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- a Russian Variation on the Monroe Doctrine

Bohuslav Litera

The Russian term “blizhneye zarubyezhe” (“near abroad”) is used to refer to those states neighbouring the Russian Federation which, until its collapse, formed part of the Soviet Union—as “Union Republics”. From the geo-political point of view it corresponds to the borders of the former Soviet Union. Today it covers the area of the Commonwealth of Independent States and also those countries which, though formerly in the U.S.S.R., did not join the CIS: i.e. the Baltic states.

From the position adopted by the representatives of official Russian foreign policy it follows that Russia’s attitude to this “near abroad” has seen a relatively pronounced and officially declared shift, especially after the October events and the elections in December 1993. Everything that Russia was doing up until then in a more or less concealed manner is now admitted officially. It is evident that Russia has begun to restore and strengthen its dominant influence on the territory of the entire former Soviet Union.

A meeting of Russian ambassadors to the CIS states and to the Baltic republics, held in January 1994, was of particular significance in this respect. In his directives to the ambassadors, Russia’s Foreign Minister Kozyrev outlined a more radical line. Referring to Russia’s new foreign policy doctrine he firmly declared the post-Soviet republics to be an area of vital interest as far as Russia is concerned. He stressed that “the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States and the Baltic republics are an area where Russia’s crucial vital interests are concentrated. That is where the major threats to these interests come from”.

This area of priority in Russia’s strategic interests and the threat to those interests, thus defined, logically gave rise to one fundamental task: “...to preserve our [Russian—author’s note] military presence in the near abroad”.

According to Kozyrev, the withdrawal of Russian troops from this area would create a power and security vacuum there which would have to be filled by forces which would not by any means always have a friendly inclination towards Russia. In several cases they might even be hostile to Russian interests. In this context he described the defence of the rights of the Russian population living in the countries of near abroad and their dual citizenship as one of the major priorities.

More or less at the same time, in January 1994, the paper *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* carried an extensive analysis, in instalments, by A. Migranyan, a member of the Presidential Council of the Russian Federation, entitled “Russia and the Near Abroad”. The essential idea of his study was again the thesis that “the entire area of the former Soviet Union is one of Russia’s vitally important interests”. He stressed, in particular, that the existence of the new post-Soviet republics was merely a temporary phenomenon because their future lay in the creation of “...a new, possibly federative or confederative state”. Migranyan stated authoritatively that several states—Ukraine, for example—were artificial, nationally heterogeneous formations, which will have to break up along ethno-regional borders. Kazakhstan, and some other states, will also not escape a break-up, he claimed. He pointed out that in Russia there were sufficiently strong forces which did not recognize the territorial integrity of Kazakhstan nor the existing Russian-Kazakh border. Therefore, they regard Northern Kazakhstan, where most of the population is Russian or Russian-speaking, as a natural part of Russia. Although

Migranyan does not specify these forces, they might consist principally in the Cossack movement. As a matter of fact, a congress was held in Omsk at the end of 1993, where the Russian and Kazakh Cossack formations merged into a single Siberian troop formation, one of the tasks of which will supposedly be to protect the interests of the Russian-speaking population of Kazakhstan.

In the same way, when referring to relations with other states of the so-called near abroad, Migranyan speculated about the possibility of creating ethnically Russian formations within these countries. Under different circumstances, his statements might be seen as a manifestation of extremism; but their author holds the high post of a member of the Presidential Council of the Russian Federation, and he is therefore in a position to influence the formulation and implementation of Russian foreign policy. The question is whether his views reflect official policy (and, in which case, to what extent) or simply one trend within it.

