Nuclear Shield or Double-Edged Sword?

Strategic Nuclear Forces and the (Un)Making of Post-Soviet Nuclear Alliance

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At the end of the Cold War, two nuclear superpowers, United States and Russia, were left to redefine and restructure their alliances. Why was Moscow unsuccessful in maintaining a nuclear alliance following the collapse of the USSR, despite the political, military, and technological ties with the former Soviet republics it inherited from the USSR? The existence of highly centralized structure of Strategic Nuclear Forces deployed, in addition to Russia, on the territory of Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan, seemed particularly conducive to preservation of a Russian-led nuclear alliance. Drawing on archival sources, this paper reconstructs the debates over the formats of military-strategic cooperation between constituent republics of the Soviet Union in the late Soviet and early post-Soviet period. The paper finds that Soviet Strategic Nuclear Forces were a double-edged sword that created both the promise for continued military cooperation and grounds for conflict between the republics as they strove to define their new national security identity. The paper also argues that a continued military disintegration was as much a factor of Moscow's redefinition of its relations to its former domains as of the desire of Ukraine, a key potential ally, to distance itself from Moscow.

Key words: Russia, Ukraine, Soviet Union, CIS, alliance, collective security, nuclear weapons

Introduction

The end of the Cold War brought about the demise of the original *raison d'etre* of two superpower alliances – North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the Warsaw Treaty Organization (WTO).

While NATO managed to survive this crisis of identity and carry out consecutive rounds of expansion into Eastern Europe and the Balkans, Moscow's efforts to maintain an alliance in its former Soviet domains have been less successful. Today, Moscow leads the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) that include Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. CSTO claims to have integrated air defenses and holds joint military exercises.

The coherence of this alliance has been uncertain. Although the total number of the Russian-led alliance members stayed at six since its foundation in May 1992, the composition has been volatile with states joining and leaving.[1] The military exercises mostly focused on peace-keeping, anti-narcotics, and anti-terrorist operations in Central Asia and the Caucasus.[2] Kazakhstan, a key CSTO ally, second largest after Russia in terms of economic and political weight, and the rest of the Central Asian member states are also members of the Central Asian Nuclear Weapons Free Zone (CANWFZ). This conflicts with their alliance with nuclear-armed Russia and casts doubt on the extent of their alliance commitment. In a UN vote on March 27, 2014 to uphold Ukraine's territorial integrity and thus condemn Russia's annexation of Crimea, a question of great political importance to Russia, of the CSTO allies only Armenia and Belarus voted "no," while Kazakhstan abstained, and Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan did not participate in the vote.[3] Notably, Russia's most important potential ally, Ukraine, not only abstained from CSTO thorough its post-Soviet history, but has now turned into an erstwhile adversary.

Russia seems determined to reclaim the geopolitical clout Soviet Union once wielded. Building a robust military alliance would be one way to achieve geopolitical influence and prevent what it perceives as Western encroachment into its sphere of influence. After all, leading an alliance and extending nuclear deterrence to allies had been one of the trappings of a great power claimed by the Soviet Union. Russia may still prove capable of strengthening and expending CSTO, particularly in view of deteriorating relations between Russia and NATO.

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[1] The original six signatories included Russia, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. In 1994, Belarus, Azerbaijan, and Georgia joined. In 1999, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Uzbekistan opted out. Uzbekistan rejoined the CSTO in 2006 and then withdrew again in 2012.

[2] "Ucheniia Kollectivnykh Sil ODKB [Exercises of Collective Forces of OCST]," http://www.odkb-csto.org/training/.

[3] United Nations General Assembly, "Resolution A/RES/68/262 "Territorial Integrity of Ukraine. Voting Record" (United Nations Bibliographic Information System, March 27, 2014), http://unbisnet.un.org:8080/ipac20/ipac.jsp?profile=voting&index=.VM&term=ares68262.

