CHAPTER-IV
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RUSSIAN FOREIGN POLICY TOWARDS THE WEST ASIA DURING BORIS YELTSIN’S PRESIDENCY (1991-1999)

The Russian Federation was immediately recognized as a legitimate sovereign country by the United Nations as successor to the Soviet Union and preserved its seat at the UN Security Council as a permanent member. The new pro-Western political leadership in Moscow was welcomed into the arms of the international community but it inherited mangled state structure that did not provide the mechanisms to effectively govern the land and the people. The Soviet Union was a rigid, centralized, authoritarian state and the borders of the republics and other autonomous regions within it were largely artificial in the minds of the Kremlin rulers. Historically, populations were purposefully shifted around either forcefully or through incentives that further undermined existing national boundaries. The centrifugal tendencies that emerged during the Brezhnev era quickly spun out of control under Gorbachev. State institutions throughout the Soviet Union, including those at the republic level, had been systematically overshadowed by the Communist Party and the KGB. Consequently, the Soviet system was not immediately replaced by well-defined alternative state structures after 1991 but by self-serving political, economic and security cliques often connected to varied organizations and interest groups.

Soviet foreign policy was tightly controlled and dictated by the Moscow leadership until the end of the Cold War. Gorbachev attempted to downplay ideological differences between the Soviet Union and the West by focusing on the rather idealistic and vague shared goal of saving humanity from a potential nuclear disaster, as outlined in his speech to the United Nation in 1988.¹

Talal Nizameddin, a leading expert on Russia-West Asia relations, pointed out that, in many respects the foreign policy domain required emphasis on the birth of a new Russia, rather than a post-Soviet Russia, despite the pedantic nature of the difference. Boris Yeltsin, Russia’s first democratically elected president, was

compelled to design a foreign policy for a smaller country (though still the largest in the world) with altered geographic boundaries and a smaller population with new irredentist challenges. A completely new security and geo-strategic outlook became necessary for a country that redefined itself as being a democratic member of the Western family and an integral part of the global market economy. Disengagement from regional conflicts began under Gorbachev but under Yeltsin Moscow was forced to gradually come to terms with new neighbors with a potential for dangerous military entanglements, particularly on its long southern front.2

1. Competing Foreign Policy Orientations

In the first year of government under Yeltsin, the debate over foreign policy continued in the same vein as that which had existed under Gorbachev. In the formulation of Russian foreign policy, there was a broad split between those who perceived that Russia’s interests were overwhelmingly linked to the Western world, and those who were highly suspicious of the West in general and the United States in particular. The former group, generally referred to as Atlanticists, argued that Russia had nothing to gain from old Soviet ties with dictatorial regimes such as those of Syria and Iraq. The latter group was more complex in that it was a combination of neo-communists, Russian nationalists/fascists and interest groups (mainly in the arms industry) who were wary of reforms, and people who had simply been deeply indoctrinated about Western conspiracies to undermine their country. The term “Eurasianist” was most commonly accepted to describe this amalgamation of opinions, despite certain flaws. For example, a major element of Russian nationalism did not wish to be associated with either European or Asian cultures but regarded itself as superior to both. However, broadly speaking the term was accepted because it implied that Russia was a great power in both Europe and Asia and that its national security demanded that it gave priority to its position in both continents.3

Influential foreign policy makers in Moscow began openly favoring a Russian course that protected its traditional interests, particularly in the West Asia. Vladimir Lukin, the parliament’s Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman, pointed out that Russia

2 Talal Nizameddin, N.1, p.38.

had 'deep, historic interests' that need to be 'protected not only to avoid regional imbalances, but also to prevent the disruption of the social and political balance inside Russia itself'. And referring specifically to relations with Turkey and Iran, Lukin added that 'Russia's primary interest lies in preventing open conflict with third countries for influence in the developing vacuum of Central Asia and the Transcaucasia.' Kozyrev and his neglect of relations with countries outside the Western world became the target of bitter criticism from the media and senior Russian political figures. A barrage of anti-Kozyrev reporting portrayed the Foreign Minister as weak and dominated by the West. Aleksei Pushkov interpreted Kozyrev's policy in the following way:

"Russia should obediently follow the United States. [...] This was the source of Kozyrev's idea-of a strategic partnership that assumed a subordinate role for Moscow in matters of world politics. In exchange for Russia's consent to be America's younger brother, Washington was expected to provide financial assistance, a flow of investment, and technological modernization."5

This approach was seen by the radical pro-Westerners of Russia as part of the German-Japanese path to development following their defeat in the Second World War. This perspective was deemed unacceptable by Pushkov and many others in Moscow because, they pointed out, Russia had not lost a military war in the way that Germany and Japan had, when the victors dictated the terms for peace. The changes that took place in the Soviet Union were to a large extent caused by internal dynamics rather than external forces. Moreover, the lack of financial means and limp political will in Washington to save the new democratic Russia created the general impression that any possibility of a strategic alliance between Russia and the United States was doomed to failure from the start. Kozyrev's refusal to make sufficient compromises on his foreign policy principles and his labelling of all those who criticized his views as part of the "Red-Brown-alliance" were also criticized by the media.6 Kozyrev's


6 The communists and the nationalists were strongly opposed to Yeltsin's reforms. Their shared opposition to Yeltsin led to what became as the "Red-Brown" alliance. The Red refers to the communists, while brown is to color of the far right. For detail, see David Cox, Close Protection: The Politics of Guarding Russia's Rulers (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2001) p.36.
mission, argued Pushkov, was not to promote national interest but to achieve a victory in the sphere of ideological debates.  

One may therefore argue that more specific subdivisions were gradually to evolve from the more general Eurasion-Atlanticist schism, with many scholars contented to establish a basic Left-Right-Center approach as a general explanation of the political divisions in Moscow. Margot Light categorized the debate as being between liberal Westernisers, ‘who favoured a market economy and held pro-Western views,’ and fundamentalist nationalists, ‘the people who combined extreme Nationalism with antipathy towards economic reform’. After 1992, according to Margot Light, there was a spread of nationalism which created a new group of pragmatic nationalists, ‘who proposed a more integrationalist stance towards the other successor states’ as well as ‘a more independent policy vis-à-vis the West’. The liberal Westernisers and pragmatic nationalists shared the belief that democracy should be consolidated in Russia and that a market economy was desirable. Alex Pravda and Neil Malcolm both accepted these general lines of division, with the former linking them to domestic political battle line. Pravda saw the categories of debate in foreign policy as being a carbon copy of splits in domestic affairs between the radical reformers, conservative oppositionists and centrists. The first group was characterized by the early Kozyrev period when market reformers were dominant in the government and represented by the likes of Egor Gaidar, who was characterized as the Westernist.  

As Kozyrev changed his policies, the centrists became more dominant in the government, in response to the growing electoral strength of the opposition. According to Pravda, the pragmatic nationalists ‘were concerned to ensure that radical conservatives did not manage to appropriate patriotism and use it to legitimize fundamentalist nationalism’. 

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7 Talal Nizamoddin, N.3, p.85.


9 Margot Light, N.8, p.34.


The above interpretation, while generally useful, did not point to the more subtle, and sometimes obvious, differences which existed between the groups. Nizameddin in his book, *Russia and the Middle East: towards a New Foreign Policy*, pointed out that from 1993 to 1996 five distinctly identifiable groups had evolved: pro-Western radicals, pragmatic pro-Westerners, centrist-nationalists, pragmatic nationalists/occidentalists and extreme nationalists. The pro-Western radicals were dominant until late-1992, with Kozyrev representing a policy of seeking to join the Western family at the expense of Russia's Eastern links. In this sense there is agreement with the interpretations of Margot Light, Pravda et al. However, Nizameddin argued that it was incorrect to place the broad range of opinions between the liberal Westernisers and fundamentalist nationalists under the heading of pragmatic nationalist because within this middle group there were important divisions. The second category was the pragmatic pro-Westerners, embodied Kozyrev and other former pro-Western radicals who in principle remained highly committed towards Western ideals and towards Russia becoming a part of the Western family, but who also accepted that the domestic political climate and international scene did not allow for this to take place as quickly as had been originally hoped. Therefore Kozyrev was forced into reversing his former neglect of relations with former soviet states in Central Asia and the Caucasus as well as with key states in Asia such as China, India, Iran and Iraq. Furthermore, it is argued that it was also inaccurate to place the fundamentalist nationalists under the banner of the one anti-Western opposition movement because a distinction arose between the pragmatic nationalist/occidentalists and extreme nationalists. The latter group, which received wide media coverage because of the antics of its figure-head Vladimir Zhirinovskii, had in reality a non-existent effect on Russian foreign policy. Its ideas of restoring the Russian empire, by force if necessary, were widely perceived to be eccentric and clownish by most Russians. However, the proposals of the Communist opposition, headed by Gennadii Ziuganov, did partially succeed in changing the government's policy of concentrating too heavily on the West for the sake of economic rewards. This pragmatic nationalist view noted that Russia remained a great power with important historic and political links with the East, which would enable it to form strong alliances to balance Western power and

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12 Talal Nizameddin, N.3, p.86.
ultimately serve Russian interests. This group was in its core suspicious of the West and argued that Russia needed to remain vigilant in order to protect itself from Western intentions. However, Ziuganov and his allies also noted that a strong Russia could co-exist peacefully with the Western world.  

The nationalist-centrist position was epitomized by the policies of foreign Minister Primakov in 1996. Malcolm et al., and many other scholars, failed to point out that his policies were not simply formed as a consequence of merging domestic political debates by taking the most acceptable arguments and ideas from the pragmatic pro-Westerners and pragmatic nationalists. Instead, it was a policy in its own right which was totally non-ideological, and in principle, neither opposed to nor in favor of East or West. It simply sought to follow what was best for Russian geo-strategic and economic interests, taking into account the diminished strength of the country vis-à-vis the West. Contrary to Pravda’s linkage of domestic divisions with the foreign policy debate, Primakov sought to extract the Ministry of Foreign Affairs from the domestic political scene altogether. In this sense at least, Primakov sought to emulate the British Foreign Office’s reputation for strong loyalty to the state rather than any particular political party.  

However, there had been a number of attempts by both Western experts on Russia and by Russian academics to make sense of foreign policy debates by setting up general categories under which to label the various competing orientations. Alex Pravda had employed three “clusters”: liberal internationalists, patriots, and pragmatic nationalists, while Alexei G. Arbatov identified four “major groups”: a pro-western

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13 Talal Nizameddin, N.3, p.87. During the Cold War years, East, however, referred to the Soviet Union and other Marxist-Leninist countries, mainly those in Eastern Europe. A more traditional meaning is the Orient or countries of Asia. Variants are the Far East (the countries of East Asia, including China, Japan, and the Koreas), the Middle East (originally referring to such south Asian countries as India and Pakistan, but now more commonly used to refer to Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Syria, Saudi Arabia, and neighboring countries), and the Near East (originally referring to countries in North African and Arabia; now more commonly referred to as the Middle East. (Paul R. Viotti and Mark V. Kauppi, International Relations Theory, fourth edition (New York: Longman, 2010) p.456).

14 Talal Nizameddin, N.3, p.87.

group, moderate liberals, moderate centrists, and neo-communists and nationalists. Nonetheless, one such commentary argued that seven grouping were not enough to cover the full spectrum of opinions:

"Westerniser, Liberal Moderate Reformer, Moderate Reformer, Conservative Moderate Reformer, Democratic Socialist, Communist, and Nationalist. Beyond these differences of perspective, however, the politics of foreign policy is also complicated by antagonism, not necessarily related to policy, between cliques and factions in different governmental agencies."  

It has also been common to assess these competing foreign policy conceptions with reference to a number of issues, usually including attitudes towards Russia’s relationship with the near abroad, the United States and the West, and Bosnia, in addition to general security/strategic concerns. As Peter Shearman, a specialist in Russian foreign policy, pointed out, these patterns can be primarily examined by tracing policy controversies in relation to three concentric circles consisting of the former republics of the USSR (the first circle), the West, including the United States, European and Japan (the second circle) and the rest, mainly what used to be termed the “Third World” (the third circle).  

As argued, it would be useless to take into account too many varying nuances; therefore the five groupings already mentioned best describe the emergence of the main groups by 1998. On the whole, the policy making elite, and public opinion, made a gradual but clear shift from the position of pro-Western radicals to that the centrist-nationalists between 1991 and 1998. The evolving policy under Yeltsin was accompanied by major structural reforms and underwent key phases. The first lasted

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The post-Soviet states, also collectively known as the former Soviet Union (FSU) or former Soviet Republics, are the 15 independent states that emerged from the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics in its dissolution in December 1991, with Russia internationally recognized as the successor state to the Soviet Union—namely Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Estonia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan.
until late 1992, when the pro-Western radicals were strongest; the second phase was a period of uncertainty between late 1992 and the end of 1995; finally, a stable and recognizable policy was established in 1996 which coincided with the appointment of Yevgeny Primakov as Foreign Minister.\textsuperscript{19}

2. Development of Russian Foreign Policy towards the West Asia during Yeltsin's presidency

2.1 Andrey Kozyrev's period (1992-1996)

Andrey Kozyrev, the first foreign minister, reflected three stages of foreign policy under President Yeltsin's direction during his tenure from 1992-96, especially in Russian policy towards the West Asia.\textsuperscript{20}

The first stage of foreign policy during Kozyrev's tenure covered the year 1992 and was clearly characterized as a pro American direction. Thus Russia joined in enforcing the sanctions against Iraq by dispatching two warships to the Persian Gulf; it supported sanctions against Libya (the Russian Embassy in Libya was attacked because of Russia's support of the sanctions); and Russia was an enthusiastic supporter of the Arab-Israeli peace process with Vice President Alexander Rutskoi visiting Israel in April 1992 and Parliament speaker Ruslan Khasbulatov visiting Israel in January 1993.\textsuperscript{21} As far as the countries of the former Soviet Union were

\textsuperscript{19} Talal Nizameddin, N.3., p.88.

\textsuperscript{20} Andrei Vladimirovich Kozyrev (b. 1951), Russian Foreign Minister before and after the collapse of communism in 1991, he came to personify the pro-western school of thought among Russian policy makers. He was born into a Russian family in Brussels, Belgium, graduated from the Moscow State Institute of International Relations of the USSR Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1974, and successfully presented his dissertation in history on the role of the UN in the development of détente (PhD), 1977. He was in the department of international organizations of the ministry, 1974–86, ending up as first secretary of the department. By 1990 he was head of the administration of international organizations and was also a member of the Soviet delegation to the UN. He never served at a Soviet embassy abroad. In October 1990 Ivan SILAЕV, RSFSR Prime Minister, invited him to leave the USSR Ministry of Foreign Affairs and become Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs. Previously this would have meant a demotion but in 1990 Russia was a rising power. He quickly established himself as a supporter of Russian sovereignty and during the autumn of 1991 he helped to draft the agreement which eventually set up the Commonwealth of Independent States. He was a member of the Communist Party until 1991. As Russian Foreign Minister he was savagely attacked in the RSFSR Congress of People's Deputies for not defending Russians in the ex-Soviet republics (called the near abroad) and being too pro-western. This was known as the Atlanticist view as opposed to the Eurasian view of the Russian nationalists. Andrey Kozyrev was the foreign minister of Russia under President Boris Yeltsin from October 1991 until his dismissal in January 1996.

\textsuperscript{21} Ami Ayalon, ed., \textit{Middle East Contemporary Survey}, v.16 (Boulder, San Francisco, and Oxford: West view Press, 1992) pp.53-54; *Russian Vice President in Israel, Marking a Landmark in
concerned—the "Near Abroad" in Russian parlance, where 25 million Russians lived—Kozyrev took the lead in calling for normal diplomatic relations, discarding Moscow's old, imperial behavior—an attitude strongly supported by the United States. Only in the case of arms sales to Iran did Russia take a position markedly different from that of the US—which strongly opposed such sales. But Yeltsin persevered, hoping to obtain desperately needed hard currency and to deter Iranian efforts to spark Islamic unrest in the new Muslim states of Central Asia—unrest which could spread to Muslim regions of the Russian Federation itself, such as Tatarstan and the Northern Caucuses.22

The only exception to this pattern of Russian support of US West Asia policy was in the area of arms sales to Iran, and enemy of the United States with which Moscow was seeking close cooperation. However, one contemporary observer concluded that Moscow did not seem to work out its policy towards the West Asia—an area of less than central concern to the Russians who were preoccupied with the "near abroad" (the newly independent countries of the former Soviet Union) and relations with the United States and Europe—until November 1992 when Viktor Posuvaliuk, director of the Foreign Ministry’s Africa and Middle East Department, formally described the new Russian policy as:

1. Effectively using the Arab countries’ potential in order to solve the problems that face Russia on its way to [economic] recovery.

2. Ensuring Russian national security.

3. Preventing the development of military and political conflagrations.

4. Actively supporting the Middle East peace process and opposing destructive recurrences of phenomena such as the Iran-Iraq war and the Iraqi aggression against Kuwait.

5. Fulfilling the agreements it had signed in regard to arms supplies—albeit in doses in order not to harm third countries.


6. Shifting to mutually advantageous economic and trade relations with Arab countries.  

By December 1992, however, Yeltsin's relatively free-hand in foreign policy was being challenged by Russian Parliamentary opposition, where three main groups vied for power. On the left of the political spectrum was the group of legislators who supported Yeltsin's pro-Western foreign policy— including good ties with Israel, sanctions against Iraq, and cooperative relations with the countries of the Near Abroad—along with Yeltsin's efforts to reform and privatize the Russian economy. In the center of the spectrum was a group of legislators who advocated a "Eurasian" emphasis in foreign policy which would not be exclusively focused on the United States and Western Europe but called for good ties with the West Asia, China and other areas of the world as well. This group also wanted much closer ties with the Near Abroad, with Russia in a dominant position there. On domestic policy, while still in favor of reform, the Eurasianists advocated a far slower process of privatization. Finally, on the right of the political spectrum was the combination of "diedhard" communists and ultranationalists. Though differing on economic policy, they all wanted a powerful, highly centralized Russia that would actively protect Russians living in the Near-Abroad; act like a major world power, as the Soviet Union had done; adopt a confrontational approach toward the United States which they saw as Russia's main enemy; and renew close ties with Moscow's former West Asian allies such as Iraq. Finally both communists and ultranationalists advocated the re-establishment of Moscow's domination over the Near Abroad.  

