have never met a person from the enemy nation. Finally, strong forces on both sides believe time is on their side. In Azerbaijan, the thinking is that the discrepancy of power will only increase to Baku's advantage, decreasing incentives to agree to a deal today when the possibility exists of imposing a better one tomorrow. In Armenia, by contrast, the feeling is that the world is increasingly receptive to the principle of self-determination that the Armenians of Karabakh champion, given the independence of East Timor,

Montenegro, and especially Kosovo. After all, if there are two Albanian states in the Balkans, why can't there be two Armenian ones in the Caucasus? Of course, especially since the ethnic cleansing disproportionately targeted Azerbaijanis, the prospect of the international community ever recognizing the independence of Nagorno-Karabakh is in reality very unlikely.

Western diplomats have generally considered the conflict sufficiently frozen to concentrate, instead, on more urgent matters elsewhere. As such, attention to mediation efforts has been sporadic and erratic. The Bush administration did host a summit in Key West in 2001; French president Jacques Chirac hosted another at Rambouillet in 2006, and Russian President Dmitry Medvedev organized a third in Kazan in 2011. But in between such bursts of energy, little has been done to work toward an agreement. No top-notch mediator has been deployed by Paris, Washington or Moscow to continuously work on the conflict; instead, mid-level ambassadors have chaired the talks, a strategy that has failed to produce results.

The events of 2008-2009 illustrate this neglect. If anything, the war in Georgia should have served as a stern reminder that conflicts of the South Caucasus are far from "frozen". Having failed to prevent the escalation to war in Georgia, it would have been logical for Western powers to redou-

ble their efforts to resolve the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict. Instead, as absurd as it seems, Western leaders did not blink when Russia, fresh from its invasion of Georgia, announced it would take the lead to seek a negotiated solution.

Thus, shortly after the war in Georgia, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev took a leading role in the negotiations between Armenia and Azerbaijan. This served two purposes: first, to improve Russia's tarnished international reputation; and second, to reinforce Russia's role as the predominant force in the South Caucasus. While both the Azerbaijani and Armenian presidents played along, not least in a high-profile summit in Moscow in November 2008, the negotiations went nowhere because of the volatile post-war regional atmosphere. In spite of this fact, Medvedev in October 2010 continued to express optimism that a deal would be reached by that December. Needless to say, there was no progress in that direction.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, Medvedev organized a high-level meeting in Kazan in June 2011, which attracted substantial levels of international attention, involving hopes of a breakthrough in negotiations. Again, such progress failed to materialize.

The reason for the failure is simple: Russia lacks credibility as a mediator. Indeed, while playing the part of a mediator, Moscow has simultane-

<sup>15</sup> "Medvedev Seeks Karabakh Deal by December," *Moscow Times*, October 28, 2010.



ously been acting as an arms merchant in the South Caucasus. Russia has sold Armenia arms at low prices, while offering them to Azerbaijan at high cost.

Following the successful extension of Russia's basing rights at Sevastopol on Ukraine's Crimea peninsula, Moscow applied the same blueprint in Armenia. August 2010 saw the amendment of the 1995 Russian-Armenian bilateral defense treaty, extending the lease of Russia's military base at Gyumri until 2044. At the same time, the wording of the agreement itself was altered; whereas the origi-

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nal treaty included a commitment by Russia to come to Armenia's defense if the country was attacked "by a state outside the CIS," (a reference at the time mainly referring to Turkey) the amended treaty included no such clause. Thus, Yerevan in practice received stronger commitments from Moscow for defense against a possible Azerbaijani attack to reclaim its lost territories. To make good on these obligations, Russia also transferred a large volume of armaments to Armenia.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Fariz Ismailzade, "Russian Arms to Armenia Could

But Moscow is playing both sides of the fence. While its main focus has continued to be Armenia, Russia is reported to have sold S-300 advanced anti-aircraft to Azerbaijan, and to have provided Baku with considerable amounts of tanks and other armaments.<sup>17</sup>

Thus, Moscow's policy in the Armenian-Azerbaijani dispute seems to be to seek a negotiated solution on its own terms, one that would certainly involve Russian troops on Azerbaijani territory in some form of peace-keeping role. Barring that, it strives to sustain a controlled level of instability in the South Caucasus, one that ensures Armenia's continued dependence on Moscow while attaching cost to Azerbaijan's independent policies.