The idea of a NATO-type military alliance within the former Soviet borders is not recent, however: it emerged during the last days of the Soviet Union and has not left Russia's political imagination since. Russia's first post-Soviet national security strategy in 1993 maintained that Russia bore a special responsibility for the establishment of a new system of constructive and stable relations between former Soviet states.[4] This entailed enhancing cooperation in military-political sphere, establishing an effective system of collective security, and maintaining the military infrastructure that comprise the unified system of military security in the post-Soviet space.[5]

Indeed, having secured a license to a great power status by inheriting Soviet Union's place as a permanent member of the UN Security Council, as well as a nuclear-weapons-state status under the Treaty on Nonproliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), Russia seemed poised to remain a hegemon in the former Soviet realm. Moreover, newly independent states emerging out of the Soviet collapse remained deeply interconnected in economic, political, and military terms. On December 25, 1991, when Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev resigned his post and handed over the nuclear strike authorization unit, the so-called *Cheget* briefcase, to Russia's President Boris Yeltsin, the giant Soviet military complex stood intact: armies, chains of command, and defense industry spanning borders, as well as millions of troops and officer corps honed by the Soviet military tradition. Politically, the idea of preserving a common military-strategic space within old Soviet borders had much traction in Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Armenia, as well as among some political forces within Ukraine.

Why was Russia unable to capitalize on these historical and institutional ties in early 1990s and restructure a relationship with post-Soviet states into a fully-fledged alliance? This paper revisits the dynamics of Soviet military disintegration and finds that Soviet defense establishment did not crumble overnight but took deliberate dismantling, in which Russia took an active part. In the early post-Soviet period, the role of Strategic Nuclear Forces, deployed in Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Ukraine quickly turned from a potential integrator to a bone of contention and conflict, in particular between Russia and Ukraine. This paper aims to contribute to a better understanding of the nature of transformations in the immediate post-Cold War period. It also challenges the popular political

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[4] Vladislav Chernov, "Natsional'nyie Interesy Rossiii i Ugrozy Dlia Ieie Bezopasnosti [Russia's National Interests and Threats to Its Security]," *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, April 29, 1993, https://yeltsin.ru/uploads/upload/newspaper/1993/nzv04_29_93/FLASH/index.html. Chernov was a member of Russian Security Council involved in drafting the strategy in 1992-1993.
[5] Ibid.

narrative, promoted by the incumbent Russian President Vladimir Putin, of Soviet disintegration in early 1990s as chaotic and unruly, a catastrophe akin to a natural disaster, with weakened Russia accepting helplessly its strategic retreat. This research hopes to offer empirical material for further understanding of the role of nuclear weapons in alliance dynamics.

Soviet Nuclear Shield: The Might and the Burden

"Before the [August 1991] coup not a single sane person considered the possibility of the break-up of the Soviet army," according to General-Major Pavel Zolotaryov, formerly of the General Staff of the Soviet Strategic Rocket Forces.[6] Indeed, even during the turbulent years preceding the Soviet collapse, hardly anyone could foresee the fracturing of the single military and defense-industrial establishment that spanned the vast expanse of the Soviet territory without regard for borders between its constituent republics. Moreover, the Soviet Union was not just a superpower, it was a nuclear superpower. On the eve of its demise, the Soviet Union had about 2,500 strategic launchers, armed with over 10,000 nuclear warheads, including some 1,400 intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) armed with over 6,000 high-yield thermonuclear warheads.[7] The ICBMs occupied chief strategic importance in the Soviet nuclear triad, and the Soviet Strategic Rocket Forces, a service of the military that was in charge of them, were the core of the Soviet nuclear might and its status as a superpower.

This massive ICBM force was deployed in 17 locations, stretching in an arc from Belarus and Ukraine, through Russia and into Kazakhstan.[8] This deployment pattern was dictated primarily by Soviet doctrine and military planning, as well as by rail connections that would allow to transport heavy missiles to deployment sites. If reliability of republics were considered, Moscow saw no issues with the loyalty of Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Ukraine.[9] All ICBM divisions and command posts were looped into a highly centralized and secretive system of command, control, and communication

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[6] Pavel Zolotaryov, interview by Mariana Budjeryn, Electronic mail, November 19, 2017. (Here and after, translation from Russian, Ukrainian, and Belarusian are by Mariana Budjeryn, unless otherwise noted.)

[7] "Table of USSR/Russian Strategic Offensive Force Loadings (1956-2002)," *Natural Resources Defense Council*, n.d., http://www.nrdc.org/nuclear/nudb/datab2.asp. A single ICBM could carry up to 10 warheads, so called multiple independently targetable reentry vehicles (MIRVs).

[8] Steven J. Zaloga, *The Kremlin's Nuclear Sword: The Rise and Fall of Russia's Strategic Nuclear Forces, 1945-2000* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2002), 118–9.

[9] Viktor Esin, interview by Mariana Budjeryn, Electronic mail, December 21, 2012. General Esin served as Chief of the Operations Directorate of the General Staff of the RVSN of the Soviet Union, then Russian Federation, in 1989-1994.

designed and managed by the military and civilian authorities in Moscow, bypassing any republican oversight.