If in the past it has been politicians of the Rutskoï or Khasbulatov type who have spoken of the geo-political area of the former Soviet Union as of an area of exclusive Russian vital interests, today this trend has become an official Russian policy. The only thing to be disputed is who precisely was the first to formulate the Russian Monroe doctrine. G. Sidorovova, Kozyrev's adviser, immediately reacted to Migranyan's accusations that Kozyrev had sold out Russian national interests, and to the allegation that the doctrine had been formulated by Khasbulatov. It was symptomatic that she neither rejected nor argued with Migranyan's allegations and conclusions. On the contrary, she stated in great detail that already in the past, i.e. immediately after the emergence of an independent Russia, Kozyrev had on several occasions described the near abroad as a region of exclusive Russian interests.

Perhaps this was stated in even more blunt terms by A. Adamishin, First Deputy Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation, in the middle of June 1994. "Take the CIS—or, as it is fashionable to say today, the post-Soviet region. For those who formulate Russian foreign policy today it has become self-evident that this is where the nucleus of Russian vital interests lies. The very survival of Russia depends on what relations will be like within the CIS. In the past few months a great deal has been done so that the understanding of these priority interests should not remain something abstract: and so that it can be reflected in concrete action—in the further integration of the CIS, in an end to the conflicts on its territory, and in settling certain key issues in the bilateral relations of certain states with Russia." Adamishin then pointed out that some of Russia's Western partners, especially the United States, did not understand, or just flatly refused to accept, the fact that "Russia cannot simply give up its special responsibility and, consequently, its special role in relations with its neighbours, that is, with the members of the CIS".

It is no coincidence that this tendency was officially and publicly stressed precisely after the elections to the Russian Parliament. In the elections it became evident that the majority of Russians living outside the Russian Federation voted for the nationalist wing on the Russian political scene or, to be exact, for Zhirinovskiy's party. Emphasis on the defence of their rights and patriotic feeling, therefore, became part of the struggle in the Russian domestic political scene. Although this is primarily a foreign policy question, to do with relations with the countries of near abroad, it might easily be misused. In July 1994, Moscow drew up a programme for the protection of all Russians living on the whole territory of the former USSR. According to E. Paine, chairman of the Presidential Council group of experts which prepared it, Moscow must, among other things, be prepared to defend the rights of the Russian diaspora by all means allowed by international law.

A strong emphasis on the special relations with and responsibility for the post-Soviet republics is also contained in the new Russian military doctrine. (cf. *Mezinarodni vztahy*, 1/1994, pp. 106-116: editor's note) Incidentally, during the passing out ceremony of graduates of military academies at the end of June 1994, Yeltsin himself stressed Russia's special responsibility for the defence of the Euro-Asian region. In an article in the magazine *Foreign Affairs* (Volume 73, Number 3), Kozyrev even claimed that following the break-up of the

Soviet Union the West acknowledged Russia's role as a stabilizing factor in the post-Soviet region. He referred to the example of the European Union and argued that the situation in the CIS was similar in the sense that the members of the European Union, too, recognized the leading role of states such as France or Germany. He furthermore stressed that not even the larger and relatively more advanced states of the CIS (meaning Ukraine) would be able to exist without close ties with Russia. In view of the mutual dependence of the countries in the post-Soviet region, their close cooperation was imperative. He alleged that the opposed alternative would lead to a repetition of the "Yugoslav scenario". Kozyrev again asked the West to recognize Russia's special role in this area as well as its responsibility, and to support Russia in this.

Russia's new military doctrine is sometimes called the Kozyrev doctrine. Its most substantial feature lies in its declaring the post-Soviet region to be an area of exclusive Russian interests, and in the implication that if Russia ever felt that this region was threatened it would have the right to take all steps to defend it.

If we leave aside the geographical and historical conditions for the emergence of the two doctrines, we find that Kozyrev's doctrine strongly resembles the American Monroe doctrine of 1823. According to the latter, the entire Western hemisphere was the sole sphere of influence of the United States, and any attempt by other, non-American powers, to penetrate it by force would be regarded as an attack against the interests and security of the United States. It can be summed up briefly as "America for the Americans".