If one examines the course of Russian politics since December 1992, including Yeltsin's political and subsequent military clash with parliament in September-October 1993, the election of an even more nationalist parliament in December 1993, and a still more nationalist parliament in December 1995, one can see the steady progression of Yeltsin to the right of the political spectrum, as he sought to tackle with the political winds, a process that led to the ouster of Kozyrev in January 1996.  

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24 Robert O. Freedman, N.22.
By 1993, the second stage under study, Yeltsin had moved to the center of the political spectrum, criticizing US bombing of Iraq, increasing arms sales to Iran—including submarines and taking a stronger position on the protection of the Russians in the Near Abroad. Yeltsin also suggested that Russia should have ‘special powers as guarantor of peace and stability’ there. Moscow also intervened more openly in conflicts in the Transcaucasus—the Abkhaz-Georgian and Azerbaijani Armenian wars—and the civil war in Tajikistan.

By 1994, the third stage in the evolution of Yeltsin's policy, Russian and Iraqi government officials were conducting regular visits. By summer 1994, Russian officials began to call for the lifting of sanctions against Iraq in an attempt to conclude major economic deals and recover some US$5-7 billion in Iraqi debts. Moscow's efforts ran into trouble, however, because Saddam Hussein's military movement toward the Kuwaiti border in October 1994 caused a chill in Moscow's relations with the Gulf Cooperation Council states despite Kozyrev's efforts to mediate the crisis. Russia also stepped up its arms sales to Iran during this period, and for the first time took a position independent of the US in the Arab-Israeli conflict, albeit only temporarily, by calling for a return to the Geneva Peace Conference following the February 4, 1994 massacre of Arabs in Heron. Nonetheless, Russia, which had supported the Oslo Accords of September 1993, backed the Gaza–Jericho Agreement of May 4, 1994, and also supported the Israeli Jordanian peace treaty of October 1994, with Kozyrev demanding the right at the last minute to speak at the peace ceremony so as to assert the importance of Russia in the peace process. As far as the Near

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25 The bombing of Iraq in June 1993 was ordered by U.S. President Bill Clinton as both a retaliation and a warning triggered by the attempted assassination by Iraqi agents on former U.S. President George H. W. Bush while on a visit to Kuwait in April 14–16, 1993.

26 Robert O. Freedman, N.22.

27 Oslo Accords of September 1993 refers to a group of accords arrived at between Israel and the Palestinians in order to set the ground rules for the establishment of autonomy in the West Bank and Gaza, and then the condition in which final status negotiations were to unfold. They followed an exchange of letters between Yasser Arafat and Yitzhak Rabin on 9 and 10 September 1993: the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) ‘recognized the right of the state of Israel to live in peace and security’, while Israel chose to recognize the PLO ‘as the representative of the Palestinian people’, without, however, any reference to the Palestinians’ right to a state of their own. (Alain Gresh and Dominique Videl, The new A-Z of the Middle East (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004) p.227)

The Gaza–Jericho Agreement, officially called Agreement on the Gaza Strip and the Jericho Area, of May 4, 1994 was a follow-up treaty to the Oslo I Accord in which details of Palestinian autonomy were concluded. The agreement is commonly known as the 1994 Cairo Agreement. Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat reached agreement in Cairo, on the first stage of
Abroad was concerned, Russia stepped up its efforts to assert control; limiting the amount of oil it would permit Kazakhstan to send through Russian pipelines while actively working against Azerbaijan's efforts to maintain its economic independence by seeking to control its oil exports.²⁸

Perhaps the strongest signal of Yeltsin's turn to the right was his decision to invade Chechnya in December 1994.²⁹ This ill-fated decision, perhaps aimed at securing control over the Baku-Grozny oil pipeline, was both an economic and military disaster, not only leading to the death of more than 20,000 civilians, but also involving an ill-equipped, poorly trained and poorly motivated Russian army in a long and bitter civil war.³⁰

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²⁸ Robert O. Freedman, N.22.

²⁹ In August 2005, Chechnya's State Council Head, Taus Dzhabrailov, named the total official and civilian casualties in the breakaway republic for the first time—revealing that up to 160,000 people have been killed in the two military campaigns since December 1994. Most of those killed were ethnic Russian civilians, who had no place to hide and had to stay in war-torn cities, while ethnic Chechens stayed with their relatives in village. Only 30,000-40,000 among those killed were ethnic Chechens.

³⁰ Robert O. Freedman, N.22.

A pro-Russian website estimated that because of oil, Chechnya was worth as much as 10 per cent of Russia's GDP in 1991, see: www.Chechnyafree.ru (February 22, 2002) p.1.
As far to the right as Yeltsin had moved in 1994, he was to move still further in 1995. Under his direction, Russia moved ahead with the sale of nuclear reactors to Iran in the face of bitter American criticism. Yeltsin also stepped up Russia's efforts to lift the sanctions against Iraq, with Kozyrev stating publicly in early August that Iraq's disarmament file is close to being closed, and work on the biological file is proceeding in the same direction. Once again, however, Moscow was discomfited when the defection of Sadism Hussein's son-in-law, Hussein Kemal, led to the late August disclosure of an enormous secret Iraqi weapons effort and the thwarting of Russia's efforts to lift the Iraqi sanctions. In the Near Abroad, Russia adopted its toughest position to date. Not only did Yeltsin unilaterally abrogate the CFE treaty\textsuperscript{31} limitations on the stationing of military equipment in Southern Russia; he also signed an edict that ominously called for Russia to ensure that the members of the CIS pursue a "friendly" policy toward Russia, and called for the stationing of Russian Federation border guard troops in these countries. Nonetheless, despite its efforts to pressure the states of the Near Abroad, Moscow did not always meet with success.\textsuperscript{32}

Apart from that, Moscow also failed to convince the international oil consortium developing the oil resources of Azerbaijan to send the "early" oil from the project only north through Grozny to Novorosssiysk in Russia. Instead, in October 1995 the consortium chose to ship the oil both through Russia, and through Georgia to Turkey.

\textbf{2.2 Yevgeny Primakov's period (1996-98)}

Yevgeny Primakov, an old Soviet West Asia specialist, became Russia's foreign minister in January 1996.\textsuperscript{33} Primakov was expected to put his personal imprint

\textsuperscript{31} The original Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) was negotiated and concluded during the last years of the Cold War and established comprehensive limits on key categories of conventional military equipment in Europe (from the Atlantic to the Ural) and mandated the destruction of excess weaponry. The treaty proposed equal limits for the two "groups of states-parties", the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the Warsaw Pact.

\textsuperscript{32} Robert O. Freedman, N.22.

\textsuperscript{33} Yevgeny Maksimovich Primakov (born October 29, 1929) is a Russian politician and diplomat who was Prime Minister of Russia from 1998 to 1999. From 1956 to 1970, he worked as a journalist for Soviet radio and a West Asian correspondent for Pravda newspaper. During this time, he was sent frequently on intelligence missions to the West Asia and the United States as a KGB under codename MAKSIM. He also served as Foreign Minister (January 1996-September 1998), Speaker of the Soviet of the Union of the Supreme Soviet of the Soviet Union, and chief of the intelligence service or KGB (1991-1996). He served as Gorbachev’s special envoy to Iraq in the run-up to the Persian Gulf War, in
on Russian policy toward the West Asia, as well as do a better job in coordinating Russian foreign policy than his predecessor, Andrei Kozyrev. Primakov’s policy in the West Asia had closely resembled that of his predecessor, with the exception of Russian policy toward the Arab-Israeli conflict which had acquired a special flavor under Primakov.\textsuperscript{34} However, one contemporary observer differently concluded that Primakov was notably more active in the West Asia than his predecessor. In addition to expressing interest in playing a more active role in the peace process, Primakov considerably increased Russian arms sales in the region.\textsuperscript{35}

Expressing his foreign policy ideas in his first press conference as foreign minister in January 1996, Primakov unmistakably allied himself with the "pragmatic nationalist" and "Eurasianists" viewpoints. He declared that ‘Russia has been and remains a great power, and its policy toward the outside world should correspond to that status,’\textsuperscript{36} while echoing his predecessor in saying that Russia’s policy should create ‘an environment that would, to the greatest extent possible, be favorable to the development of the economy and the continuation of democratic processes in Russian society.’\textsuperscript{37}

Russia’s relations with its Cold War adversaries, he emphasized, must be ‘an equitable and mutually advantageous partnership that takes each other's interest into account.’ Expressing the need to diversify Russia’s foreign ties, he made special mention of the West Asia and the key states of Asia (not coincidentally, the subjects


\textsuperscript{35} Andrei P. Tsygankov, Russia's Foreign Policy: Change and Continuity in National Identity (Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield Publisher, 2006) p.107.


of his academic specialization). Primakov enumerated four foreign policy tasks that would be given top priority:

1. The creation of the best external conditions conducive to strengthening the territorial integrity of our state.

2. The strengthening of centrifugal tendencies in the territory of the former USSR. Naturally, this does not and cannot mean the rebirth of the Soviet Union in the form in which it used to exist. The sovereignty obtained by the republics is irreversible, but this does not negate the need for reintegration processes, first of all in the economic field.

3. The stabilization of the international situation at the regional level. We have achieved great successes in the stabilization of the international situation at the global level, having jointly won—I want to put special emphasis on the point that there were no victors or vanquished here—jointly won the Cold War. Now things depend on the settlement of regional, nationality-based, interethnic, and interstate conflicts. Russian foreign policy will do everything possible to settle such conflicts, first of all in CIS and in the Yugoslav crisis.

4. The development of fruitful international relations that will prevent the creation of new hotbeds of tension, and especially the proliferation of means or weapons of mass destruction.39

Within the Russian government's Executive branch by the time Primakov became foreign minister, there were a number of quasi-independent actors. In addition to the foreign ministry, there were:

1. The energy companies—especially Lukoil and Gasprom—closely linked to former Prime Minister Chernomyrdin, which openly contradicted Kozyrev’s policy on developing Caspian Sea oil by agreeing to develop an Azeri oilfield despite the Russian Foreign Ministry’s opposition;

2. Business magnates such as Boris Berezovsky and Vladimir Potanin who have been in and out of government (Berezovsky served as deputy secretary of Russia's national security council from October 1996 to November 1997);

3. The "Reformers" such as Boris Nemtsov and Anatoly Chubais, who entered the government in March 1997 and were particularly influential in Russian policy toward the FSU (they succeeded in watering down the Primakov-promoted Russian- Belarus unification plan) until their weakening in the fall of 1997;


4. Rosvooruzheniye, the Russian arms sales agency, which seemed ready to sell arms to anybody;

5. The Ministry of Defense which was initially very active in Russian policy toward Transcaucasia and Tajikistan, but has been weakened over the last few years because of the rapid changeover of defense ministers;


To achieve a modicum of cohesion in Russian foreign policy, it was necessary for Primakov, as well as Kozyrev, to line up as many as possible of these quasi-independent actors, as well as the Duma, in favor of a particular policy. In the case of Russian policy toward Iran and Iraq, both Kozyrev and Primakov were able to build a consensus; in the case of Russian policy toward Turkey, the contradictions that existed during Kozyrev's era had been exacerbated under Primakov, and in the case of Russian-Israeli relations, the once warm diplomatic relations of the Kozyrev era had become badly strained under Primakov, though cultural, economic and even military cooperation had increased.  

Finally, when he took office, Primakov had to face the fact that Russia, which was losing its war in Chechnya, was a very weak state and he was conducting foreign policy from a very weak base.

2.3 Igor Ivanov's period (1998-1999)

Igor Ivanov became Russia's Foreign Minister in September 1998 shortly after the economic collapse of August 1998.  

40 Robert O. Freedman, N.34, p.2.

41 Ibid.


Igor Sergeyevich Ivanov (born September 23, 1945) is a Russian politician who was Foreign Minister of Russia from 1998 to 2004. Ivanov was succeeded to the post of foreign minister by Sergey Lavrov in 2004, and appointed by President Vladimir Putin to the post of Secretary of the Security Council. On July 9, 2007 he submitted his resignation. Ivanov is professor of Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO-University), member of the Supervisory Council of the International Luxembourg Forum on Preventing Nuclear Catastrophe and member of the European Council on Tolerance and Reconciliation. In 2011 Ivanov became a member of the advisory council of The Hague Institute for Global Justice.
economically and militarily continued to contribute to the deterioration of the Russian position in the West Asia. Russia remained marginal to the Arab-Israeli peace process, even as the election of Ehud Barak served to revive the peace process. In the case of Turkey, Moscow put more emphasis on its economic ties with Ankara than on its geopolitical conflict with it, and sought to expedite the Blue Stream natural gas pipeline project. Nonetheless, given the competition between Blue Stream, the Trans-Caspian pipeline project, and Azerbaijani natural gas and the possibly increasingly negative impact of the Chechen war on major segments of Turkish society, the future direction of Turkish-Russian relations was an open question. In the case of Iraq, Russia, after proving unable to prevent either the U.S. and British bombing attack on Iraqi WMD sites, or the subsequent attacks on Iraqi air defenses, continued, as it had in the past, to try to get the sanctions on Iraq lifted and abstained, despite Iraqi protests, on a new Security Council resolution backed by the United States. As in the past, however, Moscow was not able to convince the U.S. to weaken its opposition to the lifting of sanctions, nor to convince the Iraqi government to accede to even the limited compromise agreements the United States was willing to make. Finally, in the case of Iran, while Russian sales of military equipment and nuclear technology continued, the war in Chechnya posed a potentially serious problem.  

In sum, Noge and Donaldson identified five broad underlying factors that collectively explain much of the change and variability in Russian foreign policy in the post-Soviet period as follows:

1. The change in structure of the international system from bipolarity to multipolarity,  
2. The decline in Russian military capability;  
3. Russia’s transformation from a command economy to a market economy  
4. Russia’s integration into the global economy and its increasing reliance on the global market;

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44 ‘Multipolarity’ is a key concept, often mentioned in Russia’s foreign policy documents, in its attempts to secure its position as a great power on the world arena. Developed by Yeltsin’s Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov in 1996, the concept means fighting for a world in which the United States does not dominate and where Russia is one of the poses of power or influence. See Ingmar Oldberg, ‘Great Power Ambitions under Putin’, in Roger E. Kanet, ed., N.29, p.17.
5. Russia’s political leadership and domestic politics, especially as manifested in the struggle between Yeltsin and Russian nationalist, followed by Putin’s effort to restore the power of the state and its central control.45

It was observed at the time that Post-Soviet Policy under Kozyrev was generally perceived as being confused. His successor, Yevgeny Primakov, succeeded in controlling the tide of change after 1991 and channeling it towards a much more clearly defined policy. As one US commentator noted at the end of 1997: ‘Seven years ago, Primakov was racing around the Middle East in a futile bid to stop the Persian Gulf War. The Americans regarded him as a meddlesome nuisance. [...] But now, Primakov is finally where he has always thought Russian diplomats should be: at the center of world attention.’46

3. Russian Policy towards Israel, Palestine and Arab-Israeli Conflict

During the Post-Soviet period, Russian policy reflected on evolving Russian-West Asian relations and remained focused on Israel, Palestine and Arab-Israeli conflict. Since national interest was promoted as a legitimate and absolutely necessary framework for conducting foreign policy in Yeltsin era, Israel was no longer enemy but a powerful regional actor offering Post-Soviet Russia opportunities of economic, cultural and technological cooperation. Moreover, strong relation with the United States had been vital to post-Soviet Moscow. To help cultivate this relationship, Russian leaders needed to consider the American’s pro-Israel position and avoid previous hostilities.47 Consequently, Russia’s relationship with Palestine was less important than Israel while its role in the Arab-Israeli conflict appeared to be minimal.

3.1 Russian-Israeli relations

One of the most startling transformations in Russian policy in the West Asia in the early 1990s was the nature of relations between Moscow and Tel Aviv, considering that in the Soviet era, until Mikhail Gorbachev took power, Israel was

45 Robert H. Donaldson and Joseph L. Nogee, N.37, pp.6-7.


regarded as an enemy of the Soviet Union and prime threat to its interests in the region. But because Gorbachev had already initiated so many drastic yet unexpected turnabouts in foreign policy (in Europe, Afghanistan and so on), the two countries had slowly established diplomatic relations in 1991 the world hardly noticed.

3.1.1 Andrey Kozyrev’s period (1992-1996)

In terms of Russian-Israeli relations, the strong rapprochement that had occurred in the last few years of the Soviet Union continued under Yeltsin as Moscow sought both economic benefits and political dividends from its growing ties to the Jewish states.\(^48\) Israel became a sought-after friend who was the enemy of another friend, the Palestinians. Faced with such a predicament the Russian political and economic elite became divided on the basis of competing ideological, strategic and economic goals behind policy making. The military industrial complex for example held a generally pro-Arab position in order to promote weapons sales to anti-Israeli states and tacitly prolong the conflict. Russians in the modern financial sector and the oil and gas industries considered their country’s interest to be in adopting a more balanced approach that would allow the development of relations with Israel as well as moderate, energy-rich Arab states such as Saudi Arabia and Qatar.

The fact remains, however, that in 1992 a new Russia was born and the Soviet Union ceased to exist. This created an opportunity for a new basis of relations with Israel and President Yeltsin and his reformist foreign minister, Andrei Kozyrev, energetically distanced themselves from Soviet policies and made deliberate efforts during 1992 and 1993 to make up for lost time in relations with Israel. As one author pointed out, among the most effective actions Russia took in favour of Israel in the region during those initial years was not to do anything at all. In other words, by yielding to US leadership in the peace process and informing the Palestinians and Syrians that Russia would not act as a military counter-balance to Israel and the United States in the West Asia. Arafat and Asad realized that the peace process was the unavoidable route to ending their international isolation.\(^49\)

\(^{48}\) Roger E. Kanet and Alexander V. Kozhemjakin, ed., N.15, p.129.