Soviet nuclear force was delivered by the giant military-industrial complex: a sprawling network of government, military, and scientific institutions, design bureaus, and manufacturing facilities. As with the deployment patterns, little in the planning, design, and manufacture of Soviet nuclear armaments anticipated the possibility of Soviet disintegration. Although all uranium enrichment and plutonium separation facilities, as well as design and production of nuclear warheads were situated on the territory of the Russian republic, other critical elements of the nuclear weapons complex spanned republican borders. Kazakhstan mined and milled the lion's share of uranium ore for Soviet nuclear weapons and housed major nuclear and missile tests sites. Ukraine designed and built some of the best Soviet ICBMs, missile engines, as well as guidance and targeting systems. Belarusian facilities supplied advanced computing and electronics. Ukraine and Belarus, due in large part to their historic and cultural affinity with Russia, were viewed as particularly reliable, and Moscow placed no restrictions on the development and construction of Soviet defense industry in these republics.[10] As with the chains of command, the lines of subordination of these defense enterprises and construction bureaus ran directly to Moscow, bypassing republican governments.

Vitaliy Kataev, who served for many years at the very apex of the Soviet military-industrial complex, the Department of Defense Industry of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, described his country's defense industry as a "Soviet Texas," where everything existed on a grand scale.[11] This 'state within a state' commanded the country's best human, financial, and economic resources. By early 1980s, the spending on this giant military-industrial complex and the inefficiencies that plagued it began to take a heavy toll on the Soviet Union's civilian economy.[12] The wide spread dissatisfaction with Moscow's economic policies, combined with the relaxation of state coercion and Gorbachev's policies of *perestroika* and *glasnost*, reform and liberalization, resulted in the attempts by

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[10] Vitaly Kataev, "Voienno-Tekhnicheskii Potentsial Stran SNG: Perspektivy Rossiisko-Ukrainskoho Voienno-Tekhnicheskoho Sotrudnichestva [Military-Technical Potential of CIS States: Perspectives for Russian-Ukrainian Military-Technical Cooperation]," 1994, Digital Files, Vitaly Kataev Collection, Hoover Institution Archive.

[11] Vitaliy Kataev, "MIC: The View from Inside," in *The Anatomy of Russian Defense Conversion*, ed. Vlad E. Genin (Walnut Creek, CA: Vega Press, 2001), 54. From mid-1970s until the Soviet collapse in 1991, Kataev served in the Defense Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the USSR that oversaw Soviet military-industrial complex.

[12] For a good summary of the scope of Soviet military-industrial complex and its impact on overall economy, see Kataev, "MIC: The View from Inside."

the constituent Soviet republics to demand greater say in their local affairs. Outside the rebellious Baltics and Georgia, it was the Russian Federation, led by Boris Yeltsin, that spearheaded the move for greater autonomy from the Moscow Center. On June 12, 1990, Russian republican legislature passed the Declaration of Sovereignty, stipulating that the Russian republican laws would now take precedence over those of the Union.[13] Similar declarations by Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan followed.

Even as centrifugal forces gained momentum in 1990-1991, little foreshadowed military disintegration. While the Russian Federation's declaration of sovereignty said nothing about military and defense matters, the Ukrainian declaration made an important move: not only did it assert Ukraine's right to an independent army, a clause that had to overcome significant opposition from the communist majority, it also declared Ukraine's intention to become a neutral, nuclear weapons-free state.[14] The Belarussian declaration was closely modelled on that of Ukraine.[15] Kazakhstan's declaration focused primarily on economic sovereignty and said nothing of military matters.[16]

In crafting their nuclear renunciations Ukraine and Belarus were undoubtedly guided by the popular aversion to all things nuclear that issued from the Chernobyl nuclear power station accident in 1986. Yet there was another reason, at least in Ukraine: the authors of the declaration realized that the country's move toward political independence would be impeded by the command and control ties that bound strategic nuclear units to the Center in Moscow.[17] Given the prominence of the two western republics in Soviet military planning and the number of strategic systems deployed there in 1990 – 176 silo-based ICBMs and 44 bombers in Ukraine, 54 road-mobile ICBMs in Belarus – their nuclear renunciations had important strategic implications.

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[13] Verkhovnyi Sovet RSFSR, *Deklaratsiia O Gosudarstvennom Suverenitete Rossiiskoi Sovetskoi Federativnoi Sotsialisticheskoi Respubliki [Declaration of State Sovereignty of the Russia Soviet Federative Socialist Republic]*, 1990, http://constitution.garant.ru/act/base/10200087/.