### ***No Resolution in Transnistria***

Moldova, with its unresolved conflict in Transnistria, has long been Europe's poorest, and perhaps most forgotten country. Ever since a short conflict in 1992, Russian military forces have been deployed in the eastern Transnistria region, where a secessionist pro-Russian, neo-communist regime remains in control. Russia's military presence in Moldova exists against the will of the Moldovan government and in contraven-

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*Change Azerbaijan's Foreign Policy Orientation," Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst 11, no. 2, January 28, 2009, <http://cacianalyst.org/files/090128Analyst.pdf>.*

<sup>17</sup> Shahin Abbasov, "Azerbaijan: Baku Embarks on Military Spending Surge, Seeking Karabakh Peace," *eurasianet.org*, October 22, 2010, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/62223>.

tion of its constitution, and has been one of the chief stumbling blocks for the entering into force of the Treaty on Conventional Forces in Europe.

In 2010, the German government launched an initiative to explore closer security cooperation between Europe and Russia. At a summit in Meseberg, near Berlin, in June 2010, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and Russian President Medvedev signed a memorandum to “explore the establishment of an EU-Russia Political and Security Committee,” which would be a considerable step toward changing the architecture of European security.<sup>18</sup> The move had taken place without consultations with Washington, and the intended body would surpass the institutional forms of coordination between the EU and NATO, or between the EU and the U.S.

However, Merkel explicitly raised resolution of the conflict in Transnistria as a test case of EU-Russia security cooperation, and the memorandum promised joint efforts in that direction.<sup>19</sup> Berlin also followed up on this memorandum: soon after the Meseberg summit, German Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle visited Moldova, the first to do so.<sup>20</sup> German

leaders then raised the issue with French and Polish leaders in the consultations known as the Weimar triangle, and Chancellor Merkel further coordinated with Romanian leaders during a state visit in October 2010. Yet almost a year later, Moscow had failed to reciprocate, in spite of German proposals that went a considerable distance in meeting Moscow’s policy goals – involving pressuring Moldova to accept a solution based on a federalized state in which the separatist regime in Tiraspol would have significant influence, which in turn would undermine Moldova’s European integration. Although German diplomacy sidelined the EU and U.S., who unlike Germany are official parties in the 5+2 format of the negotiations on Transnistria, and moved closer to Moscow’s position, Russian intransigence continued.<sup>21</sup>

Thus, Germany’s initiative has failed to bear fruit in spite of the great benefits and prestige a developed security relationship with the EU would offer Moscow. Observers with first-hand information about the negotiations suggest that Russian negotiators are more polite, but have yielded nothing on substance. Indeed, Moscow has not backtracked from its stance on the conflict—which continues to back the Smirnov regime in Transnistria, while demanding a resolution

18 Vladimir Socor, “Meseberg Process: Germany Testing EU-Russia Security Cooperation Potential,” *Jamestown Foundation Eurasia Daily Monitor* 7, no. 191, October 22, 2010; George Friedman, “Germany and Russia Moving Closer Together”, *Stratfor*, June 22, 2010.

19 See, for example, Judy Dempsey, “Challenging Russia to Fix a Frozen Feud,” *New York Times*, October 28, 2010.

20 “The First Visit by a German Foreign Minister to Moldova,” *Eastweek*, June 30, 2010, <http://www.osw.waw>.

[pl/en/publikacje/eastweek/2010-06-30/first-visit-a-german-foreign-minister-to-moldova](http://pl/en/publikacje/eastweek/2010-06-30/first-visit-a-german-foreign-minister-to-moldova).

21 Vladimir Socor, “Moscow Meeting Fails to Re-Launch 5+2 Negotiations On Transnistria Conflict”, *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, 22 June 2011.

and a “reliably guaranteed” special status for Transnistria as well as Moldova’s “constitutional neutrality” before any military withdrawal.