\(^{49}\) Talal Nizameddin, N.1, p.201.
Yeltsin and Kozyrev’s emphasis on building friendly relations with the West that was initiated by Gorbachev in the late 1980s indirectly facilitated the Palestinian-Israeli agreement reached in 1993. Moscow’s political disengagement at the time was paralleled by an active economic thrust towards finding new partners in the West Asia. Bilateral Russian-Israeli trade grew rapidly so that by 1995, after crossing the $500 million mark, Israel became Russia’s second largest trading partner in the West Asia after Turkey. Moscow’s new policies towards Israel, however, eventually encountered major limitations in the same way as Russia’s efforts towards the United States reached an impasse. The initial progress in developing economic relations stalled, with Russia’s first ambassador to Israel, Alexander Bovin, reminiscing that during ‘my five and a half year in Israel, I didn’t implement a single large Israeli-Russian project’.

While prodding the Palestinian in the early 1990s towards reaching a settlement with Israel, arguably to the advantage of the latter, Moscow was simultaneously carefully constructing relations with Iran. According to the Rabin government that was formed in 1992 the Iranians had emerged as the single most dangerous threat to the security of Israel. In confirmation of such fears, the United Nations arms register in October 1994 noted that Iran had emerged as “Russia’s largest arms customer”. Rabin relayed his concerns to Yeltsin and Kozyrev on his visit to Moscow on 24 April 1994, the first ever by an Israeli prime minister since the creation of Israel. The Russian leadership offered verbal assurances but did not deny that Iran was earmarked as an important long-term economic partner. Co-operation with Tehran was geo-strategically wise considering that Iran bordered the unstable Caucasus region and shared a coastline on the Caspian Sea.

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Russian-Iranian cooperation, despite Israeli complaints, resulted in positive outcomes for Moscow. Tehran supported the Armenians, Russia’s historic allies, against Azerbaijanis in their war in the Caucasus and co-operated with Moscow in curtailing the civil war in Tajikistan. Yeltsin’s Russia had little to lose in abandoning the Palestinians but much to gain in building a solid relationship with Iran. The balancing of relations between Iran and Israel became the major challenge under Yeltsin and latter throughout the Putin era.

In the early 1990s Russia faced the embarrassing situation of being the major source for the burgeoning number of Jewish settlers in disputed territories. Arab and Muslim public opinion associated the Yeltsin-Kozyrev era with Western support for Israel and the deterioration of the Palestinian humanitarian crisis. Russian foreign policy under Yeltsin therefore lost prestige among the Arabs while it failed to gain Israel’s confidence because Moscow’s developing relations with Tehran.\textsuperscript{54}

In 1991 and 1992 there was genuine and well-founded optimism that Russian-Israeli relations were positively limitless in terms of co-operation and cordiality. The pro-Western radicals were dominated in Moscow’s political arena and they were known for their determination to cast away the prejudices and hostility of all aspects of Soviet policy. The pro-Western radicals’ desire for improved relations with the United States was closely associated with the way Moscow behaved towards one of its most important international allies. In addition, Russia’s relation with hard-line regimes such as Syria and Iran were at that time negatively affected as a consequence of Gorbachev’s New Thinking, the continued flow of Jewish immigrants into Israel (and the occupied territories), and Russia’s general neglect of its relations with the East.\textsuperscript{55}

However, as Russia’s relations with the West cooled, differences with Israel took on a new and larger significance. As this happened the pro-Western radicals began losing their influence in Moscow to pragmatic pro-Westerners such as Chernomyrdin, who encouraged trade ties with Israel but was restrained in political support for Israeli actions and policies in the region which undermined the peace.


\textsuperscript{55} Talal Nizameddin, N.3, p.139.
process. In 1993 Moscow’s political elite, which included Kozyrev, was dominated by the pro-Western pragmatist position of acknowledging Washington’s primary position in the West Asia but suggesting that Russia could still play a prominent role in finding a breakthrough in the West Asia peace process. Both Washington and Tel Aviv undermined Moscow’s efforts to have a say in regional affairs and this led to growing criticism in Russia from pragmatic and extreme nationalists who argued that Russia’s interest were being wastefully neglected by Kozyrev and his colleagues. They also argue that Russia’s neglect of traditional allies such as Iran and Syria was costing the country billions of dollars in lost revenue.\(^{56}\)

After 1994 Russia raised its diplomatic profile in the region by improving relations with old Arab and Iranian allies, but it also persisted in seeking to improve relations with Israel, which indicated that there was not an overbearing influence of the pragmatic nationalists on the government’s policy. Instead, a more centrist policy was taking shape in 1995, when Russian-Israeli relations were given a fresh impetus by Tel Aviv’s encouragement of Moscow to convince the hard-line states such as Syria and Iran to tone down their belligerent policies and statements and show support for the Israeli-Palestinian and Israeli-Jordanian peace agreement.

3.1.2 Yevgeny Primakov’s period (1996-1998)

In general, Primakov’s centrist views were in line with the mainstream of Russia’s media and political elite, which had become increasingly convinced by 1996 that it was necessary for Russia to maintain some role in the West Asia because of geo-strategic and economic factors. One contemporary observer pointed out that Israel’s importance was two-fold: economically, it was a dominant force in the region which could provide Russia with important technology in the fields of agriculture and medicine, amongst many others: politically, winning the goodwill of Tel Aviv would almost certainly have allowed Russia to play a more influential role in the West Asia and lessen Washington’s strong-hold there. In addition, good Russian-Israeli relations would dampen suspicions in the West about Moscow’s intentions in the West Asia, particularly among those circles which perceived Russia to be a supporter of hard-line regimes, and enhance its image as a serious and constructive player in the region. That Primakov found it difficult to reconcile these aims with Israeli and US demands that

\(^{56}\) Talal Nizameddin, N.3, p.139.
Moscow should lessen its co-operation with some of Israel’s enemies such as Syria and Iran, was largely because of Russia’s fruitful economic and political links with countries which happened to be enemies of Israel. But it was also because Russia, in line with most countries of the international community, genuinely found certain aspects of Israeli policy, such as the expansion of settlements on occupied land, the refusal to negotiate over the status of Jerusalem, and the bombing of civilian targets in Lebanon, morally difficult to justify. Washington’s zealous support for Israel was interpreted in Russia (as in most of the world), as not being based on international law, or a sense of righteousness, but on the more direct assessment of the US national interest.  

The appointment of Primakov in early 1996 as Foreign Minister coincided with a period of growing friction between the two countries, both of which faced leadership elections in that year. In Russia, the strong neo-communist opposition posed a serious challenge to Yeltsin, whose pro-Western policies had come under strong criticisms in the light of the growing debate about NATO expansion into Eastern Europe. In Israel, Prime Minister Peres was seen as being too much of a dove, particularly in the light of terrorist attacks by Hamas and Hezbollah, which led to calls for more stringent reactions against Israel’s enemies. Operation Grapes of Wrath, launched in April 1996 against Lebanon, was intended to silence Peres’ critics, but the mission was a complete failure because it did not suppress Hezbollah and at the same time the death of hundreds of innocent civilians and the destruction of homes, factories, roads and other buildings rebuilt after the twenty-year civil war led to

57 Talal Nizameddin, N.3, p.132.


59 The Movement of Islamic Resistance (the initials spell ‘Hamas’ in Arabic, meaning ‘zeal’ was created by the society of Muslim Brothers in 1987, shortly after the launching of the first Intifada. Hezbollah, was created in 1982, a crucial year in the history of a Lebanon which being torn apart by the Lebanese Civil War. The ‘Party of God’ had its roots in the Shi’ite community, federating several groups which were opposed to the majority movement represented by Amal under the leadership of Nabih Berri. Three factors contributed to the emergence and strengthening of Hezbollah: the radicalization of the Shi’ite community; the Iranian Revolution; resistance to the Israeli invasion of Lebanon. The organization’s Secretary-General since 1992 has been Hassan Nasrallah. Dissimilar from Russia, the US has put Hezbollah on its list of terrorist organizations and has called unsuccessfully for the Lebanese government to freeze its assets. See Alain Gresh and Dominique Videl, N.27, pp.107-110 and pp.114-116.
widespread international criticism. Peres was replaced by Likud hard-liner Netanyahu, who opposed many of the concessions made to the Palestinians in the peace process. As his government reneged on various agreements with the Palestinians, and pushed forward plans to expand Jewish settlements in disputed territories, Moscow's criticisms of Tel Aviv became more frequent. However, these criticisms were not in the same vein as those emanating from pragmatic and extreme nationalists, but were more akin to the condemnation of most European capitals at the time, particular Paris.

Thus it appeared that by 1996 Russia's policy towards Israel had reached an impasse, despite the growing trade links, not because Moscow had opted for a return to the anti-Israeli line of the Soviet era, but because of Israel's aggressive policies in the West Asia. There was also an acceptance by Moscow that the special relationship between Israel and the United States acted as a barrier to greater Russian involvement in the region. During this period Russia could not be compared to the United States in terms of direct political influence in Israel. Added to this, Russian foreign policy had by 1996 defined a certain outlook on world affairs based on a domestic consensus of national interests and principles. Typified by the centrist-nationalist position of Primakov, this new perspective stressed the need for the restoration of relations with traditional Arab allies, some of which were Israel's most dangerous enemies. These factors made it difficult for Moscow to create better working conditions with the Jewish state than was aimed for in the early 1990s.

3.1.3 Igor Ivanov's period (1998-1999)

During the last stage of Yeltsin's presidency, Russian-Israeli relations appeared to be a good bit of movement, but with slight progress. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had canceled negotiations on a natural gas supply agreement with Russia because of Russia's supply of missile technology to Iran,

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60 Baylis Thomas, *The Dark Side of Zionism: Israel's Quest for Security Through Dominance* (Plymouth, UK: Lexington Books, 2011) p.132. Peres authorized, in April, 2,000 air attacks on Lebanon with intent to destroy Hezbollah, the 300-man militia committed to forcing out the IDF. This Lebanon operation ("Grapes of Wrath") was Peres's undoing. The air attacks killed more than 200 civilians and turned nearly 400,000 Lebanese civilians into homeless refugees. Destruction was heaped on Beirut and the Bekas Valley.

61 Talal Nizameddin, N.3, p.141.
which Israel saw as a serious threat. Then, Netanyahu suddenly changed his position on Russia when the Israeli election campaign was in progress, because he believed that if Israel improved its relations with Russia he would win the votes of Russian immigrants in a hotly contested election. Netanyahu not only supported Russia’s quest for additional IMF aid, but through his Foreign Minister, Ariel Sharon, questioned the NATO intervention in Kosovo.\textsuperscript{62} Primakov, who was soon to be removed by Yeltsin, responded to the Israeli initiative by letting it be known that he was hoping for a Netanyahu victory. In the same vein, Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov gave Arafat advice against proclaiming a Palestinian state on May 4, 1999, a major concern of Israel at the time.\textsuperscript{63} Netanyahu’s ploy failed, however, as the Russian immigrant voters voted their local concerns—particularly concerns about their religious status in Israel—and supported Netanyahu’s opponent, Ehud Barak.\textsuperscript{64}

A new Prime Minister of Israel, Ehud Barak himself journeyed to Moscow soon after his election and once again emphasized the Israeli concern about Russia’s sale of missile technology to Iran (a subject which Barak again addressed during his meeting with Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin in Oslo in November 1999) and also raised the concern about the rise in Russian anti-Semitism, both of which Yeltsin promised to address. The Israeli and Russian leaders also discussed the possibility of Russian help in achieving a Syrian-Israeli peace agreement, although given Russia’s weakened economic, military and diplomatic position in the world, whether Moscow could be of much help in this regard was an open question.\textsuperscript{65}


The available evidence suggests that during Yeltsin's last year in office, due to the Second Chechen war which started in August 1999, Russian public opinion was prone to being more sympathetic to Israelis rather than Palestinians because of the shared imagery of Islamic terrorism. This was relevant in light of Hamas and Islamic Jihad attacks on civilian targets in Israel at that time. As an interesting indicator of attitudes, one study found that the 'former Caucasophobia turned into Arabophobia' among Russian Jews who relocated to Israel. According to Yo'av Kany, 'If Jew-members of a well-educated urban minority, quintessentially victims of ethnic hostility—subscribe so eagerly to such stereotypes then it is not all that surprising that xenophobia is prevalent among Russian intellectuals.' Putin, a newly appointed as Prime Minister in August 1999, was among the new elite who on several occasions betrayed an underlying negative personal attitude towards Muslims, particularly during his handling of the Chechen war.

There was a growing transnational relationship between Russia and Israel throughout the 1990s by virtue of the large Russian-Jewish community in Israel which maintained its old habits and language and found it difficult to integrate with older Jewish communities. During the 1990s nearly 700,000 Soviet Jews migrated to Israel and the figure grew to over 1 million in 2012, comprising about one in seven of the Israeli population. Since Russian speakers were a major segment of Israeli society, the largest Russian-speaking community outside the former Soviet space, the 'Russian-speaking Jew have emerged as a prominent interest group' in Israel. Furthermore, Russia opened its borders to Jews who wished to leave, so unlike during the Soviet era families who emigrated could still return regularly to visit relatives or

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friends on a regular basis. This helped in maintaining bonds between Russia and Russian Jews in Israel. One leading Russian-Jewish figure, Vladimir Jabotinsky, while describing his community's view of Russia, remarked; 'I do not know if many of us love Russia, but many, too many of us, children of Jewish intelligentsia, are madly, shamefully in love with Russian culture, and through it with the whole of the Russian world.' 70 This would not be the first or last paradox in relations between Israel and Russia.

3.2 Russian-Palestine Relations

For many historical and political reasons, Russian and Soviet relationship with the Palestinians have remained deeply interwoven with the Zionist-Israeli enterprise, Arab nationalism, and Third World national liberation movements. Between 1956 and 1990, Soviet-Palestinian relations were tied to the Cold War. At the end of the cold war, the international importance and ideological role of Russian-Palestinian relations far exceeded local and regional limitations. 71

An oft-repeated argument was that the resolution of the Palestinian problem would eliminate the political and socio-economic stagnation in the West Asian region. The ongoing Palestinian-Israeli conflict had become a symbol of Western injustice and inhumanity and thus offered both the Soviet Union and Russia a cause to exploit. The Palestinian people did not and could not offer Russia an immediate boost to the economy or provide a military-strategic advantage. Adopting the Palestinian cause in the 1990s, however, not only created a measure of popular support for Russia among Arabs and Muslims but it also facilitated relations with Iran and Syria as both countries thrived on anti-Western and anti-Israeli rhetoric. Russia’s stated support for the rights of the Palestinians also dampened a potentially far more hostile reaction from Arab and Muslim countries during its military campaign in Chechnya in the 1990s. But such benefits had to be balanced with developing a meaningful relationship with Israel, which was a powerful regional actor offering opportunities of economic, cultural and technological cooperation. In addition, antagonizing Israel with an overtly pro-Palestinian policy risked damage to relations with the United

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71 Andrej Kreutz, N.47, p.45.
States and other Western countries, which Russia was very keen to avoid.\(^2\) Russian-Palestine relations during this time were under serious scrutiny.

3.2.1 Andrey Kozyrev’s period (1992-1996)

In 1992, the first year of Yeltsin’s presidency post-Soviet Union, Moscow’s official line ‘did not mention Palestinian rights or the Israeli occupation’.\(^3\) Russia’s general disengagement from the West Asia was a consequence of Foreign Minister Kozyrev’s focus on bettering relations with the United States and the West.\(^4\) Throughout 1993 Moscow deliberately took a back seat in formal Arab-Israeli peace negotiations, which tellingly took place in the hallways of the State department in Washington DC. The leadership in Moscow was oblivious to the secret Oslo talks and appeared surprised when the outcome was publicly announced. The result of the secret talks, the Declaration of Principles, was signed between Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in September 1993 on the White House lawn, with Bill Clinton basking in the glory of the role of peacemaker. The September 1995 Israeli-Palestinian Interim Agreement was an implementation document of the Oslo-inspired Declaration of Principles of 1993, which among other things established the Palestinian National Authority under Arafat’s leadership following a partial withdrawal of Israeli forces from the West Bank and Gaza.\(^5\) The agreement allowed for Palestinian self-rule after legislative elections although there was no Israeli commitment on the creation of a Palestinian state. According to the Interim Agreement final status issues such as the fate of Jerusalem would be resolved at a later date.\(^6\)

In September 1994, one year after the signing of the Oslo Declaration of Principles in Washington DC, Arafat’s first meeting with President Yeltsin took place.

\(^2\) Talal Nizameddin, N.1, pp.197-198.

\(^3\) Andrej Kreutz, N.47, p.60.


\(^6\) Talal Nizameddin, N.1, p.214.
in Moscow to discuss bilateral relations.\textsuperscript{77} The Russian leadership welcomed Arafat to give further encouragement to the Israeli-Palestinian peace accord and also to provide endorsement to the Palestinian leader in light of fierce criticisms from radical Palestinian groups Hamas and Islamic Jihad. In turn, Arafat hoped that the meeting would initiate a process of re-engagement with Russia as a long-term counterbalance to the United States and his Arab and Muslim opponents, including Iran. As a seasoned political player, Arafat was correct to invest his efforts early in the Yeltsin presidency because Russian foreign policy began shifting away from the pro-Western tilt in the second half of the 1990s.\textsuperscript{78}

3.2.2 Yevgeny Primakov’s period (1996-1998)

Primakov’s appointment in 1996 confirmed the process of transition in which Russia once more began seeking to play a significant role in the West Asia independently from the United States. In February 1997 Arafat was invited to Moscow as head of the Palestinian National Authority. Primakov offered Arafat unequivocal support and expressed strong criticism of Hamas and Islamic Jihad, both of which refused to renounce violence, thus also joining the West in condemning Palestinian terrorism. But Moscow was also subtly diverging from the Israeli position under Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu who blamed Arafat for terrorist attacks by accusing him of failing to curtail them. Netanyahu’s un concealed agenda was to annul the Oslo agreements and aggressively rebuild settlements in the disputed territories in order to change the demographic landscape before the scheduled final status talks with the Palestinians were held. This was supported by the veteran and highly influential Israeli political figure Ariel Sharon, who served in the Netanyahu government in 1990s as Minister of National Infrastructure. Netanyahu and Sharon wanted to humiliate Arafat, who was a figure of hate for many Israeli Jews. Primakov deftly presented Russian foreign policy as moderate by rejecting political violence and fiercely supporting the peace process while the United States, in fear of

\textsuperscript{77} Andrej Kreutz, N.47, p.57.