[14] Verkhovna Rada of the Ukrainian SSR, *Deklaratsiia pro derzhavnii suverenitet Ukraiiny [Declaration of State Sovereignty of Ukraine], 55-XII*, 1990, http://zakon1.rada.gov.ua/cgi-bin/laws/main.cgi?nreg=55-12.

[15] Vyarkhouny Savet of the Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic, *Deklaratsiia O Gosudarstvennom Suverenitete Respubliki Belarus [Declaration of State Sovereignty of the Republic of Belarus] No. 193-XII*, 1990, http://www.pravo.by/world_of_law/text.asp?RN=V09000193.

[16] Verkhovnyi Sovet of the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic, *Deklaratsiia O Gosudarsvennom Suverenitete Respubliki Kazakhstan [Declaration of State Sovereignty of the Republic of Kazakhstan]*, 1990, http://adilet.zan.kz/rus/docs/B900001700_.

[17] John Lloyd and Chrystia Freeland, "A Painful Birth," *The Financial Times*, February 25, 1992.

The declarations of sovereignty, however, for the most part remained just that – declaratory statements that brought few real changes. While almost every Soviet citizen was disgruntled about the social and economic woes, pro-independence forces in most republics, outside of the Baltic states, constituted a minority, albeit a vocal one.[18] Military organizations were particularly hostile to any idea of partitioning the country. According to Kostiantyn Morozov, at the time commander of the 17th Air Army headquartered in Kyiv, and later Ukraine's first minister of defense, top military brass in Ukraine "were absolutely certain that Ukrainian independence was absurd and that a Ukrainian [national] army was a state and military crime."[19] The text of the Ukrainian declaration was never circulated within the military.[20]

To mitigate the republican demands for greater autonomy, President Gorbachev launched a negotiation process with the republican leaders aimed at reconstituting the Soviet Union based on a new treaty between its constituent parts. The new Union treaty envisioned devolution of political and economic power to the republican governments; the Center in Moscow, however, would retain essential sovereign functions: monetary policy, defense, and foreign policy.[21] Such a solution seemed to satisfy all parties involved and, after successive rounds of negotiations, the signature of the treaty was scheduled for August 20, 1991. Although the leaders of Ukraine and Azerbaijan were not expected to attend the signing at that time, their parliaments were due to deliberate the treaty in September.[22]

The attempted coup against Gorbachev, launched on August 18 by a group of high-ranking conservative strongmen, was timed to thwart the signing of the new Union treaty and it did. The coup perpetrators believed that Gorbachev made too many concessions to the republics in negotiating the treaty, just as he made too many concessions to the West in foreign policy and arms control. By August 22, however, the coup was foiled and its perpetrators jailed.

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[18] In the first multiparty elections in March 1990, anti-communist opposition parties, a combination of nationalist pro-independence and pro-democracy forces, took some 24% of parliamentary seats in Ukraine and only 10% in Belarus. In Kazakhstan, the opposition was not allowed to register as a political party and thus remained on the fringes on the political system.
[19] "Kostiantyn Morozov Collection, 1991-1996. Interview Transcripts.," n.d., Transcript of Tape 2, 8, Ukrainian Research Institute Library, Harvard University.
[20] "Kostiantyn Morozov Collection, 1991-1996. Interview Transcripts." Tape 2, 18, 20.
[21] Sergei Shakhrai, ed., "Dogovor o Soiuze Suverennykh Gosudarstv [Treaty on the Union of Sovereign States]. Draft, July 23, 1991," in *Rasspad SSSR. Dokumenty i Fakty. 1986-1992 Gg. [Dissolution of the USSR. Documents and Facts. 1986-1992]*, vol. Volume I (Moscow: Kuchkovo Pole, 2016).
[22] Mikhail Gorbachev, *Memoirs* (New York: Doubleday, 1995), 629.

One failed coup open the space for another successful one: in Moscow, power shifted radically from Gorbachev to Russian President Yeltsin and in the republics, a wave of declarations of full political independence from Moscow ensued.[23] In the wake of the coup, the prospects for retaining a unified state, as envisioned by Gorbachev, dwindled dramatically and were altogether erased by the Belavezha Accord, signed on December 8, 1991 by the leaders of Belarus, Russia, and Ukraine who declared that the Soviet Union, "as a geopolitical reality and a subject of international law" ceased to exist.[24] Instead of averting the collapse of the Soviet Union, the August coup set in motion processes that made it inevitable.