The fact that the post-Soviet republics have been officially declared a region of exclusive Russian interests, as a region where the greatest threats to these interests, and therefore to Russia as a whole, are situated, is in fact tantamount not only to the formulation of a Russian variant of the Monroe doctrine but also to the creation of a real or fictitious "Feindbild" (image of the enemy), to the doctrinal possibility of Russian intervention in regional confrontations, and to a redefinition of the threat of the restoration of imperial ambitions, no longer on a global but on a regional scale.

But the picture need not be so black and white. At the beginning of May 1993 Russian Defence Minister Grachev warned against the spread of Islamic fundamentalism from Iran and Afghanistan to the Central Asian republics, concretely to Tadjikistan. In this connection he pointed out that in the Russian Federation there were some 20 million Muslims who, if they were to incline towards fundamentalism, might become a strong destabilizing factor. Everything points to the fact that immediately after the break-up of the Soviet Union, Russian President Yeltsin intended to orient Russian policies towards the needs of Russia and its relations with the Slav countries in a spirit of neo-Slavicism, and that he preferred "abandoning" Central Asia. After all, the CIS was originally founded only as an organization of Slav nations—even though other states were subsequently added. The protagonists of the Russian reforms also feared the impact of a possible revival of a neo-imperial policy on the Russian economy and on domestic developments as a whole. However, the events in the summer of 1992 indicate that the Yeltsin regime, under pressure by events in Tadjikistan, reached the conclusion that Russia could not afford to leave a power vacuum in Central Asia. Following the victory of the neo-communists in the civil war (they managed to stay in power only with the help of the Russian army) more than 100,000 persons fled from Tadjikistan to neighbouring Afghanistan. It was from there that they launched a guerrilla war against the regime under the banner of Islam. What is more, the republic almost broke up into groupings of clans.

Yeltsin himself and the Russian government at first reacted in a way reminiscent of Brezhnev's reaction in 1979. Yeltsin spoke of an attack against the southern Russian borders, he accused Afghanistan of supporting this, and he threatened to take tough counter-measures. However, in the course of the crisis, major shifts occurred in Russia's concept of a security policy in favour of Russian military intervention in CIS crisis areas as part of so-called peacekeeping operations which, some observers maintained, contained the vision of

restoring the empire and maintaining a Russian military presence in the region. In this context, Russian officials stressed the need to protect the Russian population in the countries of near abroad. It was in the spirit of this tendency that the formulation of the foreign political and military doctrine was put into its present form.

The crisis in Tadjikistan, moreover, induced the majority of Central Asian politicians to get closer to Moscow; they were prompted by the fear of Islamic fundamentalism and of developing destabilization. With the exception of Kirghizia, six CIS states concluded a Treaty on collective security in May 1992.

When looking back at Russia's foreign political activities, it is evident that after a period of hesitation, or rather of reformulation, which followed immediately after the break-up of the USSR, Russian foreign policy was given new tasks in its relations with the near abroad. In 1992 Russia was still, so to speak, sitting on the fence. It attempted to put a brake on disintegration processes and probably hoped that the initial euphoria at achieving independence would die down in the newly independent states and that everyday reality as well as economic problems would compel their ruling circles to agree to close cooperation with Russia. There was, moreover, another possibility, and one which began to be translated into reality only later: namely that elites with a nationalist orientation might be replaced by more pro-Russian ones.

The change mentioned earlier finally took place in 1993. Russia came out with increasing candour in favour of the re-integration of the area of the former Soviet Union, which it declared to be a region of its vital interests. Both these tasks were given top priority and, as such, were incorporated in the foreign political and military doctrine of the Russian Federation.