\textsuperscript{78} Talal Nizameddin, N.1, p.215.
antagonizing Israel, appeared to be a negative element that failed to uphold existing peace agreement by supporting extremist Israeli leaders.\(^{79}\)

### 3.2.3 Igor Ivanov’s period (1998-1999)

Primakov, this time in his role as prime minister, visited Arafat in Ramallah in October 1998 to openly advocate statehood for the Palestinians but Russia’s approach remained ‘cautious because it did not want to antagonize either Israel or the United States.’\(^{80}\) This balanced diplomacy was put to the test on 4 May 1999 when the final status negotiations over the Occupied Territories were scheduled, but deliberate Israeli procrastination in the process prevented discussions. In response, Arafat travelled to Moscow on 5 April 1999 to seek Russian support for a unilateral declaration of Palestinian statehood. Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov however responded coolly and the leadership in Moscow informed the Palestinian leader that the act would be counterproductive. Sharon, as foreign minister, travelled to Moscow one week after Arafat and praised Russia’s role in convincing the Palestinian leader to postpone the declaration of independence.

While Primakov’s policies in the West Asia were being widely praised in Russia, rivalry between the president and the prime minister intensified. On 12 May 1999 Yeltsin felt sufficiently concerned over Primakov’s growing influence in the Russian political establishment to remove him from his post as prime minister.\(^{81}\) Yeltsin’s decision was endorsed by Western government and the Western media had widely labelled Primakov as pro-Palestinian and anti-Western but in reality, while he was driving force in Russia’s active return to the West Asia during the late-1990s he also developed good relations with Israeli political leaders, including more hawkish, right-wing figures such as Netanyahu and Sharon. The Western simplification of the Yeltsin-Primakov rivalry failed to consider that the president of Russia enjoyed essential powers in foreign policy that formed a lynchpin of Russia’s various political forces and trends. Primakov’s initiatives were therefore carried out in tandem with Yeltsin and both leaders consistently presented Russia as a balanced player in the

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\(^{79}\) Talal Nizameddin, N.1, p.216.

\(^{80}\) Andrej Kreutz, N.47, p.64.

Palestinian-Israeli dispute. Russian foreign policy during this period was not untypical of Western European states such as France and Germany, both of which were at times even more critical than Moscow of Israeli policies towards the Palestinians.\textsuperscript{82}

3.3 \textbf{Russian policy towards the Arab-Israeli Conflict during Boris Yeltsin’s Presidency (1991-1999)}

Having moved forward from the supporting cast in the Persian Gulf conflict, Russia still sought to do the same in the remaining long-running dispute in the West Asia—the Arab-Israeli conflict. During earlier phases, Russia, led by President Boris Yeltsin, had been handicapped by its lack of influence with Israel. This changed—as did so many other features of Moscow’s foreign policy—during the late Gorbachev period. By 1988 Soviet restrictions on Jewish emigration to Israel had eased and consular missions were opened. In October 1991 full diplomatic relations, broken after the Six-Day War in 1967, were restored. At the end of that month Gorbachev attended the Madrid Conference on West Asian peace, which was co-chaired by the USSR.\textsuperscript{83}

3.3.1 \textbf{Andrey Kozyrev’s period (1992-1996)}

Yeltsin’s government moved quickly to further strengthen Russia-Israeli relations. Vice President Aleksandr Rutskoi visited Israel in April 1992, and the following August Shimon Peres made the first visit to Moscow by an Israeli foreign minister. The following month Peres and Kozyrev signed an agreement calling for

\textsuperscript{82} Talal Nizameddin, N.1, p.216.

\textsuperscript{83} Robert H. Donaldson, Joseph L. Nogee, and VidyaNadkarni, \textit{The Foreign Policy of Russia: Changing Systems, Enduring Interests}, Fifth Edition (Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2014) p.328. The Madrid Conference of 1991 was a peace conference, held from 30 October to 1 November 1991 in Madrid, hosted by Spain and co-sponsored by the United States and the Soviet Union. Ostensibly, it was a conference to kick-start negotiations between Israel and its regional neighbors, with the conference to kick-start negotiations between Israel and its regional neighbors, with the conference attended by Israel, the Palestinians and representatives from Syria, Lebanon and Jordan. However, Israel refused to participate if the PLO served as the Palestinian representatives resulting in the Palestinians attending in a joint committee with the Jordanians. Whilst these negotiations did not result in an official agreement between the PLO and the then-Likud Shamir government, they did lead to unofficial talks between the Palestinians and the new Labour government of Yitzhak Rabin after 1992 as well as laying the groundwork for the 1994 Israeli-Jordanian Peace Treaty. Indeed, it was the symbolism of the negotiations that was the most important outcome of the Madrid process, allowing both the Israelis and the Palestinians to outline the parameters they saw as a prerequisite for peace. (Benjamin MacQueen, \textit{An Introduction to Middle East Politics} (Los Angeles, London, and New Delhi: SAGE, 2013) p.318).
closer relations in several spheres. Trade relations between the two countries began to increase at a dizzying speed, moving from only $70 million in 1991 and $280 million in 1993 to about $65 million in 1995. Finally, much to the chagrin of Yeltsin’s domestic critics, Moscow demonstrated an unaccustomed even-handedness in the ongoing Arab-Israeli peace process, and Kozyrev was invited to the White House in September 1993 to celebrate the Oslo accords between Israel and the Palestinians.⁸⁴

A number of scholars held the view that the strong showing by Zhirinovskii and the nationalist forces in the Duma election of December 1993 might have motivated Yeltsin initially to play a more independent role in West Asian negotiations, following the disarray caused by the February 1994 massacre of twenty-nine Palestinian worshippers by a Jewish settler in the West Bank town of Hebron. Without consulting Washington, Yeltsin dispatched Kozyrev to Tunis to meet with Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) leader Yasser Arafat, for reconvening of the Madrid conference, and to support the demand of the Arabs for international observers to protect West Bank Palestinians. In April Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin made separate visits to Moscow for consultations with Yeltsin. Although Moscow was not coordinating its initiative with Washington, it nevertheless remained even-handed. Rabin, a former general, was even invited to lecture at the General Staff Academy in Moscow, and he extracted two promised from the Russians—to use their influence with Syria to help in locating captured Israeli soldiers, and to forgo the sale of any new offensive weapons to Syria. By this point, Moscow had only limited influence in Syria, which had been refusing to negotiate with the Yeltsin government about its substantial debt ($10 billion) to the USSR. During the April 1994 visit to Damascus, Deputy Prime Minister Oleg Soskovets opened conversations on debt repayment, while agreeing to resume deliveries of spare parts for Soviet-made weapons.⁸⁵ A follow-up visit by Kozyrev in October produced a Syrian agreement on a repayment schedule stretching to 2015. This cleared the way for better relation between Syria and Russia, which still had a Mediterranean naval


base in Syria, as well as about 2,000 military and civilian specialists working in the

country.\textsuperscript{86}

The higher Russian profile in the West Asia occasioned an approving article in
the Russian press by Karen Bretents, a veteran academic specialist on the area. Whereas Soviet influence in the West Asia during the Brezhnev period had been comparable to that of Washington, and the Arabs had been Moscow’s main economic
partners in the Third World, he argued, the early Yeltsin policy had curtailed political
ties, wanting to destroy everything “sinful” that had been built up over the years. A
legacy had thereby been wasted and Russia had been relegated to a purely ceremonial
role in the peace process. Even though the rise of independent states in the Caucasus
had pushed Russia farther away geographically, ‘in some respect, Russian security is
now even more closely connected with the Middle East than it was before,’ and
tremors there could have serious repercussions in the near abroad. The Arab countries
remained a promising market for Russia, with possible benefits to stem from
coordination of petroleum-exporting policies. Finally Brutents argued, changes for the
better were being seen in Russian policy, with Arafat’s visit to Moscow and
Kozyrev’s trips to the West Asia. The key, he maintained, was pursuing an
independent policy that was based on a clear understanding of the importance to
Russia of good relations with the Arab world.\textsuperscript{87}

3.3.2 Yevgeny Primakov’s period (1996-1998)

By the beginning of 1996, the stage was set for a major effort by Primakov,
newly appointed foreign minister, to bring Moscow’s diplomacy back to the forefront
of the Arab-Israeli relationship. The opportunity came in April, when Israel launched
Operation grapes of Wrath in response to shelling of northern Israeli settlements by
Hezbollah guerrillas in southern Lebanon. Primakov traveled to Israel, Lebanon, and
Syria, offering himself as mediator in the conflict, and hinting that Russia would be
able to exert influence over forces in both Syria and Iran that could assist in
normalizing the situation in Lebanon. His meeting with Prime Minister Peres was
described as “difficult,” and Peres reportedly told him that Israel was interested only


in U.S. mediation. A similar message came to Primakov from Washington, in a
telephone call from Secretary of State Warren Christopher, who said, 'We can handle
without you.'\textsuperscript{88} The Russian foreign ministry staff bitterly complained to journalists
that U.S. "egoism"—a desire to keep a monopoly on diplomatic activity in the area—
was the main reason Russia was even being excluded from the international group
formed to monitor implementation of the cease-fire in southern Lebanon. One
commentator noted that Russia's increasing efforts to develop ties with Iraq, Iran, and
Libya probably contributed to the wariness of the United States, though he found an
even more basic reason Russia was being left on the sidelines: 'Moscow's basic
problem is that, unlike the Americans and the West Europeans, it is unable to provide
any material backup for its claims to a special role in the region, which is accustomed
to massive financial infusions.'\textsuperscript{89}

Primakov's chief deputy for the West Asia gave a candid interview in which
he expressed the foreign minister's frustration with Washington. According to Viktor
Posuvaliuk, Russia was proceeding from the premise that the Madrid process needed
to be given fresh impetus, and the best way to do this was to assure, 'a more energetic
role for Moscow.' However, he told his interviewer, 'You are right when you say that
an attempt is being made to prevent Russia from taking an active role in the Middle
East.' Russia's general line was to strengthen ties with all states in the region;
paradoxically, Moscow was being accused on the one hand of associating mainly with
countries such as Libya, Iraq, or Sudan, but then hindered when it tried to broaden its
ties, especially through the sale of arms. In the next five year, he asserted, the
countries of the region intended to buy arms worth up to $80 billion. If Russia did not
sell to them, then some other country would 'So our task is to find our own niche in
these plans.'\textsuperscript{90}

\textsuperscript{88} Konstantin Eggert, 'Russia Wants to Be the Equal of the U.S. in the Middle East,' Izvestia, April 26,
p.308.

\textsuperscript{89} Maksim Iusin, 'Washington No Longer Wants to Share the Laurels of Peacemaker with Moscow',
L. Nogee, N.37, p.308.

\textsuperscript{90} Leonid Gankin, 'We Have Become Mature Partners,' Moskovskienost, no. 23, June 9-16, 1996,
Primakov did not let his initial disappointment discourage continued efforts in the region. In October 1996 he embarked on another trip to the West Asia, visiting Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Israel, and the Palestinian Authority. Recognizing that the Arab world's ardor towards Moscow had cooled, partly because its value of financial and military support had been shut down, partly because of Russia's war in Muslim Chechnya and its support of Bosnian Serbs, but also because Kozyrev had given far more attention to Israel than to its neighbors, Primakov nonetheless persisted in trying to revive former friendships in the Arab world. By the time Arafat came to Moscow in February 1997, on his trip visit elected president of the Palestinian Authority, Primakov had specific suggestions which—in one journalist's words—'left no doubt that Russia's diplomatic train, which had sat on a siding of the Mideast railway for many years, is back on track.' These ideas centered on arranging an expanded conference on a comprehensive settlement; the meeting would be held in Moscow and attended by all West Asian countries. In a joint statement with Arafat, Russia declared that Palestinian aspirations to achieve self-determination did not harm Israel's legitimate interests, that the problem of the West Bank settlements must be resolved, and that the outcome of talks on Jerusalem must not infringe on the rights of any religious faith. As this journalist concluded, 'The logic of events allows one to assume that in general Moscow will henceforth speak with a more pronounced Arab accent in talks on the subject of a Mideast settlement: Disillusioned with the West's NATO-related ambitions, it will try to charm the Muslim world again.'

It was observed at the time that Moscow's Arab accent was being heard in Israel as well. In April 1996 the Russian government had revoked the registration of the Jewish Agency in Moscow, which was heavily involved in arranging the emigration of Russian Jews to Israel. Government spokesmen claimed that the agency had violated Russian laws by circumventing visa procedures, but there were widespread complaints in the press about its active inducements toward emigration.

91 'Russia Looks to the Mideast', Monitor, Volume: 2 Issue: 195, October 18, 1996.
especially of talented young people. In a June interview, Posuvaliuk had strongly implied that registration would be possible, but he had also stated, with respect to the bilateral relationship, "The "honeymoon" in our relations with Israel is over, and now they have entered a time of maturity." This was even more evident the following March, when Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu visited Moscow. Although he declared that Israel now considered Russia to be a "friendly state," and announced a $50 million loan for Russian agricultural development, there were evidently serious disagreements between him and his Russian hosts, especially about Moscow's arms sales to Syria and Iran. Primakov assured Netanyahu that Russia was not supplying missiles to Iran, and Yeltsin apparently promised him that Moscow would not sell state-of-the-art weapons to Syria. But once again, Russia's active pursuit of opportunities in the weapons market was being regarded as major obstacle to its acceptance as a responsible partner by all sides in the regional conflict.

Netanyahu reportedly had told the Russians that "there shouldn't be two chefs in the same kitchen"—in other words, that their help was not needed in efforts to settle the Arab-Israeli conflict—but Egypt's President Hosni Mubarak, visiting Moscow a few months later, clearly was encouraging a greater Russian role in the region. Noting with regret the absence of regular high-level visit during the past decade and the 50 percent drop in Russian-Egyptian trade (to an annual level of only $400 million), Mubarak and Yeltsin agreed to set up a bilateral commission to promote trade and economic cooperation. The following month, following a New York meeting with Secretary of State Madeleine Albright to coordinate U.S. and Russian effort, Primakov returned to the West Asia for his third tour in less than two years. Visiting Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Israel, and the Palestinian Authority, the Russian foreign minister was well received, but he made no apparent progress in putting the peace process back on track. Not until the election of Ehud Barak as Israeli


97 Ibid., p.309.

prime Minister in 1999 did prospects for peace talks brighten. Even Syria’s President Hafez al Assad signaled his interest in talks during a trip to Moscow in July 1999—his first visit since the end of the Cold War—but Assad may have been primarily interested in purchasing Russian arms to modernize his army, 90 percent of whose equipment was Soviet-made. However, the issues of the unpaid debt—rather than U.S. objections—appeared to be the main stumbling block to a deal.99

4. Russian Policy towards the ‘Northern Tier’: Turkey and Iran

As regional powers in their own right, the influence of Turkey and Iran was not related just to the West Asia, but also to the vast area to the south and south-west of Russia’s borders. By virtue of their sizable territorial mass, large populations and indispensable geo-strategic locations Turkey and Iran were widely viewed as states of major significance in the international order. Dominating the geographic edges of the north and east of the West Asia, these two non-Arab Muslim countries historically exerted a strong influence on their Arab neighbors and established themselves as regional powers. Iran was the inheritor of a great Persian civilization while Turkey represented Sunni Turkic culture and was the successor of the long-dominant Ottoman Empire in the West Asia.

It was observed at the time that the greatest fear that accompanied Moscow’s diminishing influence99 was that the three powers would clash as a result of instability in Caucasus. There was also discord over the delineation of the Caspian Sea and the Black Sea. Such differences were not new, but had existed for centuries. However, the post-Soviet era added a new equation to the formula: there was so longer a direct border between Russia and the other two Muslim powers. Instead, a geo-political space was opened for the three historic rivals to re-assert their own influence. In 1992 with the domination of the pro-Western radicals at its peak, Moscow focused its attention on relations with the West while seeking to avoid entanglement with the Muslim World to its south. It was believed in that year that the biggest threat to its security from that region would come from Islamic fundamentalism, guided by Iran. But as pragmatism became the dominant feature of Russian foreign policy, many observers were surprised to find that Moscow was increasingly co-operating with

Tehran in order to balance Ankara’s more assertive role in the Eurasian land-mass stretching from Central Asia to the Balkans.  

Bilateral relations with Turkey and Iran were another key component on which Russia placed greater significance from 1993 onwards.  

Arms sales to Iran, as well as industrial projects, were to have an important bearing on relations with the United States as well as other key states of the West Asia, particularly Turkey, Iraq, Saudi Arabia and Israel. Furthermore, co-operations with Iran promised Russia a more influential voice in the politics of the Gulf. Turkey was involved in a territorial and water dispute with Syria, which became more hostile towards Ankara after the latter began to raise the level of military co-operation with Israel. The Kurdish issue also forced Turkey to become more involved in Iraq and more hostile towards Syria for its support of extreme Kurdish factions. Thus it could be seen that relations with Iran and Turkey preoccupied Russia in a massive geo-strategic tangle which was of vital importance to Moscow’s national security.

4.1 Russia and Turkey

Regarding Russia-Turkey relations, the historical and collective memories of enmity and confrontation remain close to the surface. Imperial Russia and the Ottoman Empire fought seven wars, and Russia was the principal external force responsible for the loss of the Ottoman’s European territories. During the Cold War, Soviet ideology confirmed Russian imperial ambitions and Turkey became a stalwart frontline NATO members in 1952.