CIS Joint Strategic Forces: A Double-Edged Sword

What did not seem inevitable at the time was the disintegration of common security arrangements in the post-Soviet space. In Belavezha, Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus created the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), an arrangement that was to provide a framework for continued political, economic, and defense cooperation. Importantly, Article 6 of the Belavezha Accord stated: "Member-States of the Commonwealth will preserve and maintain, under the joint command, a common military-strategic space, including unified control over nuclear weapons."[25] On December 21, 1991, the CIS held its first summit in Almaty, Kazakhstan, during which a further eight former Soviet republics – Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan – joined the CIS.[26]

One task the CIS had to manage was the future of the Soviet armed forces. At the time of Soviet collapse, the former Soviet republics, less the Baltic states, fell into two categories on military and defense matters. According to Marshal Yevgeniy Shaposhnikov, Soviet Union's last minister of defense who served in this capacity from September to December 1991, Ukraine, as well as Moldova, Azerbaijan, and Georgia intended to forge their armed forces out of the Soviet military units deployed

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[23] For a discussion of August 1991 events as a "successful" coup, see William E. Odom, *The Collapse of the Soviet Military* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 341–346.

[24] *Soglasheniie O Sozdanii Sodruzhestva Nezavisimikh Gosudarstv [Agreement On the Establishment of the Commonwealth of Independent States]*, 1991, http://www.cis.minsk.by/reestr/ru/index.html#reestr/view/text?doc=1.

[25] *Ibid.*

[26] Thus, the CIS comprised all former Soviet republics except the three Baltic states and Georgia which would join in 1993.

on their territory. Russia, Belarus, Armenia, and Kazakhstan together with the rest of Central Asian republics, on the other hand, favored the preservation of a single army and a single military-strategic space.[27] Shaposhnikov and the former Soviet military authorities obviously also sided with the latter position. While Shaposhnikov allowed for some delegation of military powers to the republics, such as the retention of a small republican guard and civil defense units, he insisted that a single military, including both conventional and nuclear forces, be preserved to provide security of all republics and defend the outer borders.[28]

Preserving a single military against desperately poor prospects of preserving a single political authority was hardly realistic. Yet there was an alternative to the single military and to a full military disintegration – a defense alliance of the newly independent states. Moscow's foreign policy establishment, more liberal and more pragmatically-minded than the military, immediately recognized that disintegration processes did not preclude an option of an alliance. In September 1991, Soviet ministry of foreign affairs (MID) circulated a memo, in which it considered a post-Soviet "military-political alliance" specifically modeled on NATO.[29] The MID, acknowledged that differences between the republics could be an obstacle but pointed that NATO was an example of effective alliance operation despite significant differences between its member states.[30] To accommodate differences between the republics, an alliance could offer varying levels of membership, from full to associate.[31] By December 1991, the MID and its research arm, the Institute of USA and Canada (ISKAN), had a draft of a Treaty on Common Defense ready. Appropriately, Article 5 of the draft treaty stated: "Aggression against one member-state by a state or a group of states will be treated as aggression against all members of this Treaty."[32]

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[27] Yevgeniy Shaposhnikov, *Vybor. Zapiski Glavnokomanduyushchego [The Choice. Notes of a Commander-in-Chief]* (Moscow: Independent Publishing House "PIK," 1993), 116.

[28] Ibid., 80–81.

[29] Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the USSR, "Sozdanie Voenno-Politicheskogo Soiuza Gosudarstv-Byvshikh Chlenov Sovetskogo Soiuza (Po Tipu NATO) [Establishment of a Military-Political Union of States-Former Members of the Soviet Union (Fashioned after NATO)]," September 11, 1991, Fond 10026, Opis 4, Delo 2781, State Archive of the Russian Federation.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Ibid.

[32] "Dogovor o Sovmestnoi Oborone Sodruzhestva Nezavisimykh Gosudarstv. Proekt [Treaty on Common Defense of the Commonwealth of Independent States. Draft]," December 23, 1991, Fond 10026, Opis 4, Delo 3324, State Archive of the Russian Federation.

Whatever the format future defense cooperation between the republics would take shape, strategic nuclear forces seemed to be an important factor, conducive to preserving post-Soviet military collaboration. These were now stationed on the territory not one but four new sovereigns: Belarus, Kazakhstan, the Russian Federation, and Ukraine. While conventional forces, organized into military districts were easier to bring under national command authorities, the division of strategic nuclear forces could not be easily affected for technological and institutional reasons. As discussed above, these were a unified network of military units bound by centralized system of command and control that was now effectively in Russia's hands.