## Conclusions

While the atmospherics in Russia’s relations with the West have changed, it is clear that little has changed in Russia’s policies on the unresolved conflicts in Eurasia. Indeed, Russian aspirations to a sphere of influence covering the former Soviet space are still very much alive. Russia makes use of a range of mechanisms to reward positive behavior or punish undesirable actions on the part of neighboring states. The main problem for Moscow is that its means of influence in the former Soviet space is mainly negative: it has little to offer the states of Eurasia, but great potential to undermine their security by diplomatic, economic, subversive, or military measures. Thus, Moscow has few carrots, necessitating a heavy use of sticks. Russian rewards extend to privileged export deals for military and other hardware, as well as subsidized energy prices. But potential punishments are many, including economic sanctions and embargos, manipulation of the price and supply of energy, intervention in domestic politics and unresolved conflicts, subversive activities, military provocations, and ultimately, as in Georgia, the use of full-scale military force. More than anything, Moscow uses manipulation of unresolved conflicts to maintain its position in the countries affected.

It is well-known that Russia’s main desire in establishing the “reset” diplomacy with the United States – and similar efforts with European states – has been to obtain acceptance in the West of its claim to a sphere of influence in Eurasia. Western states have publicly and repeatedly rejected such a sphere of influence. Nevertheless, Western engagement in the region since 2008 has decreased dramatically. This is in all likelihood greatly a result of the financial crisis. Yet several policies suggest that a desire not to antagonize Moscow is part and parcel of the lack of Western engagement. Most egregiously, America’s refusal to normalize military relations with Georgia and to resume the sale of military equipment to Georgia to the pre-2008 levels seem to uphold the favored Russian policy of a de facto arms embargo on Georgia. Similarly, Western efforts to develop the southern energy corridor through the Black Sea and Caspian basin have been much reduced. Thus, the inescapable conclusion is that while Western leaders reject the Russian notion of a sphere of influence, they have reduced their level of engagement to a level that allows Moscow to conclude that its demands for a sphere of influence are not being actively challenged.

Even though Western policies have been markedly less principled and active in Eurasia, Moscow has been unable to make much headway in consolidating its position. The gov-

ernment of Mikheil Saakashvili in Georgia survives, having weathered serious internal storms while maintaining substantial public legitimacy and continuing its reform agenda, though perhaps at a slower pace than before. Moscow's war against Georgia caused enormous damage to that country, but also made inconceivable the arrival to power of a pro-Russian politician of the Yanukovich mold. Indeed, if not before, 2008 was the year that Russia lost Georgia. Similarly, Russia's renewal of its basing agreement with Armenia, and the attendant arms supplies, led to the abrupt end of any Russian-Azerbaijani honeymoon period, preventing Moscow from capitalizing on Baku's frustration with the West. While the Azerbaijani government is cautious in its relations with Moscow and cooperates in areas of its own interests—such as gas sales and arms procurement—nothing has changed in Azerbaijan's independent foreign policy. Even in Armenia, Moscow's position is based on Armenia's dependency, a fact not lost on Armenia's leaders. In Moldova, Russian encroachments failed to measure up to the gravitational pull of the European Union. In November 2010, the fractured coalition government, aptly named the "Alliance for European Integration," won renewed confidence in an election, and was reconstituted, dashing Moscow's hopes of returning the Communist party to power.<sup>22</sup> In Belarus, the government

of Aleksandr Lukashenko remains as alienated from Moscow as it was several years ago. In Central Asia, Moscow's policies have accelerated the efforts of Turkmen and Uzbek leaders to broaden their international contacts and their energy export routes; even in Ukraine, where Moscow had initial successes following the coming to power of Viktor Yanukovich, bilateral ties have worsened as Ukrainian leaders have refused Russian efforts to gain control over Ukraine's gas infrastructure.

In sum, Moscow's aggressive tactics have largely failed to bear fruit—but have contributed to deepening the instability of the entire post-Soviet sphere, and to complicating efforts at conflict resolution and development in the region.

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<sup>22</sup> Vladimir Socor, "Moldova's Alliance for European Integration: a Team of Rival Parties," *Jamestown Foundation*

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*Eurasia Daily Monitor* 8, no. 5, January 7, 2011.