The end of the Soviet Union established a new era of Russian-Turkish relations. However, Russian-Turkish relations during Boris Yeltsin’s presidency had a

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100 Talal Nizameddin, N.3, p.220.


103 Talal Nizameddin, N.3, p.221.

complicated evolution. On the one hand, there had emerged an unprecedented degree of cooperative interaction between the two countries. Turkish businesses, for example, were actively involved in the growing private sector of the Russian economy. On the other hand, many in Russia feared the possibility that Ankara might be able to displace Moscow as the pre-eminent power in the ex-Soviet republics with linguistic links to Turkey (Azerbaijan in the Caucasus and Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan in Central Asia). The Russian nationalist strain in Moscow’s foreign policy had identified Turkey not only as a threat to Russian interests in these states, but also in the Muslim regions of the Russian Federation. Russian nationalists frequently claimed that Turkey supported the Chechen Independence movement. The ultra-Russian nationalist leader, Vladimir Zhirinovsky, appeared to regard Turkey as Russia’s primordial enemy.

In post-Soviet era, it was observed at the time that Turkey had, in fact, attempted to extend its influence into the South Caucasus and Central Asia. One author noted that there were several obstacles, however, to the spread of Turkish influence to these regions. To begin with, Turkey does not directly border on any of the predominantly Turkic former Soviet republics (except for its very short common border with Azerbaijan’s Nakichevani exclave which itself is geographically discontinuous from Azerbaijan). In addition, Turkey’s economy was not particularly strong and there were severe constraints on the aid and investment that Turkey could provide to these former Soviet republics. Further, Ankara’s cultural campaign to link

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these republics more closely with Turkey was largely unsuccessful, resulting instead in resentment over Turkey's perceived cultural arrogance. So far, it was observed at the time that Turkish efforts to spread its influence to these republics had been limited both by Turkey's distance from them (especially the ones in Central Asia), the lack of sufficient resources that might enable Ankara to spread its influence, and perhaps most importantly, Turkey's unwillingness to damage its relations with Russia by aggressively seeking to displace its Influence in the South Caucasus and Central Asia.  

4.1.1 Andrey Kozyrev's period (1992-1996)

Kozyrev's visit to Turkey in June 1994, as part of NATO Conference on Partnership for Peace, resulted in meetings with Prime Minister Tansu Ciller and his Turkish counterpart Hikmet Cetin. In the Kozyrev-Cetin meeting the issue of the Straits was raised and Russia's displeasure with Ankara's plan to introduce new guidelines and restrictions was expressed. The Turkish side seemed as determined as ever to stand its ground as in the words of Turkish leader: 'we can clarify some of the issues again and explain that they do not violate the Montreux convention...but Turkey cannot allow a city of 10 million people to be threatened'. Apart from that, the emergence of new Muslim republics and fear that Turkey was seeking to expand its reign of influence into these areas created added tension between the two countries.

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110 The Partnership for Peace (PfP) is a program of practical bilateral cooperation between individual Euro-Atlantic partner countries and NATO. It allows partners to build up an individual relationship with NATO, choosing their own priorities for cooperation. PfP was established in 1994. Currently, there are 22 countries in the PfP, including Turkey and Russia.

111 TRT TV (Ankara), June 9, 1994, BBC SWB, SU/2020, June 13, 1994, B/12, cited in Talal Nizameddin, N.3, p.228. The Montreux Convention Regarding the Regime of the Straits is a 1936 agreement that gives Turkey control over the Bosphorus Straits and the Dardanelles and regulates the transit of naval warships. The Convention gives Turkey full control over the Straits and guarantees the free passage of civilian vessels in peacetime. It restricts the passage of naval ships not belonging to Black Sea states. The terms of the convention have been the source of controversy over the years, most notably concerning the Soviet Union's military access to the Mediterranean Sea.

Turkey's introduction of new procedures for seafaring through the Straits, implemented on January 1, 1994, led to criticism from the Russian Foreign Ministry because the move was seen as an attempt to limit Russian merchant and military shipping out of the Black Sea. Deputy Foreign Minister Albert Chernishev complained that while Moscow accepted the need to update and improve rules and codes to improve seafaring, they should not have been made unilaterally. Moreover, he accused the Ankara government of acting contrary to the spirit of the Geneva Conventions. 'The interests of all parties concerned and particularly those of the Black Sea region should also be taken into account', Chernishev maintained. Foreign Ministry spokesman Grigorii Karasin echoed this point and added that freedom of navigation in the Black Sea was of primary importance for the Russian economy. 'In this connection the Russian side has repeatedly made clear that we are unable to recognize the introduction of procedures which essentially amount to having to ask for authorization to cross the Straits and unilateral restrictions up to and including a de facto ban on such crossings for certain categories of vessels as legally binding.'

Turkey had long been irritated by Moscow's unrelenting attention to the issue of the Straits because it believed that Russia's ultimate motive was some form of control over them. It was observed at the time that Ankara sought to counter Russian complaints by arguing that the changes it had introduced were intended to improve sea traffic, which had grown rapidly over the years, and for the sake of improving environmental and safety standards for the ten million citizens of Istanbul. The undercurrent of Turkish suspicions was expressed in extreme terms by the Turkish General Gueres in June 1994. He claimed that Russia posed a bigger threat to Turkey than it did during the Cold War, arguing that 'Moscow had expansionist desires towards the Caucasus region, Ukraine and even the Balkan states'. The Russian Foreign Ministry was sufficiently concerned to make an immediate response in which


it expressed its hope ‘that the statements made by Gueres do not reflect the point of view of Turkey’s political leadership’.\textsuperscript{115}

It was observed at the time that the Turkish political establishment had fears of its own, caused by the rise of Russian nationalism and the possibility that it could become uncontrollable to the existing leadership in Moscow. Both the government and media of Turkey paid much attention to the rise of Vladimir Zhirinovskii, the Russian ultra-nationalist whose comments were offensive to all of Russia’s neighbors. The Turkish Foreign Ministry prevented Zhirinovskii from entering Turkey in February 1994, wrecking his plan to lead a fifteen-man delegation at the invitation of a Turkish newspaper.\textsuperscript{116}

Another major point of difference between the two countries which continued to affect bilateral relations was the traditional support shown by Moscow to the Kurdish movement and their quest for independence.\textsuperscript{117} Yeltsin’s government had made clear for its support and respect for the integrity of the Turkish Republic and attempted to distance itself from the terrorist PKK, the Kurdistan Worker’s Party.\textsuperscript{118} However, the Turkish government did not contain its anger at Moscow for allowing Kurdish groups to hold a conference in Moscow in February 1994. The conference was sponsored by the Russian Ministry of ‘Affairs of Nationalities and Regional Policy’ and was titled ‘Kurdistan at a Historical and Political Cross-roads’. Turkish President Suleiman Demirel warned Moscow that ‘our people are very sensitive to this issue. It is necessary that Russia provide additional explanations to prevent the


\textsuperscript{116} Talal Nizameddin, N.3, p.230.

\textsuperscript{117} Habibe Özdal, Hasan Selim Özeren, Kerim Has, M. Turgut Demirtepe, N.105.

\textsuperscript{118} The Kurdistan Worker’s Party (PKK), founded by Abdullah Öcalan in 1978, was a political and paramilitary organization that fought the Turkish government for Kurdish autonomy and independence. During the period of military activity (1984-98), it not only confronted the Turkish government and military within the country, it also embarked on a series of bombings, assassinations and other activities against Turkish government officials around the world. As such, it became designated as a terrorist organization by many governments. Öcalan led the PKK from northern Syria until 1998, when the Syrian government ordered him to leave. He was captured by Turkish agents in Kenya in 1999. He was sentenced to death, with this being commuted to life imprisonment in 2002. (Benjamin MacQueen, N.83, p.197). See Henri J. Barkey and Graham E. Fuller, \textit{Turkey’s Kurdish Question} (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1998), in chapter 6, for an in-depth study of Kurdish Relations with Russia during Yeltsin’s presidency.
impression that it supports terrorism. In fairness to the Russian government the Turkish government's view that any form of Kurdish nationalist expression represented terrorism was not shared by most countries of the world community.

However, the Turkish government did not view the special attention paid to the Kurdish issue by the Russian press and diplomatic officials with benign indifference. The Kurdish point of view was often reflected in the mainstream press, which implied that the fault lay with the Turkish leadership. One article, openly supporting Kurdish self-determination, asked: 'Is that really such a high price to end a thirteen-year-long war, which has already taken 25,000 lives and costs Ankara from $7 billion to $9 billion a year in rough estimate?'. The reader was reminded that the forty million Kurds scattered around the world were the largest ethnic group without a homeland. More significantly, it was noted that one million of them lived in Russia and other CIS states. Realistically, however, in the words of the Russian commentator, 'the Kurds recognize that Russia is not currently in a position to quarrel with Turkey, its largest trade partner outside the CIS'. Nonetheless, in October 1998, it became clear that Russia was to host to PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan, after he fled Syria under Turkish pressure. The Duma voted in early November to reject Turkish demands that he should be extradited. Thus the Russian government was left in the embarrassing position of explaining itself to Ankara for allowing Öcalan to live in a relative safety in western suburb of Moscow. Clearly, the issue had negatively damaged Russian-Turkish relations as the 1990s come to a close.

Since 1995 Turkey had sought to moderate its relations with Russia. Observers noted that while Russia remained muted about Turkish operations against Kurds in northern Iraq, 'Ankara reciprocated on the Chechnya issue' and it was also pointed out that 'Russia has the lion's share of the $5.2 billion Turkish investments in the

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121 Leonid Gankin, N.120, p.11.

122 Talal Nizameddin, N.3, p.231.
CIS’. The trade links continued to flourish between the two countries to the extent that each side viewed the other as a vital economic partner. In December 1995 an agreement was signed between Oleg Davydov, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Economic Relations, and Bilgin Unan, the Turkish ambassador to Moscow, in which Turkey extended a $350 million credit to Russia and the two countries restructured the debt of the USSR. The agreement was seen as a breakthrough in resolving the Soviet debt issue and allowing new investment to flow into Russia. The turnover of trade between the two countries stood at $3 billion in 1995. In addition the value of contracts for the construction of facilities by Turkish firms stood at $5 billion in that year. There were also other important factors such as the well-being of Turkish workers in Russia and the number of Russian tourists in Turkey that added to value of economic interaction. Moreover, Turkey agreed to earmark $100 million of the $370 million Russian debt for the purchase of weapons for the Turkish army. 

4.1.2 Yevgeny Primakov’s period (1996-1998)

The coming to power of Necmettin Erbakan in 1996 was not met with enthusiasm in Moscow. The Russian media compared his views to the militant leader of Iran, and quoted him as saying that ‘our goal is to liberate Bosnia, Azerbaijan, Chechnya and Jerusalem’. It may be understood therefore that the seventy-year-old Erbakan was averse to the growing Western influence in Turkey and wanted to restore traditional values in society. Further, a traditional Islamic outlook, as Moscow found so often in the past, was also not sympathetic towards Russia because it was accompanied with many historic suspicions.

125 Necmettin Erbakan (October 29, 1926—February 27, 2011) was a Turkish politician, engineer, and academic who was the Prime Minister of Turkey from 1996 to 1997. He was pressured by the military to step down as prime minister and was later banned from politics by the Constitutional Court of Turkey for violating the separation of religion and state as mandated by the constitution.
Toward the end of 1996, the niggling differences between Turkey and Russia had not subsided. Russia’s dismay with Turkey’s indirect support for the Chechens intensified when a Chechen mission was opened in Istanbul. This was the reaction in a statement by the Russian Foreign Ministry in early December 1996, ‘Governments that allow Ishkeria’s so-called missions to be turned into embassies will be taking a clearly unfriendly step toward Russia, attempting through such action to challenge the territorial integrity of the Russian Federation.’ According to Russia’s Military Doctrine, any country threatening the unity of the Russian Federation was in effect making a declaration of war. The strong language from Moscow led to a counter-response from Ankara insisting that the mission would not be upgraded and that it considered Chechnya to be a member of the Russian Federation and Turkey respects Russia’s territorial integrity.

Moscow also revealed some unease at Turkey’s military build-up and its upgrading of naval power in the Black Sea. According to Russian defense sources quoted in the press, the Turkish fleet had a clear superiority over the Black Sea Fleet that was two to one in Turkey’s favour. The Turkish navy continued to be augmented ‘not only by American-built fighting ships, but also by small craft produced in Turkey’. The 700,000-strong Turkish army was the second largest in NATO, after the U.S. Armed Forces, and Ankara’s plan to modernize it was a clear-cut challenge to Moscow’s military strategists to utilize and upgrade resources for securing the defence of that region. The visit to Russia by Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Tansu Ciller in mid-December 1996 was accompanied with a list of complaints brought to Moscow which included matters such as the sale of Russian weapons to the government of Cyprus and the activities of Kurdish organization on Russian territory. The first point was a reference to Russian plans to sell Cyprus several S-300 surface-to-air missile systems for around $660 million. Russia had also


been supplying the small Mediterranean island T-80U tanks in 1996. In return, the Russian government delivered its own misgivings, which included the restrictions that Ankara had imposed on the passage of tanks through the Bosporus and the activities of numerous organizations that had been providing support to the Chechen separatist.¹³⁰

On 15 December 1997 Prime Minister Chernomyrdin visited Turkey in an effort to resolve some of the political differences between the two countries. In reference to Russian misgivings about Turkish involvement in the Caucasus and the latter country’s concern about Moscow’s proposed sale of arms to Cyprus, Mesut Yılmaz, Chernomyrdin’s counterpart, said that it had been ‘agreed to refrain from acts that would pose threat to each other’s security or territorial integrity’.¹³¹ The two sides also highlighted the need to resolve differences over other issues, including sea–traffic through the Straits and the routing of gas and oil pipelines through the region. However, these issues continued to be separated from bilateral economic relations as a $20 billion gas deal was signed between the two countries and further measures were proposed to facilitate trade between the two countries. Reports suggested that the volume of trade between the two countries at the beginning of 1998 had reached $12 billion a year.¹³²

Russian officials happily pointed towards the ever-growing trade links with Turkey but there was a more forthright tendency to discuss the political differences by 1998. A senior diplomat in the Foreign Ministry, discussing Ankara’s ambitions and potential threat to Russia’s regional domination, rather sarcastically commented that ‘Turkey exaggerated its own capabilities and pictured itself without an objective

The Bosporus is shorter, narrower, and shallower than the Dardanelles—about 17 miles/28 km long, 2,500 ft./762 m at its narrowest, and 100 ft./30 m at its minimum mid-stream depth. Since the Sea of Marmara is as deep as, and much wider than, the two straits, any ship afloat can make the passage between the Aegean and the Black Sea. Traffic through the straits has increased enormously since World War I—international traffic by some ten times. Shipping passing the straits in the late 1990s exceeded 51,000 vessels annually—140 per day, compared with 38 for the Suez Canal. Half of larger ships were tankers and nearly half of all vessels flew the new flags of Russia and other successor states of the FSU, especially Ukraine and Georgia. (Colbert C. Held, Middle East Patterns: Places, Peoples, and Politics, 3rd edition (Boulder and Oxford: Westview Press, 2000) p.234).


¹³² Selcan Hacaoglu, N.131.
In other words, Turkey's leaders did not quite have their feet on the ground when considering their country's role in the regional context. Primakov continued the Soviet policy of seeking to co-operate with Ankara, despite the various bilateral issues which left them in disagreement. Although many of these differences were not resolved by early 1999, the growing economic dependency of the two countries on each other was a positive counterweight to the political problems.

4.1.3 Igor Ivanov's period (1998-1999)

As Russia's international position weakened, its relations with Turkey, which had been schizophrenic in 1998, appeared to stabilize. At that time, Russia was simultaneously seeking efforts, in the face of bitter Turkish opposition, to sell and deploy the sophisticated SAM-300 anti-missile system in the Greek section of Cyprus, and endeavoring to proceed with the multibillion dollar sale of natural gas to Turkey through the Blue Stream pipeline that was to be built along the bottom of the Black Sea.