The United States took the issue of nuclear weapons in the disintegrating Soviet Union very seriously. The incumbent George H.W. Bush administration quickly formulated a policy that only one nuclear state should emerge from the Soviet collapse. Diplomatic recognition of non-Russian nuclear inheritors was made conditional on their nuclear renunciation.[33] What the Unites States was primarily concerned about, however, was the devolution of centralized command and control to more than one entity. In his address at Princeton University on December 12, US Secretary of State Baker spelled out the US policy as follows:

> [W]e do not want to see new nuclear weapons states emerge as a result of the transformation of the Soviet Union... [We] want to see Soviet nuclear weapons remain under safe, responsible, and reliable control with a single unified authority. The precise nature of that authority is for Russia, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Belarus, and any common entity to determine. A single authority could, of course be based on collective decision-making on the use of nuclear weapons. We are, however, opposed to the proliferation of any additional independent command authority or control over nuclear weapons. For those republics who seek complete independence, we expect them to adhere to the Non-Proliferation Treaty as non-nuclear weapons states, to agree to full-scope IAEA safeguards, and to implement effective export controls on nuclear material and related technologies.[34]

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[33] James Baker A. and Thomas DeFrank M., *The Politics of Diplomacy. Revolution, War and Peace, 1989-1992* (New York: G.P. Putman & Sons, 1995), 560; Thomas Graham, Jr., interview by Mariana Budjeryn, March 18, 2016.

[34] U.S. Department of State, Office of the Assistant Secretary/Spokesman, "'America and the Collapse of the Soviet Empire: What Has to Be Done'. Address by Secretary of State James A. Baker, III at Princeton University," December 12, 1991.

Baker was preaching to the choir. Despite Washington's concern, in December 1991, nuclear successors of the USSR had neither intent, nor capacity to fracture Soviet nuclear forces. At a meeting on December 16 in Moscow, Russian President Yeltsin and Soviet defense minister Shaposhnikov assured Baker that the launch authority would remain in Moscow.[35]

At the Almaty summit on December 21, 1991, the four 'nuclear' republics: Belarus, Kazakhstan, Russia, and Ukraine signed a separate Agreement on Joint Measures on Nuclear Weapons, which refashioned Soviet strategic nuclear forces as Joint Strategic Forces (JSF) of the CIS and stipulated that they would "provide collective security for all members of the Commonwealth."[36] Belarus and Ukraine – but not Kazakhstan – pledged to join the NPT as non-nuclear weapons states.[37] Until strategic nuclear forces on their territories were completely dismantled, the decision to use the nuclear weapons would be made by the President of the Russian Federation "with the approval" of other three signatories, according to an unspecified "jointly developed procedure."[38] Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan also committed to transfer all tactical weapons to Russia for dismantlement "under joint supervision" before July 1, 1992.[39]

The next CIS meeting in Minsk on December 30, 1991, all eleven CIS members signed the Agreement on Strategic Forces, where they pledged to preserve "joint command" of strategic forces and "unified control" over nuclear weapons of the former Soviet Union.[40] Nuclear decision-making procedure was augmented to include "consultations" with the non-nuclear member-states, who felt that they should have a say.[41] The Agreement included a clause that strategic nuclear weapons would be withdrawn

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[35] James Baker A., "Notes from One-on-One Meeting with Boris Yeltsin, St. Catherine's Hall, Moscow," December 16, 1991, Box 110, Folder 10, James A. Baker III Papers, Seeley G. Mudd Manuscript Library, Princeton University.
[36] *Soglasheniie o Sovmestnykh Merakh v Otnoshenii Iadernogo Oruzhiia. [Agreement On Joint Measures on Nuclear Weapons]*, December 21, 1991, http://cis.minsk.by/reestr/ru/index.html#reestr/view/text?doc=3. Article 1 and Article 3.
[37] Ibid. Article 5.1,
[38] Ibid., Article 4.
[39] Ibid., Article 6.
[40] *Soglasheniie mezhdu Gosudarstvami-Uchastnikami Sodruzhestva Nezavisimikh Gosudarstv po Strategicheskim Silam [Agreement between Member-States of the Commonwealth of Independent States on Strategic Forces]*, 1991, http://cis.minsk.by/reestr/ru/index.html#reestr/view/text?doc=9., Article 3.
[41] Ibid. Article 4.

from Ukraine's territory by the end of 1994.[42] Belarus and Kazakhstan made no specific commitments in this respect.