Transition to an open and much more active policy in the post-Soviet region includes two lines of approach: first, the Commonwealth of Independent States, and second, bilateral relations between Russia and the individual CIS states. Moscow made considerable efforts to consolidate the CIS and its bodies. A turning point was reached with the adoption of the CIS Charter in January 1993 and the establishment of pertinent and ensuing "umbrella" bodies of the Commonwealth. In March 1993, Yeltsin proposed to the top representatives of the CIS a number of further integration measures, e.g. the establishment of a security system and co-ordination in the foreign political sphere. Moreover, Russia launched integration in the economic sphere. The Agreement on a CIS Economic Union was approved in September 1993; it provides for the gradual introduction of a common market and a customs and currency union. A major step in this direction was taken one year later. In September 1994, the International Economic Committee (SNS) was formed which, as distinct from previous institutions, has power and authority. A payments union of the CIS countries was introduced which provides for the convertibility of the various national currencies. In addition, in the second half of 1993, Azerbaidzhan, and later Georgia, again joined the CIS. The two states, together with Belarus, joined the Agreement on Collective Security of May 1992.

However, the consolidation of the CIS does not mean a weakening of Russian positions, since Russian bodies and officials hold a dominant position in the CIS institutions. Consolidating the CIS is tantamount to reinforcing Russia's role in this direction. On the other hand, an opposed trend is also evident, since it appears that Russia, while consolidating the system of its own state institutions, intends to maintain its freedom to take decisions independent of the CIS institutions. This is particularly evident in the military and security sphere where, at the initiative of the Russians, the supreme command of the joint armed forces was abolished in June 1993, something which up until then had been subordinated to the CIS Council of Defence Ministers.

Hand in hand with reintegration in other spheres, Russia began to create a new defence system within the framework of the CIS. Early in July 1994, a top level conference was held of the coordination staff for military cooperation in the CIS which discussed the proposal of establishing a collective security system as well as the proposal of major efforts to increase

military cooperation among the CIS states. The conference arrived at the conclusion that in the given situation the best option was to establish a military-political alliance with united military bodies and troops, and with joint operational planning and military training. The objective is to act as a common defence against various sources of threat, namely: territorial claims by third countries against the members of the alliance, local conflicts, the use of weapons of mass destruction against member states, the proliferation of these weapons including the supply of modern military technology to some other states, organizations or terrorist groups, external interference in the internal affairs of participating states, destabilization of their internal political situation, and international terrorism.

While this definition of the sources of threat to states belonging to a newly emerging military-political bloc are in principle identical with the international concept of security, in some ways it goes much further. Various aspects, such as destabilization of the internal political situation, would permit interference in the internal affairs of member states. This would apply especially in connection with the principle that the members of the alliance would have the possibility of stationing their military units on the territory of the other members of the bloc and of retaining their own military bases there. Under the existing balance of power and situation in the CIS countries it is clear that only Russia could in practice take advantage of these principles. By the same token, it would be Russia which would unquestionably provide the biggest contingent of the planned coalition defence force, i.e. for the armed forces of the alliance.

The relevant documents (i.e. above all the collective security concept), signed in July 1994 by the Defence Ministers of the CIS states, were subsequently presented at a joint session of the Council of Foreign Ministers and the Council of Defence Ministers. Although the establishment of a genuine alliance will be a matter of future development, and since its implementation will need some time, the decisive step in this direction has already been taken, namely towards a pronounced reintegration in the military-political sphere. The creation of a new military-political bloc would greatly change the situation throughout the Euro-Asian region, it would strengthen the position of Russia as the unquestionable leading force of that bloc which might possibly serve as a counterbalance to other security systems, including the North Atlantic Alliance.

Hand in hand with the consolidation of the CIS, the Russian Federation is consolidating its own bilateral relations with the individual countries of the near abroad. Of the successor states, only Ukraine has so far failed to conclude a basic political agreement with the Russian Federation (in other words, a Treaty on Friendship and Cooperation). Moscow signed the last of these agreements with Georgia in February 1994. In this agreement, Russia reserves the right to keep three military bases on Georgian territory. The network of basic agreements is complemented by a large number of economic, military and other accords. In 1993, it concluded 72 of these with other CIS states. The development of Russian-Belarus relations, which are already very close, will be most interesting in the context of the reintegration of the post-Soviet region. It appears that a further step towards reunification is in preparation: something which might serve as a model for the other CIS countries, or even for the entire reunification process. Early in August 1994 the Presidents of the two countries agreed to conclude a new inter-state treaty which would confirm the special priority nature of Russian-Belarus relations and anchor a strategic line aimed at their all-round rapprochement. Yeltsin later pointed out that this might be possible, for example, on the basis of a confederation.