In 1999, as a result of the Russian financial crisis in 1998, Moscow chose cooperation over confrontation with Turkey even as Russian trade with Turkey dropped precipitously. On the question of deploying the SAM-300, Greece, under heavy U.S. pressure, chose to deploy the missiles in Crete, rather than in the Greek area of Cyprus to which Greece was allied in an air-defense agreement. Moscow, through statements by Yeltsin and Primakov, had gone out on a limb in advocating the deployment of missiles on Cyprus, together with Russian technical and air defense personnel, as a Cold War-type geopolitical move against the United States in the Mediterranean. However, Moscow did not have the political clout or perhaps the desire to reverse the Greek decision. It acquiesced in the deployment of the missiles on Crete. While the Crete deployment did not please Turkey, nonetheless it was far

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133 Talal Nizameddin, N.3, p.233.
134 Ibid.
135 Robert O. Freedman, N.43. p.214
136 Crete is a Greek island in the eastern Mediterranean Sea.
less objectionable to Ankara than a deployment on the volatile island of Cyprus would have been.\footnote{Robert O. Freedman, N.43, p.215.}

Moscow was to suffer another blow in 1999 in what appeared to be its efforts to create a geopolitical bloc on its southern border that would have been pitted against Turkey. One contemporary observer pointed out that during the period Primakov was Foreign Minister, it appeared as if Russia was seeking to put together an alignment, if not an alliance, of itself, Armenia, Syria, and Greece—all of whom were, to a greater or lesser degree, in conflict with Turkey and Iran—that would be opposed not only to Turkey but also to its ally Israel in what was emerging as a de facto alignment of the U.S., Turkey, Israel, Azerbaijan, and Georgia. On July 11, 1999, Armenian Foreign Minister Vartan Oskandarian stated that Armenia had no plans to join a three-way defense alliance with Greece and Iran, and Armenia also began serious negotiations with Azerbaijan to settle the Nagorno-Karabach problem, an effort that the assassination of the Armenian Prime Minister Vazgen Sarkisian in late October 1999 slowed.\footnote{Sergey Markedonov and Natalya Ulchenko, N.112.}

The available evidence suggests that Russia suffered another blow to its hopes for an alignment when Greece and Turkey began to improve relations. After being embarrassed by its involvement in protecting Kurdish terrorist leader Abdullah Ocalan, Greece moved to improve ties with Turkey and took the opportunity to help Turkey in the aftermath of the severe earthquake that hit Turkey in August 1999. When an earthquake hit Greece three weeks later, a Turkish rescue team reciprocated the Greek gesture by coming to Greece's aid. As relations warmed, Greece in early September made a major step toward improving relations with Turkey by removing its objection to Turkey's entry into the European Union.\footnote{European Union (EU) is the official term for the European Community (formerly the European Economic Community) and associate treaty organizations. The EU has 28 member states and is negotiating with other 6 states that have applied for membership, including Albania, Iceland, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, and Turkey. For a survey of Turkey's attempt to join the EU see Harun Arikman, \textit{Turkey and the EU: An Awkward Candidate for EU Membership?}, second edition (Hampshire, England: Ashgate, 2006); Edel Hughes, \textit{Turkey's Accession to the European Union: The Politics of Exclusion?} (Oxon: Routledge, 2011); Eric Faucompret and Jozef Konings, \textit{Turkish Accession to the EU: Satisfying the Copenhagen Criteria} (Oxon: Routledge, 2008).} Coupled with some movement by the Turks to improve the treatment of their Kurdish minority, the Greek
gesture helped lead to an EU invitation to Turkey to apply for membership. Meanwhile, Greek-Turkish relations continued to improve rapidly and, during a visit by Greek Foreign Minister George Papandreou (who had replaced the anti-Turkish Theodoros Pangolos) to Turkey, the two states signed a series of agreements including cooperation in fighting organized crime, preventing illegal immigration, promoting tourism, protecting the Aegean environment, and protecting investments. The two countries also agreed to begin direct talks on reducing military tension in the Aegean, and Turkish Foreign Minister Ismail Cem even raised the possibility of joint maneuvers in the Aegean. The two countries, under U.S. prodding, also began discussions on the thorny problem of Cyprus, and, as the rapprochement continued, observers began to recall the period of warm détente in the 1930s between Ataturk and Venizelos.\textsuperscript{140}

Meanwhile, another problem for Soviet alignment came in early October, when the Greek Deputy Foreign Minister, Yanos Kranidiotis, went to Israel to discuss defense cooperation. The Greek move was a major blow to the once hoped-for pro-Russian alignment of Armenia, Syria, Greece and Iran.

As its diplomatic position in the West Asia weakened and its economy further deteriorated, Russia stepped up its efforts to improve economic ties with Turkey. The keystone of this attempt was the “Blue Stream” project which Russia had tried to avert a competing natural gas pipeline agreement from Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan to Turkey. In early February 1999, the Italian oil firm ENI signed a memorandum of understanding with Gazprom to proceed with the construction of the 400 km pipeline, along with a compressor station near Dzhubga on Russia’s Black Sea coast. Later in the month, the project got support from the Dutch banking company Abn-Amro Holding. With a contract given to an Italian firm with extensive experience in building deep-sea natural gas pipelines, the project seemed to be nearing takeoff.\textsuperscript{141}

\textsuperscript{140} Robert O. Freedman, N.43, p.216.

\textsuperscript{141} Ibid,.
But at this point the rapid changes in the post of Russian Prime Minister began to affect the implementation of the project. During the spring of 1999 Primakov was reportedly ready to sign a resolution for the government support of the Blue Stream project. But before he could do so, Yeltsin ousted him. A second problem arose when the new Fuel and Energy Minister Viktor Kalyuzhny objected to the plan. Although Yeltsin overruled Kalyuzhny and ordered Russia’s new Prime Minister Sergei Stepashin to move the project ahead, Yeltsin then fired Stepashin himself, and it was not until late August that Russia’s third Prime Minister in 1999, Vladimir Putin, began to push the project, leading to a parliamentary hearing on September 16, 1999.  

It may be understood therefore that if the Russian government could have succeeded in pushing the Blue Stream project forward, Russia would have reinforced Turkey’s position as its main West Asian trading partner. Turkish Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit went to Moscow in early November 1999 to discuss implementation of the project, as well as other matters such as increasing trade between Turkey and Russia and getting Russia to curtail its support for the PKK, although no agreement

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144 Leyla Boulton, ‘Ecevit Russian visit to focus on gas line’, Financial Times, November 4,
was signed during his visit, possibly due to a conflict in the Turkish government over Blue Stream. Nonetheless, Russia continued to face serious competition for the Turkish gas market from Turkmenistan and potentially Azerbaijan. Should this project be completed, and it received a strong endorsement at the OSCE meeting in Istanbul in mid-November 1999—it would reinforce Turkey’s relations with Azerbaijan and Georgia and further weaken the Russian position in the Southern Caucasus.

Nonetheless, Russia continued to pursue the Blue Stream project while, at the same time, seeking to preempt the Turkmen alternative as Gazprom contracted for a large amount of Turkmen gas. In early December 1999 the Russian Parliament approved $1.5 billion in tax breaks for the construction of Blue Stream, although financing remained a problem. Gazprom and ENI signed a contract for the construction of the underwater section of the pipeline. These events led Turkish Minister of Energy, Cumhur Ersunmer, to note that Russia had pulled ahead in the race to supply natural gas to Turkey. Yet, as Blue Stream moved ahead, Russia and Turkey still had their problems. The Turks were critical of Russian policy in Chechnya, although the Turkish leadership maintained a relatively low profile on the issue.

Finally, Turkey was uneasy about the Russian military build-up in the North Caucasus as a result of the Chechen war, although it had to take satisfaction over the agreement reached with Moscow at the OSCE meeting in Istanbul under which Russia agreed to pull all of its 2,600 troops out of Moldova by 2002 and to dismantle two of its four

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The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) is the world’s largest security-oriented intergovernmental organization. Its mandate includes issues such as arms control and the promotion of human rights, freedom of the press and fair elections. Currently, there 57 participating states and 11 partners for co-operation.

147 Gazprom is the world’s largest extractor of natural gas and one of the world’s largest companies. The Russian government currently holds a majority stake.
ENI is an Italian multinational oil and gas company headquartered in Rome.

bases in Georgia by 2001. The agreement also stipulated that a state cannot deploy forces in another state without the host country's consent, a provision aimed at protecting such countries as Azerbaijan. Still, Russia had more offensive military equipment on its southern flank than the CFE permitted, so Turkey as well as the U.S. stated they would not present the revised CFE pact to their legislatures for ratification until Moscow came into compliance with the treaty.

In sum, while considerably improved over in 1998, Russian-Turkish relations were not without their problems in 1999. Nonetheless, successful completion of the Blue Stream project in 2005 has helped improve the Turkish-Russian relationship.

4.2 Russia and Iran

Russia found a similarly mixed relationship with Iran. In the past Iran has had a long-standing policy of “negative equilibrium” with regard to foreign policy, which was based on rivalling Russo-British interests in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This took on a revised from in the Khomeini era with the slogan “neither East nor West” characterizing the country’s foreign policy. In the post-Soviet era Iran was internationally isolated while Russia was left greatly weakened. Both shared similar worries about instability in Central Asia and the Caucasus. Although many experts predicted in 1991 that there would be inevitable conflict between the two countries because of rivalry over the Central Asian republics, the opposite actually seemed to take place, with co-operation being the dominant characteristic.

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150 The original Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) was negotiated and concluded during the last years of the Cold War and established comprehensive limits on key categories of conventional military equipment in Europe (from the Atlantic to the Urals) and mandated the destruction of excess weaponry. The treaty proposed equal limits for the two "groups of states-parties", the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the Warsaw Pact.


4.2.1 Andrey Kozyrev’s period (1992-1996)

Well before the December 1993 elections, Russia’s policies in the former soviet republics had already become more assertive. In the early years following the demise of the Soviet Union, ‘Russian policy makers expressed great skepticism about Tehran’s intentions in these predominantly Muslim areas’ of Central Asia and the Caucasus.\textsuperscript{154} Moscow’s new democratic leadership expected Turkey to be the more favored partner in promoting moderation in the region. But the pragmatic influence of President Rafsanjani enabled a rapid rapprochement between Iran and Russia in the early 1990s, to the extent that the United States began to show growing agitation at this development. Both Iran and Russia refrained from criticizing the other on a variety of issues ranging from the war in Bosnia to events in the Gulf. For example, when Russia announced that it planned to sell a number of advanced weapons to Kuwait, Iranian news reports were uncharacteristically neutral, pointing out that the $800 million deal was vital for the Russian economy.\textsuperscript{155}

The most controversial development in Russian-Iranian relations was the announcement that Russia would complete the Bushehr nuclear plant in southern Iran by 1999.\textsuperscript{156} Reza Amrollahi, head of the Iranian Nuclear Energy organization, pointed out that Germany, which carried out 85 per cent of construction, had refused to complete the deal following pressure from the United States. The available evidence suggested that The Iranians were angered by the German withdrawal and the claims made by Washington that the plant was a cover for an Iranian military nuclear project. Tehran argued that the allegations were intended to divert attention from Israeli refusals to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) which was up for renewal at the time. But this did not lessen genuine concern by the United States, and Iran’s neighbors, about Tehran’s motives and the development of Russo-Iranian ties.\textsuperscript{157}


\textsuperscript{155} Talal Nizameddin, N.3, p.234.


\textsuperscript{157} Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) is an international treaty that created a framework for controlling the spread of nuclear materials and expertise, including the International Atomic Energy Agency.
Yeltsin attempted to answer US worries during his visit in late September 1994 when he said that 'this co-operation is not extensive, nor does it threaten regional stability'.158 But the following month Chernishchev met with an Iranian foreign Ministry delegation to 'examine all aspects of bilateral relations', with Kozyrev characterizing existing ties as good and stable at the end of the two-day meeting.159 Deputy Foreign Minister Mahmoud Va’zzi, who led the Iranian delegation, announced that Iran and Russia had signed thirteen documents relating to bilateral co-operation encompassing commercial, scientific, technical and cultural ties.

On 8 January 1995 the two countries officially signed the $1 billion contract to complete a reactor at Bushehr, the construction of which had been halted in 1979.160 Under extreme criticism from the United States and other countries in the West Asia concerned about Iran’s nuclear potential, Tehran found it necessary to make a defence of the project. The Iranian government argued that while the West had hundreds of similar plants, it had 'repeatedly tried to deny Iran the right to have its own power plant'. The statement added that 'it was natural that Iran would turn to Russia to finish the construction of the power plant in Bushehr'.161 Tehran announced that 500 Russian engineers and inspectors would be working on the site, though 'the Russians say they will send 3,000' and about 150 of them began arriving in the early months of 1995.162

Even though the United States strongly objected, claiming that the reactor would help Iran to build a nuclear weapon, the Russian ministry said that the project complied with the NPT and would be monitored by the International Atomic Energy

(IAEA), a UN agency based in Vienna that is charged with inspecting the nuclear power industry in NPT members to prevent secret military diversions of nuclear materials. Opened for signature in 1968, the Treaty entered into force in 1970. Currently, a total of 191 states have joined the Treaty.


159 Talal Nizameddin, N.3, p.235.


161 BBC SWB, ME/2197, January 10, 1995, MED/1.

agency. However, in this atmosphere of criticism, further exchange in the nuclear field between Russia and Iran was announced on 18 February 1995. But there was added concern that the internal instability in Russia and the organized crime factor would allow the possibility of the smuggling of equipment and material which could enable countries such as Iran to develop their own nuclear programs. Israeli television reported that Turkish security forces in Istanbul arrested several Iranians smuggling plutonium and osmium. It was reported at that time that the arrested men had been under surveillance and that they had been in regular contact with the Iranian deputy defence minister. On 20 February 1995 Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres said that ‘according to information he received in Paris, Iran will be able to produce its first nuclear bomb within three years’. The report also added, without giving any sources, that ‘a senior Moscow official claimed that the Russian decision to supply four nuclear reactors to Iran will help the Iranians manufacture a nuclear bomb within a few years’. However, Russian Minister of Atomic Energy Viktor Mikhailov stressed that ‘the nuclear reactors which are to be delivered to Iran are not capable of producing plutonium used in nuclear weapons’.

The construction of the nuclear reactor represented only one side of the multifaceted nature of Iranian-Russian relations. Bilateral trade, ranging from raw energy to foodstuffs, led Moscow to be highly optimistic about the future to the extent that it was prepared to face such international pressure at a time when Russia needed Western support as an emerging democracy. In 1995 President Bill Clinton had made it clear that he wished to limit the influence of Iran by imposing a trade ban and calling on other countries to do so. Washington’s view of Iran was that it was a destabilizing factor in the Gulf and the rest of the West Asia. For example, its support for Hezbollah in Lebanon had greatly undermined the peace negotiations on the Syrian/Lebanese-Israeli tracks. Its support for militant groups in countries ranging from Algeria to Afghanistan was a contributory factor to war and bloodshed in those regions. Hence Russia’s nuclear and other economic deals with Iran were perceived

165 Ibid.,
by Washington as enabling Tehran to escape international efforts to squeeze the Islamic regime into refraining from its adventures outside its own borders.  

Moscow reacted angrily to Washington’s position by claiming first, that the United States had exploited the lucrative Arab Gulf markets without taking into account the poor human right record and the lack of democracy in those countries. It was reported at that time that Russia believed that as the United States had seen it justifiable to overlook such matters for the sake of profit with regard to Saudi Arabia it had little right to criticize Russo-Iranian economic co-operation. Russians officials such as Deputy Foreign Minister Gregorii Mamedov, during visit to Tehran on 26 February 1995, insisted that Russia would continue to seek ties with Iran. He reflected the growing view among Russians in general that ‘Russia is not a colony. It is an independent state and its decisions will be on the basis of its national interests.’ However, Russia’s press agency Itar-Tass reported a different angle to the meeting, saying that there were differences between the two sides regarding the Non-Proliferation Treaty. The report commented that Iran wanted further participation in the said treaty only for a limited period and on several conditions while Russia favored unlimited and unconditional prolongation of this international document. From this statement cynics claimed that Moscow was seeking to deflect international criticisms. However, it was observed at the time that ‘in the Soviet era Moscow was meticulous in preventing the spread of nuclear weapon; indeed, that was a major factor in the split with China’. Russia’s leaders were without doubt unlikely to stray from this path, because it was not in the national interest to have small unpredictable regimes controlling nuclear missiles on its own doorstep.  

There were other problems affecting Russian-Iranian relations, in both the economic and political spheres. Despite Russia’s participation in Iran’s large-scale economic projects, the Tehran government had been lax in paying Russian companies for the services provided. In the past, the Soviet government sometimes burned a blind eye for the sake of securing political and diplomatic gains but in the post-Soviet era, when capitalist values became dominant, it was more difficult to neglect the hard

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166 Talal Nizameddin, N.3, p.237.

167 BBC SWB, ME/2239, February 28, 1995, MED/1.

168 Talal Nizameddin, N.3, p.238.
cash factor. Russia continued to seek increased trade with Iran, but a worsening economy limited Tehran’s attractiveness as a customer. Minister for Foreign Economic Relation Oleg Davydov, visiting Iran late in 1995, said that the main difficulties in Russian-Iranian trade were not political, but were related to problems of payments that followed the 1992 decision to settle accounts only in freely convertible currency. Total trade volume had dropped 29 percent in 1994, to $520 million, and Iran’s overdue debt to Russia had climbed to $582 million (two-thirds of which was owed to the state arms trading agency). Nevertheless, Davydov predicted later in the year that the total volume of Russian exports to Iran could reach $5 billion in another decade.

4.2.2 Yevgeny Primakov’s period (1996-1998)

In his first year in office, Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov continued the Russian effort to strengthen ties with Iran. Yet at times, it did appear as if Russian diplomatic efforts were deliberately attempting to understate the development of bilateral ties, in order to prevent close attention from the United States in particular and other West Asian states in general. During this visit to Iran in December 1996, Primakov accused media of misinterpreting ties with Iran. Yet Primakov delivered a message from Yeltsin to Rafsanjani which stated ‘the urgency of establishing greater co-operation between Russia and Iran to end instability in the region’.

Primakov’s deputy, Posuvaliuk, told journalists in a news conference on 25 December 1996 that there was no need for the West or anyone to worry about the improving ties with Iran. It was still somewhat indicative of Moscow’s sensitivity

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169 Talal Nizameddin, N.3, p.238.


173 Talal Nizameddin, N.3, p.238.

regarding the issue that there was a need to continually justify the relationship. Posuvaliuk insisted that ‘the US administration must understand that we have a sovereign right to build our relation with Iran so as to promote our interests’. In the same breath he added that no country was more interested in peace and stability in the region than Russia. Posuvakiuk noted, with reason, that as a neighbor of Iran, Russia had a far greater interest than the United States in keeping Iran nuclear reaffirmed that the Bushehr nuclear project was purely for peaceful purpose. Iran and Russia had signed a Memorandum of Understanding which defined export control and according to the deputy foreign minister this highlighted the positive nature of Russian foreign policy in the world community. He argued that the Memorandum was ‘an important achievement in our efforts to draw Iran into the international non-proliferation regime’ since it would ‘help in having objects and technologies covered by export control to be used only for their intended purposes’.

Primakov criticized both the United States and Israel for endeavoring to wreck the growing relations between Russia and Iran by exaggerating the threat they posed to international security. However, Primakov repeated that stable and positive Russian-Iranian relations would actually enhance Israel’s security by keeping Iran within the fold of the international community.

In an issue of trade relation, Russia strongly encouraged the development of trade relations with Iran. In March 1996 Velayati went to Moscow at the end of an extensive trip through CIS territories. There was much discussion about developing and linking the infrastructures of Iran, Russia, Central Asia and Caucasus in order to create a large new economic zone. Russian-Iranian relation was described as a relationship of good neighbors and joint interests.