The JSF were part of the so-called Joint Armed Forces (JAF) of the CIS, a structure under which all conventional military units that were not immediately claimed by the republics were to be managed and financed through joint contributions. Marshal Shaposhnikov, now former Soviet minister of defense, was appointed commander-in-chief of the JAF, and, by extension, the JSF.[43] Formally, Shaposhnikov reported to the Council of the Heads of States of the CIS, of which the Russian president was first among equals.

Effectively, the CIS military arrangements attempted to refashion the former Soviet Union into something like a collective security alliance with a nuclear umbrella. Despite the veneer of collective nuclear decision-making, however, everyone involved understood that, in practice the 'high command' of the JAF was the old Soviet Ministry of Defense and Chiefs of Staff. Operational command and control over the former Soviet arsenal remained in Moscow, and President Yeltsin was the only one who could authorize a launch.

The appointment of Shaposhnikov as chief commander for the CIS military, however, meant that the idea of preserving a single army would not be put to rest. Shaposhnikov failed to recognize that the process of creation of conventional national militaries in the newly independent states was irreversible and had to run its course. Instead of guiding this difficult process in as painless a manner as possible, he obstructed it, creating ample opportunities for conflict with the republics, particularly Ukraine. Colonel Vladimir Lopatin, a military reformer and deputy chairman of the Russia's state committee on defense, a precursor of national security council, saw the looming dangers of tensions within the CIS in early 1992:

> There are… serious contradictions between the leaders of the defense departments of
> the republics and the current leadership of the [former Soviet] Ministry of Defense.

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[42] Ibid., Article 4.

[43] *Protokol Soveshchaniia Glav Nezavisimykh Gosudarstv (O Poruchenii Komandovaniia Vooruzhennymi Silami Marshalu Shaposhnikovu Ye. I.) [Protocol of the Meeting of the Heads of Independent States (On Charging Marshal Shaposhnikov Ye. I. with the Command of the Armed Forces)*, December 21, 1991,
http://cis.minsk.by/reestr/ru/index.html#reestr/view/text?doc=3412.

The more desperately the leadership of the Ministry of Defense tries to keep a maximum of power in the Army in its own hands, the greater the threat that it will lose everything altogether. A reasonable compromise is needed.[44]

This problem was compounded by Russia's decision to delay the creation of its own separate defense agency with CIS High Command dubbing as Russia's defense ministry. It would not be until May 1992 that Yeltsin decreed the establishment of a Russian ministry of defense and Russian armed forces.[45] The absence of separation between CIS Command and Russia's defense agency lent credence to claims that it was Russia who was obstructing the sovereign right of the republics to create their own armed forces and thus exhibiting its imperialist tendencies. The following section examines the prospects of an alliance from the viewpoint of key potential junior allies – Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and Belarus – who were also the three non-Russian Soviet nuclear successors.

Allies or Ex's?

Ukraine. National-democratic forces, championing Ukraine's succession from the Soviet Union, remained a minority in the legislature, the Verkhovna Rada, comprising only a quarter of the seats. The events of the August coup in Moscow, however, ultimately swayed the position of ambivalent republican communist elites in favor of full independence. During the coup one of the plotters, General Valentin Varennikov, commander of all Soviet ground forces, arrived in Kyiv to ensure that Ukraine's leaders comply with the plot. Speaker of the Rada, former communist ideologue Leonid Kravchuk later recalled his profound sense of insecurity during the meeting with Varennikov: there he was, the leader of a self-proclaimed 'sovereign' republic with no armed forces at his disposal against Varennikov who had millions-strong Soviet army under his command.[46]

Having learned the true meaning of 'sovereignty' during the coup, the Rada, in the very next move after declaring full political independence on August 24, 1991, voted to subordinate all military units

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[44] "Lopatin Views Status of Army Reform," *Nezavisimaya Gazeta in FBIS-SOV-92-015*, January 7, 1992.
[45] President of the Russian Federation, *Ukaz o Sozdanii Vooruzhennykh Sil Rossiiskoi Federatsii [Decree on the Establishment of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation] No. 466*, 1992, http://www.kremlin.ru/acts/bank/1279.
[46] "Interview with Leonid Kravchuk on August 30, 1991," *Robitnycha Gazeta*, September 4, 1991.

deployed in Ukraine.[47] The Rada moved quickly to establish a Ukrainian ministry of defense and appointed General Kostiantyn Morozov to lead it.[48] Following this, the Rada and the nascent defense agency embarked on a frantic effort to draft and adopt a package of laws that provided legal and institutional framework for Ukraine's Armed Forces.