Russia, while expanding its vertical relations with the various post-Soviet states, above all the CIS members, is also attempting to prevent them from establishing horizontal relations amongst themselves. It is trying even more vigorously to prevent the development of relations between these states and third countries, something which would naturally lessen their dependence on Russia. That is why Russia opposed plans for the construction of an oil pipeline from Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan towards the South, via Turkey. It argued that oil could be transported across Russian territory through the existing pipeline network. It also

tried to block concessions being granted for the prospecting and mining of oil and natural gas which Kazakhstan ultimately granted to several Western companies. What is more, Moscow refuses to grant these companies the right to transport natural gas from Kazakhstan towards the West across its territory. In the same way, Russia has adopted a negative attitude to an agreement between Azerbaijan and a consortium of Western firms for the exploitation of three crude oil deposits in the Caspian Sea.

Russia has so far been fairly successful in its attempt to retain its superiority and remain the centre of reintegration. Attempts by other CIS states to establish more extensive bilateral relations have so far not been very successful. The same applies to contacts with third countries, also because the West devotes minimum and only sporadic attention to this part of the world.

Activation of Russian endeavours towards the reintegration of the post-Soviet region under its own control is accompanied by Russian military activity in the crisis-ridden parts of the CIS. Not so long ago Moscow wanted the international community and organizations to recognize it as the political and military guarantor of peace and stability in the area. For example, at the congress of the Civic Union in March 1993, Yeltsin stressed that "the time has come for the relevant international organizations, including the UN, to grant Russia special powers as the guarantor of peace and stability on the territory of the former USSR". At the time, Russian diplomacy wanted the Russian army, or rather the units already in action, to be granted the status of a peacekeeping force, but Kozyrev's request to this effect was rejected by the UN in September 1993. In the same way, his request that Russian forces be given the status of peacekeeping forces of the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe, a request he submitted at the CSCE Foreign Ministers' Conference in Rome at the end of November 1993, was also turned down.

Russia has justified its requests by arguing that neither the UN nor the CSCE had sufficient resources to finance major operations in the area, nor the will to send their own peacekeeping forces to these parts. The Russians have maintained that only Russia is capable of such operations in this area, and also that they know the situation and conditions there better than anyone else.

Since both organizations refused to legitimize Russia's peacekeeping operations in the post-Soviet region, Moscow changed its position. In an interview he gave to Radio Free Europe in mid-June 1994, Kozyrev maintained that Russia no longer needed the consent of international organizations for its peacekeeping operations. He stressed (and he was referring to Abkhazia) that Moscow was carrying on these operations legitimately, both within the framework of an appropriate international organization (CIS) and at the request of both parties to the conflict. Kozyrev underlined that both sides had asked Russia to intervene and restore order. He explained their attitude by drawing attention to their general mentality, and to the centuries-old habit of looking upon Moscow as the policeman of the region. As a result, Russia no longer asked the international organizations to back its operations, but merely for financial assistance and the dispatch of observers. In this way Russia would receive the indirect sanctioning of its operations, which it could still carry out in any way it saw fit, without any control or limitation.

Efforts to bring about reintegration in all spheres are accompanied by the above-mentioned trend to reinforce Russia's own exclusiveness. In the economic sphere, for example, Moscow has systematically separated Russia's own financial system from that of the other CIS countries, and made them introduce their own system, based on their national currencies. This approach by Moscow is characterized as a "colonial" model of post-Soviet integration. Its ultimate objective is to transform Moscow into the economic centre of the CIS. Yet another instrument could be, for example, the transformation of the debts of the individual CIS states to Russia into bills of exchange which would be covered by their natural resources or by shares of some of their industrial enterprises. In this way Russia might well become the owner of their natural wealth at some future stage. In the case of Belarus, which is

strongly dependent on Russian energy supplies, the method chosen was a currency union which would make it even much more dependent on Russia.