However, Primakov’s visit to Iran at the end of 1996 underlined the eagerness to improve relations as Russia began to develop a foreign policy centered around geo-strategic interests which placed neighboring areas as top priority. It was reported at that time that Primakov also sought to utilize the contacts he had developed with the leadership in Tehran to put forward Russian interests in the Gulf region. The Russian

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175 ‘Russia’s Links with Iran not Directed Against USA, Deputy Foreign Minister Says’, Interfax, December 25, 1996.

176 Talal Nizameddin, N.3, p.239.
foreign minister said that the two countries had shared interest in preventing an increased military presence in the Persian Gulf which effectively meant that the two countries were opposed to US policy in the oil-rich region. Primakov’s visit, and his subsequent comments, were clearly incompatible with Washington’s wish to isolate Iran in the same way that Iraq was at that time. He insisted that Iran should be a full-fledged participant in the international community, and described bilateral relations as developing along an ascending curve, in part because of Iran’s assistance in arranging a cease fire in Tajikistan. For his part, Primakov’s Iranian counterpart told a Russian journalist that Russian-Iranian relations were the best they had been in two centuries, causing the journalist to conclude that Moscow’s way of working with Iran ‘trying to bring its behavior into conformity with generally recognized international norms—can be more effective than the ultimatum-based methods of the Americans.’ Signs of cooperation on regional problems continued into 1997, as the two countries collaborated on their policies toward the Taliban in Afghanistan, and as Russia sought Iran’s help in pressuring Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan to cooperate with Moscow in the exploitation of the considerable petroleum reserves in the Caspian Sea. In July 1998, in an agreement with Kazakhstan, Moscow abandoned its common front with Iran and adopted a different standard for division of Caspian oil resources. Whether the Russian-Iranian relationship could remain relatively trouble-free was in question, not only because of their ensuing conflict over the Caspian, but also given Iran’s expressed interest in acquiring additional arms that would likely upset the regional balance in the Persian Gulf and greatly alarm the United States.

Moreover, reports appeared in the Western press in September 1997—‘taken very seriously’ by the U.S. government—that Russia was supplying missile technology to Iran. Primakov hastily denied the reports, and Yeltsin added a blanket pledge that there would be no deliveries to Iran of missiles or missile technology. Pressed again

177 Talal Nizameddin, N.3, p.240.


on the subject the following month by Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu, the Russian foreign minister reportedly cited his prior intelligence background as the basis for assuring the Israelis that Iran would not have nuclear weapons or the means to deliver them any time within the next decade. As for the prospect of unauthorized, "leakages", Primakov added that he personally had promoted the adoption of measures to prevent specialists with access to missile and nuclear secrets from having contacts with Iran.\textsuperscript{181} In an interview given to a Russian newspaper at the end of 1997, Primakov once more criticized US allegations that Moscow was supporting Iran's rocket technology programme. He pointed out that only a few weeks earlier Russian security service officials had caught and expelled Iranian agents attempting to smuggle parts necessary for such military purposes. Primakov asked the interviewer: "Why should we arm a neighboring country with rocket technology with a larger radius".\textsuperscript{182} As the subject continued to be pressed by the U.S. government in 1998, Primakov acknowledged that some "brain drain" had occurred, but that it was simply not in Russia's interests to assist its neighbor in acquiring long-range missiles. Despite the Russian government's declared unwillingness to help, Iran succeeded in July 1998 in flight testing a Shabab-3 missile with a range of 1,200-1,500 kilometers—reportedly assisted by China, Pakistan, and North Korea.\textsuperscript{183} This development raised new alarms in Washington about possible dual-use technology in the Bushehr project, as well as about illegal transfers of bomb or missile technology from Russia. The United States accused seven Russian enterprises of selling weapons technology to Iran, Libya, and North Korea, and in January 1999 it imposed economic sanction on three Russian scientific laboratories for alleged assistance to Iran. Although Russian authorities at first denied that such transfers had taken place, nuclear industry minister


\textsuperscript{182} Aleksei Pushkov, 'Yevgeny Primakov: I feel the thrust of the Prisident', Nezavisimaja gazeta, no. 245, December 30, 1997, p.5.


The Shahab-3 is a medium-range ballistic missile (MRBM) developed by Iran and based on the Nodong-1. The Shahab-3 has a range of 1,280 kilometres (800 mi); a MRBM variant can now reach 1,930 kilometres (1,200 mi).[4] It was tested from 1998 to 2003 and added to the military arsenal on July 7, 2003, with an official unveiling by Khamenei on July 20.
Evgenii Adamov announced in March 1999 that Washington had agreed to lift the sanctions in return for a pledge that the labs’ cooperation with Iran would cease.184

4.2.3 Igor Ivanov’s period (1998-1999)

With the collapse of the Russian economy in August 1998, Russia’s government was hard put to resist U.S. pressure. Indeed, Russia pledged it would do its utmost to avert the transmission of missile technology to Iran. However, Moscow remained concerned that the aborted rapprochement between Iran and the United States might be restarted, and Russia might see its position in Iran deteriorate, particularly if a U.S.-Iranian reconciliation would lead to American consent in the construction of oil and gas transit pipelines through Iran (rather than through Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey, as the United States, in supporting the Baku-Ceyhan pipeline, had been advocating).185 In the Russians point of view, Iran’s economy was in difficult straits, the economic temptation inherent in a rapprochement with the United States was obviously evident to Moscow.186

Following the economic crisis in August 1998, a further difficulty to the U.S.-Russian relationship came with the elevation of Primakov to the position of Russian Prime Minister in September 1998, replacing the pro-Western Prime Minister Sergei Kirienko. Primakov and the communist forces in the Duma who backed him needed a tougher line toward the United States; their desire became more concerned with the U.S. bombing of Iraq in December 1998 and its bombing of Serbia in the spring of 1999. At the same time Yevgeny Adamov, head of Russia’s Atomic Energy Ministry, continued to press for the sale of additional nuclear reactors to Iran, which the U.S. strongly had objected. The end result was that Yeltsin in the 1998–1999 period followed what might be termed a “minimax” policy toward Iran, trying to maintain the maximum amount of Russian influence in Iran while at the same time seeking to minimize the damage to U.S.-Russian relations that the Russian-Iranian relationship caused. In the meantime, the Kosovo crisis became more complication to Russian-Iranian relations, where Iran evidently supported the Albanian Kosovars and Russia


185 The Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline is a 1,768 kilometers long crude oil pipeline from the Azeri-Guneshli oil field in the Caspian Sea to the Mediterranean Sea.

the Serbs. Relations deteriorated even more with Russia’s decision to invade Chechnya in August 1999, which led to the killing of numerous Chechens, something which Iran, as head of the Islamic Conference, inevitably dissented.187

In conclusion of Russian-Iranian relations during Boris Yeltsin’s presidency, the necessity for Moscow and Tehran to co-operate in the Caucasus and Central Asia opened up more complex and multi-dimensional Russian-Iranian relations. Iran’s constructive role in Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict and the civil war in Tajikistan were well received in Moscow and rather than ‘backing the emerging Taliban movement in neighboring Afghanistan, Tehran opposed it, mirroring Russian concerns’.188 Russia and Iran also agreed on preventing a Western foothold in the Caspian Sea basin, with the two countries sharing a substantial shoreline with other neighbors in Caucasus and Central Asia. As disputes among the Caspian Sea littoral states over access and shipping lights remained unresolved, the possibility that smaller states such as Azerbaijan would encourage Western involvement on their behalf continued to concern Moscow as well as Tehran. The political class and media in Russia generally praised Iran’s role on various issues considered vital for Russia generally praised Iran’s role on various issues considered vital for Russian national security leading the Duma to urge Yeltsin in 1998 to pursue a more vigorous policy of partnership with Iran. It may be understood therefore that Moscow’s shift from a pro-Western to a Eurasian mindset at that time helped raise Iran’s profile among policy makers and in light of the anti-Sunni Wahhabi atmosphere in Russia when Putin became acting president it became inevitable that Russia-Iranian cooperation would increase further.189

5. Russian Policy towards Iraq, the Gulf Cooperation Council and the rest of West Asia

As in the case of Israel, the issue of Russian-Iraqi relations was not only an issue of Russian foreign policy, it was also an issue of Russian domestic politics with


189 Talal Nizameddin, N.1, p.258.
hard-line critics of Yeltsin, led by Vladimir Zhirinovskii, demanding that not only should Russia stop supporting US policy on Iraq, but that Yeltsin should unilaterally break the embargo against Iraq and restore the Russian-Iraqi alliance to what it had been in Soviet times.\textsuperscript{190} A second group of advocates of Iraq argued that for economic reasons Russia should lift the embargo, because in this way it could receive the $5-7 billion in debt owed to Russia by Iraq – money badly needed by the hard-pressed Russian economy. On the other side of the issue were those who asserted that not only would a unilateral lifting of the embargo seriously damage US-Russian relations (and jeopardize billions of dollars of aid from NATO states), but it would also alienate the oil-rich states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) which Moscow, since the days of Gorbachev, had sought to cultivate both as sources of economic aid and as markets for Russian weapons.\textsuperscript{191} In addition, they argued, by aiding the GCC states and avoiding any rapprochement with Iraq, Moscow could offer an alternative to the GCC states who otherwise would be totally dependent on the protection of the US and other NATO states.\textsuperscript{192}

\textbf{5.1 Russia and Iraq}

Iraq is an inheritor of an old river valley civilization, and the power center located on its territory has often competed with Egypt for influence in the fragmented Mashreq.\textsuperscript{193} Historically, its geopolitical position was crucial to the region, but the present Iraqi state is a new one. The British established it after World War I by combining the territories of the three former Ottoman provinces (\textit{vilayets}) of Baghdad, Basra, and Mosul. The new state contained a population of considerable ethnic and religious diversity, which has caused existential uncertainty and insecurity over its territorial integrity. These factors have had a great impact on Iraq’s international relations, including its relations with Russia. Moscow’s relations with

\textsuperscript{190} Vladimir Zhirinovskii was the leader of the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR).

\textsuperscript{191} \textbf{Gulf Cooperation Council}, short form of Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf, formed in 1981 and including Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the UAE, and Oman. For a penetrating study of Soviet-GCC relations by a leading scholar, see Aryeh Yadid, \textit{The Soviet Union and the Arabian Peninsula} (Oxon: Routledge, 2011).

\textsuperscript{192} Roger E. Kanet and Alexander V. Kozhemiakin, eds., N.15, p.147.

\textsuperscript{193} The Mashreq is the region of Arab countries to the east of Egypt. This term composes the countries of Egypt, Lebanon, Palestine, Jordan, and Syria.
Iraq have had a long and complex history. These relations have been important for historical and geostrategic reasons, especially in the period from 1958 to 1990, and were part and parcel of the USSR's relations with Third World countries' national liberation movements, and in particular, Arab nationalism. Several unique features characterized Soviet-Iraqi relations, setting them apart from Soviet ties with other Afro-Asian nations and even some other Arab West Asian states.¹⁹⁴

It can be observed that Russian foreign policy towards Iraq, as with the rest of the West Asia, can be divided into the pre-1996 and post-1996 eras under Yeltsin before the evolution in the Putin presidency. However, categorizing Russian foreign policy into three distinct phases neglects the almost seamless transition from one phase to another. Thus while Kozyrev was foreign minister Russia began adopting a more independent line vis-à-vis the West from 1993 in light of the stiff opposition Yeltsin faced from conservative political opponents. The appointment of Yevgeny Primakov as foreign minister in 1996 was an outcome of that progression and he in turn promoted and consolidated the centre ground of the political spectrum in foreign policy thinking that allowed continuity into the Putin era. Primakov was instrumental in establishing the basis of pragmatic non-ideological policy that was detached from the West.

In 2000, Putin inherited this approach to establish the framework of his foreign policy but with modification to fit the characteristics of his era by changing the emphasis from a fixation with classic geo-strategic concerns to include a special focus on Russia’s economic interests. It can be observed that Primakov’s appointment as chairman of the Russian Federation’s Chamber of Commerce and Industry on 14 December 2001 appeared to be a move to marginalize him after the senior positions he previously held. However, the context of Primakov’s influence on Russian foreign policy and his West Asian expertise, in tandem with Putin’s wish to raise the economic dimension in the country’s international relations, this was a shrewd move to maximize Russia’s international address by stating that foreign policy was guided

¹⁹⁴ Andrej Kreutz, N.47, p.79.
by pragmatism alone and the measure of its success was based on ‘the improvement of the living standards of ordinary Russian citizens’. 195

5.1.1 Andrey Kozyrev’s period (1992-1996)

Indicating the importance of bilateral relations in the past, neither side gave up on the possibility of restoring the ties that had existed before 1992. Iraq, isolated and facing stiff international sanctions, needed all the allies it could get.196 Russia, on the other hand, was facing a more complicated situation. In 1992 President Yeltsin continued the policy of co-operation with the West, which remained a top priority under his leadership. But as Moscow gradually became more assertive in pursuing its national interest, the Iraqi factor took on a more prominent profile.197

On 9 November 1992 a Russian parliamentary delegation headed by Sergei Baburin, a leader of the Communist and Nationalist Unity Bloc, visited Baghdad. They were received by the Iraqi Speaker of parliament Sa’adi Mahdi Saleh, who announced that Baghdad wished to turn over a new leaf in its relations with Russia. Baburin was quoted by the Iraqi News Agency as saying that the ‘continuation of international norms, charters and human rights’, and attacked ‘American piracy represented by seizing part of the Iraqi people’s assets in foreign banks’.198 Such visits appeared to lend weight to claims by the Ba’ath regime that it had an influence on members of Moscow’s political elite. The Russian media was unrelenting about the financial losses as a consequence of the embargo against Iraq, and political opponents of Boris Yeltsin blamed this on the government’s kow-toeing to the West at the expense of national interests. Between 1992 to 1994 there was a growing wave of voices calling on the government not to ignore the potential gains to be made from enhancing relations with Iraq. An article in Izvestija in August 1994 mentioned that Baghdad was ‘proposing to repay its debt to Russia—about $7 billion—immediately after the sanctions are lifted or eased’, and that payment would be made in oil.199

195 Talal Nizameddin, N.1, p.129.


There was also the attractive possibility of favorable contracts and arms sales which would benefit the Russian economy over its competitors.

In April 1993, as Yeltsin’s domestic opponents were increasing their pressure on him, parliament speaker Ruslan Khasbulatov sent an emissary to Iraq to explore the possibility of restoring closer relations. The defeat of the parliamentary opposition in October 1993 momentarily eased the domestic criticism of Russia’s compliance with the sanctions imposed on Iraq and Serbia, but criticism resumed after the December elections, with Vladimir Zhirinovskii in the forefront. Under the cloak of secrecy, Iraq’s deputy prime minister Tariq Aziz visited Russia in July 1994 to enlist Moscow’s help in lifting UN sanctions, holding forth the prospect of debt repayment and contracts for Russian firms.\(^\text{200}\) Russia lobbied in the Security Council for a gradual lifting of sanctions as a reward for positive steps that Iraq might take, while it urged the Iraqi government to announce recognition of Kuwait’s independence and borders.\(^\text{201}\)

However, in October 1994, in the midst of Russia’s campaign to champion Iraqi good behavior, Saddam Hussein rekindled the crisis by sending his troops to the Kuwaiti border. As if to heighten Russia’s embarrassment and force it into a position counter to that of the West, he simultaneously sent his oil minister to Moscow to discuss future cooperation. Yeltsin sought to salvage the situation by sending Kozyrev to Baghdad in search of a political settlement. His meetings produced a communiqué saying that Iraq was ready to recognize Kuwait’s sovereignty and border, in return for which Russia would support a six-month period of monitoring Iraq’s compliance with UN requirements, followed by an unconditional end to the sanctions. This initiative was speedily and angrily rejected by the Western powers, who mustered their forces for a military response to Saddam Hussein. Desperately seeking to keep his initiative alive, Kozyrev offered assurances that Saddam had agreed unconditionally to recognize Kuwait’s borders, but no high-ranking Iraqi official would confirm his statement, and no other states seemed ready to take Saddam Hussein at his word. Ultimately, once Iraqi forces had been turned back under threat of military reprisal, Kozyrev returned to Baghdad to praise Saddam’s wisdom in recognizing Kuwait, and


to appeal personally to the Iraqi parliament to ratify the action. Although much of the Russian press praised the initiative as an admirable exercise of independent diplomacy, Vladimir Lukin, the chair of the Duma’s Foreign Affairs Committee and former Russian ambassador to the United States, wrote a withering critique of Kozyrev’s efforts as follows:

“It is our passion for mere show, the Potemkin village syndrome, that is our undoing. We managed to spoil what we should have been handling with greater care—working relations with the American administration. If our national interest consists in getting Iraq to start paying off its debt as soon as possible while at the same time avoiding any worsening of relations with the West then, as a result of the diplomatic measures we have conducted, the situation had become more difficult on both counts. That’s the bottom line.”202

Lukin’s position was not shared by a majority of his colleagues in the Russian Duma, who continued to chafe under the presumed yoke of Western policy in Iraq. In April 1995, the duma passed a resolution calling for UN sanctions against Iraq to be lifted, and demanding that the government more actively pursue debt repayment and business investment in Iraq.203

5.1.2 Yevgeny Primakov’s period (1996-1998)

From 1996, when Primakov became foreign minister, Russia undermined proposed solutions to the Iraq crisis determined solely by the United States and instead endorsed collective diplomatic counter-proposals. Russia’s preference was for the United Nations to play the leading role in resolving the problem of Saddam Hussein’s non-compliance with the international community regarding weapons of mass destruction and the Iraqi people’s humanitarian crisis caused by the UN-imposed sanctions.204 The appointment of Primakov as foreign minister, with his nationalist credential and sound reputation, was Yeltsin’s response to neutralize much of the Duma’s hostile manoeuvre.205

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203 Ibid.,

204 Robert O. Freedman, N.34; Talal Nizameddin, N.1, p.130.

205 Talal Nizameddin, N.1, p.132.
In 1996 Russia and Iraq signed a multibillion dollar oil sector agreement that set off a chain of collaborative deals in the energy sector, including a $15 billion proposal to allow Russian drilling in the West Qurna and North Rumaila oilfields once sanctions were lifted. Primakov understood that it was unrealistic for Russia to unilaterally break the sanctions regime in defiance of the United States and his strategy in the following years was to encourage Saddam Hussein to gradually increase cooperation with the West without losing face while simultaneously trying to convince the United states and its allies to reward the Iraqi leader by partially easing the sanctions based on the level of compliance with UN demands. Thus Russia’s vocal support ‘for Iraq was of lower priority for Russian diplomacy than ensuring the primacy of the United Nations in the realm of international peace and security’. Moscow’s policy rejected Washington’s absolutist all or nothing approach towards Iraq, and instead proposed a step-by-step process of targets and rewards as a solution to the deadlock.

The deep rift that had reopened between Russia and the West over the proper response to Iraqi assertiveness appeared again in September 1996, when Saddam Hussein violated UN rules by sending troops in to a special Kurdish-inhabited zone in northern Iraq. The United states responded by launching twenty-seven cruise missiles against military targets in Iraq, followed by a second strike with seventeen missiles that completed the destruction of Iraq’s air defense system in an expanded “no-fly zone”. At the time of the U.S. attack (of which the Russians had advance notification), Deputy Foreign Minister Viktor Posuvaliuk was in Baghdad trying to resolve the crisis. He claimed that he had received assurances from Tariq Aziz that

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208 Talal Nizameddin, N.1, p.132.

Iraq would withdraw its troops from the special zone, and Posuvaliuk had sought unsuccessfully to forestall U.S. military action. An angry statement from the Russian government—said by Yeltsin’s chief of staff to have been fully supported by the ailing president—bitterly denounced the U.S. actions:

“Serious concern is prompted by the fact that Washington is essentially laying claim to the role of supreme arbiter, trying, in effect, to supplant the Security council, which, in accordance with the UN Charter, possesses an exclusive right to authorize the use of force. The decision adopted unilaterally by the U.S. and Britain to expand the “no-fly” zone in southern Iraq should also be viewed in this context. These actions, which set a dangerous precedent, are at variance with international law and are unacceptable. The military actions in and around Iraq must be stopped. Russia insistently urges all parties to abandon the logic of force and to embark on the path of a political settlement of the crisis situation that has arisen.”

Responding to what the Russian press termed the low point in U.S.-Russian relation in 1996, the U.S. government expressed its disappointment that Russia had not yet learned that Saddam Hussein responds not to diplomacy but only to force. Nevertheless, with Primakov himself more directly involved in the conversation with his “old comrades” in Iraq, Moscow continued its search for a way to reduce sanctions in return for “good behavior,” in the full expectation (avidly encouraged by Baghdad) that when Iraq resumes normal economic activity, Russia will be the major foreign beneficiary.

Saddam Hussein forced the sanctions issues to the forefront again in the fall of 1997, when he ordered the expulsion of American members of the UN inspection team searching for Iraqi weapons of mass destruction. When the entire UN team withdrew in protest, the United States stepped up its military presence in the Persian Gulf region, amid rumors of an impending attack on Iraq. The diplomatic and military coalition that had prevailed in the 1991 war had fallen apart, first of all within the UN Security Council itself, where only Britain among the permanent members gave strong support to the U.S. position. Capitalizing on his personal ties, Foreign Minister Primakov wrested an agreement from Iraqis’ to re-admit all members of the


inspection team. Emerging from a meeting with Yeltsin and Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz, Primakov summoned the other “big five” foreign ministers to an extraordinary middle-of-the-night meeting in Geneva to announce his triumph and secure their concurrence.\textsuperscript{212}

Insisting to the skeptical Americans that they had made no deal with the Iraqis ‘behind anyone’s back,’ the Russian did promise that, on the basis of Iraq’s fulfillment of the relevant UN resolutions, Russia would ‘energetically work for the earliest possible’ lifting of UN sanction. However, the ultimate loophole in the agreement—on the basis of which Saddam Hussein continued to declare “presidential sites” off limits to UN inspectors—was hidden in language that spoke of increasing the effectiveness of the work of the UN special commission ‘while showing respect for the sovereignty and security of Iraq.’ Moreover, Moscow clearly wanted to push such details to the background, preferring to capitalize on what Primakov termed ‘a great success for Russian diplomacy...achieved without the use of force and without a show of force.’ In the words of a Russian reporter, the United States was essentially isolated, and Russia strengthened its reputation ‘as an influential power not only throughout the Middle East but in the world as a whole.’ Deputy Foreign Minister Viktor Posuvalitk also saw in the role Russia was playing in the crisis a special significance for broader Russian foreign policy: ‘The world is increasingly coming to realize that Russia is emerging or has emerged from its period of confusion and major problems, and that it is now oriented towards conducting an energetic and constructive foreign policy. Many countries have confidence in the balanced line we are pursuing.’ He stressed that Russian diplomats were not acting as ‘undiscriminating defense attorneys’ for Iraq, since they were calling for strict fulfillment of all the UN resolutions. ‘But at the same time we are saying that Iraq must be shown that there is light at the end of the tunnel. Not fire but light.’\textsuperscript{213}

When the Iraqi conflict flared up again in January 1998 over Saddam Hussein’s refusal to allow UN inspectors access to eight “presidential sites,” Yeltsin again sought to gain both international and domestic political prestige by sending

\textsuperscript{212} Robert H. Donaldson and Joseph L. Nogee, N.37, p.303.

Posuvaliuk to Baghdad in search of a solution. Embarrassed when a “deal” announced in Moscow was immediately denied by the Iraqis, an angry Yeltsin warned that continued U.S. military activities in the Persian Gulf could bring dire consequences: ‘one must be careful in a world that is saturated with all kinds of weapons. By his actions Clinton might get into a world war. They are acting too loudly.’ Yeltsin’s spokesman sought to explain away the president’s inflammatory rhetoric by speculating that foreign reporters might not have adequate command of the Russian language. Military action was averted when UN Secretary General Kofi Annan’s mediation defused the crisis. Claiming a share of the credit, the Russians again saw in the Persian Gulf crisis some hopeful signs that the ability of the United States to dictate its will was waning, and that the unipolar world was receding into the past.

Russian pressure, along with European support, began to pay off with UNSC Resolution 1153 on 20 February 1998, which increased the amount allowed for essential goods to be imported to $5.256 billion worth of oil exports every 180 days. This was achieved despite a background of tensions between the Iraqi regime and UNSCOM, with Saddam Hussein refusing to allow access to his presidential palace because he argued they symbolized national honor and sovereignty. The following month, Primakov played a leading role in mediation between Secretary-General Kofi Annan and Saddam Hussein that allowed for UNSC Resolution 1154 to accept a Memorandum of Understanding on the UN inspection of the Iraqi leader’s residences and other sites. This mediation successfully averted a full-scale military confrontation between Iraq and the United States.

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217 Robert O. Freedman, N.34.

218 Talal Nizameddin, N.1, p.133.
5.1.3 Igor Ivanov's period (1998-1999)

The appointment of Yevgeny Primakov as prime minister and Igor Ivanov as foreign minister on 11 September 1998 did not make any change to Russian policy towards Iraq as Primakov himself had still supervised the foreign policy. Along similar lines, Ivanov was considered as an opponent of the U.S. invasion of Iraq.

The rhetorical heights were scaled in Moscow again the following December, when U.S. and British war planes, in an operation termed “Desert Fox” (16-19 December 1998), conducted air strikes on Iraq in the wake of the UN arms inspectors’ report of continued Iraqi obstruction. Claiming that the chances for a diplomatic solution to the inspection impasse had not been exhausted, Yeltsin termed the Anglo-American action “senseless,” declaring that it “flagrantly violated” the UN Charter and international law and ‘undermines the entire international security system.’ Russia’s ambassadors to Washington and London were recalled, the pending vote on ratification of START II was postponed, Vladimir Zhirinovskii called for preemptive strikes against the United States, and Yeltsin was pictured poring over maps of the West Asia amid talk of dispatching Russian warships to the region. Alluding to the pending vote on impeachment in the U.S. Congress, a foreign ministry statement referred to the true reasons and true motives for the strikes.²¹⁹

The Russians participated in several efforts in the United Nations to reduce, suspend, or eliminate the sanctions on Iraq, but to no avail. Reportedly, Iraq was pressuring Russia to withdraw unilaterally from the sanctions regime, hinting that prospective Russian contracts for oil exploration in Iraq might depend on Moscow’s willingness to do so. Iraqi visitors to Moscow in 2000 included the defense minister and the ubiquitous Tariq Aziz. In November 2000, foreign minister Ivanov met Saddam Hussein in Baghdad, but, despite charges that Moscow was bending over backward to court “rouge states,” Russia held firm to the United Nations sanctions policy. Moscow did not, however, agree to a U.S.-British attempt to move to “smart sanctions,” which would tighten the embargo on arms and dual-use goods while

easing restriction on imports of civilian goods. Alone among the UN “Big Five,” the Russians blocked the plan with their veto threat.220

Primakov's success, although ultimately was not a long-lasting, capped a pattern of active diplomacy by Moscow on Iraq throughout the 1990s. Deputy Foreign Minister Viktor Posuvalyuk pointed out for example that: 'Russia did more for the normalization of Iraq-Kuwaiti relations than any other state.'221 The claim typified the thinking in Moscow that Russia was capable of playing a constructive role in the West Asia and Primakov’s ascendancy emphasized further that a balance to US power was an international necessity that allowed meaningful mediation to resolve conflict situations. There was also an honest expression of self-interest among Moscow’s political elite. Russian policy towards Iraq may have begun initially as reaction to appease anti-Western political factions but it developed into a mainstream thinking which argued that Russia was losing the opportunity of billions of dollars worth of contracts while it waited for handouts from the United States.222

5.2 Russia and the Gulf Cooperation Council Countries (GCC)

Another area of continuity lies in Moscow’s policy towards the Gulf Cooperation Council states (GCC). As in the case of the late Gorbachev era, Moscow is trying to maintain influence in Iraq while at the same time cultivating the GCC states. Thus Moscow signed a defence cooperation treaty and carried on naval maneuvers with Kuwait, and pursued arms sales to Kuwait and other GCC states while also seeking investments funds from them.223

A number of academics held the view that for both Gorbachev and Yeltsin, Kuwait and the other oil-rich moderate states of the GCC appeared to offer an alternative market and source of financial support. Kozyrev visited six of these states during a seven-day tour in April and May of 1992, emphasizing Russia's newfound ideological affinity by stating that 'now we prefer to deal with stable, moderate regimes' rather than the USSR's previous partners, Libya, Iran, and Iraq. Kozyrev

221 Andrej Kreutz, N.47, p.84.
222 Talal Nizameddin, N.1, p.133.
encountered a certain reticence deriving from fresh memories of Moscow's recent friendships in the region; and by the end of his trip, only Oman had offered credits to Russia—a $500 million investment in the oil and gas industry and $100 million for modernization of Russia's oil fields. Nevertheless, the primary importance of strengthening cooperation with the Persian Gulf states was reaffirmed in a foreign ministry "concept"—approved by Yeltsin—that was developed in the fall of 1992 to guide Russia's relations with the Arab world.\textsuperscript{224} The chief goals identified in this document were:

1. Ensuring Russia's national security;

2. Preventing the spread of political and military fires in the West Asia to the increasingly unstable regions of the Caucasus and Central Asia;

3. Making use of potential in the Arab states to help solve Russia's economic problems.\textsuperscript{225}

In the longer term, despite Russia's continued support of sanctions—even its dispatch of two ships to the Persian Gulf task force enforcing them—most of the Gulf states remained wary. However, Russia did manage a breakthrough with Saddam Hussein's recent victim, Kuwait, which was busy securing itself against possible future aggression by strengthening economic and military ties with all five permanent members of the Security Council. In December 1993, Russia signed a military cooperation agreement with Kuwait, calling for joint naval maneuvers and an exchange of military delegations. The following November, a visit to the Gulf by Chernomyrdin produced an agreement for a Russian arms sale of $750 million to Kuwait, involving infantry fighting vehicles and rocket launchers, and an agreement (questionably reported in the Russian press at $3 billion) with the United Arab Emirates for joint production of SU-374 fighter-bombers.\textsuperscript{226}

\textsuperscript{224} Robert H. Donaldson and Joseph L. Nogee, N.37, p.300.


\textsuperscript{226} Robert H. Donaldson and Joseph L. Nogee, N.37, p.301.
At the same time, partly in response to domestic pressure, Yeltsin also maintained ties with Iraq, the avowed enemy of the GCC states, which was seen by them as an even greater threat than Iran. When, in 1994, Moscow began to call for the conditional lifting of the embargo against Iraq, and then unsuccessfully sought to mediate during the October 1994 Iraqi-Kuwait crisis it appeared that old "minimax" policy of Gorbachev during the Gulf war was again being pursued, as Moscow sought to maintain influence with all sides.\footnote{Alfred B. Prados, ‘Iraqi Challenges and U.S. Responses: March 1991 through October 2002’, Report for Congress, The Air University, November 20, 2002. (http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awg/crs/h31641.pdf) last accessed May 20, 2015.} How successful such a policy will be, however, remains to be seen. Indeed Vladimir Isaev, a leading Russian commentator on the West Asia, described this policy in Moscow News (16-23 July 1995) as the desire to 'keep sitting on two chairs'.

5.3 Russia and the rest of the Region (West Asia & North Africa)

5.3.1 Russia and Libya

A similar, if lower-profile, mix of activities and motives had characterized Russia's diplomacy in Yeltsin's era toward another West Asian and North Africa pariah state—Libya. The advent of the Yeltsin government had not been welcomed in Tripoli, which refused until 1995 to acknowledge that its $3.8 billion debt to the USSR was now owed to the Russian Federation. When Russia joined with the West in November 1993 in voting for UN sanctions against Libya, in response to the latter's refusal to cooperate against terrorism, Moscow succeeded in obtaining an amendment to the resolution that demanded that Libya repay its debts. Ironically, a Russian trade delegation was discovered to be in Tripoli at that very time, and the embarrassed foreign ministry quickly stated that Russia had every intention of abiding by the sanctions. With the sanctions still in force (and Primakov now in charge at the foreign ministry), a Russian delegation returned to Libya in March 1996 for a discussion of debt repayment and future large-scale economic cooperation. At this point, there were said to be only 200 Russian specialists remain in the country—about one-thirtieth the size of the former Soviet contingent. Although Russia claimed that it had suffered at least $7 billion in losses, and though it noted bitterly that some Western companies continued to do business in Libya, Russia nevertheless declared that it would continue to abide by the international sanction. When the sanctions on Libya were finally lifted
in 1999, Moscow was prepared to resume business with Tripoli. A delegation led by Libya’s foreign minister was received in Moscow in the summer of 2000 to discuss arms sales, but no deal could be reached in the summer of 2000 to discuss arms sales, but no deal could be reached in the absence of a mutually acceptable plan for liquidating Libya’s Soviet-era debt.\textsuperscript{228}

5.3.2 Russia and Syria

The early 1990s Russia largely disengaged itself from the West Asia and was reduced to a minor international player. Russian relation with Syria only began significantly improving in 1996, in line with Foreign Minister Primakov’s efforts to re-establish a foothold for Moscow in the West Asia. Syria was Russia’s natural choice, particularly as Iraq was then weakened and isolated under Saddam Hussein. Primakov used the route of reviving the stalled West Asia process as an entry for Russia into the region in parallel to promoting Russia as a valuable source of arms. Syria simultaneously did not want Washington and its chief regional ally Israel to dictate affairs in the West Asia and welcomed Russian overtures led by Primakov as well as European and United Nations participation to use as leverage in relations with the United States. Syria held extensive new arms purchasing talks with Russia in 1997 and 1998. In February 1999, Syria announced plans to spend as much as $2 billion on range of Russian armaments, including more antitank system—which seem to have included deliveries of more AT-14 Kornets.\textsuperscript{229} During a visit to Moscow from 5-7 July 1999 Syria’s President Asad endorsed Primakov’s ‘idea of a multipolar world and called for strenuous efforts to strengthen the role of the United Nation’.\textsuperscript{230} However, President Hafez Asad ultimately prioritized relations with Washington and kept Russia on the fringes of regional peace negotiations. Another source of lingering frustration for Russia was the $12 billion dollar debt owned by Syria that was inherited from the Soviet era.

Damascus therefore relied on a policy of balancing relations between world powers to its advantage. One of the fruits of this approach was a $2 billion agreement

\textsuperscript{228} Robert H. Donaldson and Joseph L. Nogee, N.37, p.306.

\textsuperscript{229} Anthony H. Cordesman, \textit{Arab-Israeli Military Forces in an Era of Asymmetric Wars} (West Port, CT, USA: Praeger, 2006) p.337.

\textsuperscript{230} Andrej Kreutz, N.47, p.23.
in 1999 between Syria and Russia to sell highly sophisticated arms pending settlement of the debt issue. This was according to reports ‘the first major military deal Syria concluded with Russia since the demise of the Soviet Union, marking the resumption of strategic cooperation between Damascus and Moscow’.231 The deal marked the restoration of Russia as major regional player.

One can summarize therefore that Russian policy in the Yeltsin era could be viewed as more pragmatic, less ideological and considerably less structured and centralized as compared to past policy towards the West Asia. Although geopolitical concerns were still important determinants of policy, economic and business interests played an increasingly important role this time. Russian policy in this phase was keen to project an independent course, which was not subordinate to Western wishes for example Iran, but post-Soviet Russia did not represent the same obstructionist and destabilizing threat as its Soviet predecessor. Russian West Asia policy was strongly oriented to the Northern Tier countries, with whom good relations were developed—even with historical rivals such as Turkey. The result was Moscow’s support for lifting the sanction on Iran and Iraq, without however suggesting any unilateral breaking of UN-mandated sanctions. Although Russian policy towards Iran and Iraq caused an alarm in Western capitals, its policies towards the Arab-Israeli conflict were notably balanced and uncontroversial.