The most important components of Russian reunification endeavours include:

- 1) consolidating supra-national institutions of the CIS, both existing ones and new ones created on a selective basis;
- 2) the accelerated formation of an economic union which would be facilitated by the new rouble zone;
- 3) attempting to coordinate foreign policy within the CIS and transforming this Commonwealth into an autonomous factor not only of regional but also of global policy;
- 4) the establishment of a new military-political alliance;
- 5) the military-political sphere, in which Russia pursues a number of further objectives:
 - to maintain a Russian presence on the territory of the entire former Soviet Union, i.e. to impose the right to have military bases on the territory of other CIS states,
 - to prevent anti-Russian forces gaining influence in this area of traditional Russian interests,
 - to organize formally joint but in fact Russian peacekeeping operations which would become a common practice within the framework of the CIS,
 - to introduce the joint surveillance of the external borders of the CIS by border troops,
 - to reinforce bilateral cooperation of all components of the military industrial complex of the former Soviet Union currently deployed in the various republics which would make it possible to perfect weapon systems and maintain the CIS as an old-new outlet for Russian arms;
- 6) limiting the influence of third countries in the CIS states, especially in the military-security sphere;
- 7) defence of the rights of Russian and Russian-speaking populations in countries outside the territory of the Russian Federation, consolidating their economic and cultural position.

The question is, however, whether present-day Russia has sufficient resources to achieve the reintegration of the post-Soviet region. The expenses incurred by reintegration would inevitably be incompatible with economic reforms. As it is, Russia already finances the Central Asian republics to a large extent, to the tune of 40-70% of their gross domestic product. Another problem is the attitude of the leaders of the CIS countries. Many of them question or reject the growing role of supra-national bodies of the CIS and of Russia in them. But the majority of countries favour greater cooperation. Their attitude is determined mainly by economic factors—i.e. a radical drop of production, inflation, financial crisis and indebtedness precisely to Moscow. All this forces them to make political concessions to Russia. They hope that in return Russia will make concessions in the economic field. From their point of view, this is a relatively short-term interest, a temporary solution contingent on their current problems. For Russia, however, reintegration is a long-term strategic target. In the short term, Russia's political and economic interests are essentially identical with those of most post-Soviet countries, but this is not so in the long term. These states will, instead, look for alternatives to dependence on Russia, provided this dependence has not yet become too close.

Future developments are difficult to guess. It seems most likely that Russia will continue to exploit the favourable situation and will pursue a policy of reintegration. It will use the CIS to slow down or halt disintegration and, above all, as an instrument of the reintegration of the post-Soviet region. The further developments will probably greatly depend on whether neo-imperialist trends win the upper hand in official Russian policy. Russia will resort to the "carrot and stick" method, i.e. low raw material prices, mainly of energy, restructuring the repayment of debts or their total write off (Ukraine, Belarus), direct subsidies (Central Asian republics), military support to unstable regimes (Georgia), indirect support of

Russian minorities (Moldova, Kazakhstan and others), direct military intervention to repel the "Islamic threat" (Tadjikistan), and so forth—in order to impose its own version of the Monroe Doctrine. It will also gradually restore its influence in a region it considers the natural area of its vital interests.

Such a policy could, of course, pave the way to new conflicts, and possibly even to civil wars on the entire territory of the former Soviet Union, with all the implications this could have for the international situation, including the possible revival of the Cold War. The post-Soviet region is rife with highly dynamic old and new animosities, with fragile new relations and regimes, and temporary solutions where Russia intends to play a dominant role which it will impose by all political, economic but also military means. Until the time a more stable configuration is established, the security situation in the post-Soviet area (and also within a much wider orbit) will be characterized by an insecurity and unpredictability which will most probably be one of the greatest threats to the security of the whole of Europe in the medium term.