At a meeting of republican defense representatives in Moscow on November 28, 1991, after impassioned entreats to keep the single Soviet military intact from Shaposhnikov and representatives of Kazakhstan and Belarus, chair of the Rada security and defense committee Vasyl Durdynets presented Ukraine's "principled position" on the creation of "independent armed forces, not be subordinated to the joint Union command."[49] Ukraine's defense minister Morozov maintained that while armed forces remained the only Soviet institution left standing, without a political union, to which this military force could be attached, their disintegration was inevitable.[50] Durdynets said, however, that Ukraine would continue to participate in the system of "collective strategic defense," until nuclear weapons are removed from its territory.[51]

Shortly after this meeting, on December 1, 1991, a Ukraine-wide referendum overwhelmingly confirmed the declaration of independence and elected Speaker of the Rada Kravchuk Ukraine's first president. The Ukrainian referendum crushed any prospect of even the loosest of political unions among the Soviet republics and, with it, a possibility of preservation of a single post-Soviet army. This also left Ukraine to grapple with the fate of world's third-largest nuclear arsenal deployed on its territory: 176 ICBMs with 1,240 nuclear warheads and 44 strategic bombers armed with some 600 cruise missiles, as well as a large defense industry.

From the early days of its independence, Ukraine realized that the issue of this nuclear inheritance would be paramount in determining its relationship with the West. On October 24, 1991, the Rada

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[47] Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, *Postanova pro viis'kovi formuvannia na Ukraiini [Resolution on the Military Units in Ukraine] 1434-XII*, August 24, 1991, http://zakon2.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/1431-12.

[48] Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, *Postanova pro Ministra Oborony [Resolution on the Minister of Defense] 1473-XII*, September 3, 1991, http://zakon3.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/1473-12.

[49] "Stenogrammy Soveshchaniia Komitetov VS SSSR Po Voprosam Bezopasnosti i Predstavitelei Nezavisimykh Gosudarstv, g. Moskva, 28-29 noiabria 1991 g. [Transcript of the Meeting of the Committees of the Supreme Soviets of the USSR on Defense and Representatives of the Independent States, Moscow, November 28-29, 1991]," Fond 10026, Opis 4, Delo 3322, State Archive of the Russian Federation.

[50] Ibid.

[51] Ibid.

issued a statement reaffirming Ukraine's intention to become a non-nuclear state.[52] While Ukraine would later develop second thoughts about giving up its nuclear inheritance, at the time of establishment of the CIS, Ukraine's leaders still interpreted the presence of Soviet strategic nuclear forces on its territory as an impediment to full independence rather than as a security asset. In fact, it was upon Ukraine's insistence that the 1994 deadline for strategic forces withdrawal was included in the Minsk Agreement.[53]

Ukraine joined CIS nuclear arrangements out of political and technological necessity rather than an earnest desire to take part in a Russian-led nuclear alliance. At the same time, it expected to be brought in as an equal party to issues concerning nuclear arms on its territory until they are eliminated and the CIS arrangements recorded and perpetuated equal status of the nuclear successors. Under the Almaty agreement, for instance, all four nuclear successors upheld a no-first use principle and undertook an obligation not to transfer nuclear weapons to third parties, duties normally associated with nuclear weapons states under the NPT. Ukraine, together with Belarus and Kazakhstan, insisted and was ultimately included as "equal successor states" of the Soviet Union into strategic arms reduction (START) treaty, signed by the Unites States and the Soviet Union just weeks before the August coup and still due to be ratified.[54]

Given its determination to stay out of political unions with Moscow and disentangle itself from the Soviet conventional military, Ukraine certainly presented the hardest case for candidacy in a Russian-led alliance. The national-democratic opposition forces in the Rada and their constituencies in Western Ukraine and among Kyiv intelligentsia portrayed Russia as a historical oppressor and saw Ukraine's place within Europe. The majority of Ukraine's citizenry, as well as parliamentarians, however, had a more ambivalent view of Russia whom they saw as a distinct but kindred nation.[55]

Moreover, there were important political constituencies, which advocated close ties with Russia. These included parts of the military. In 1992-1993, a former commander of an ICBM division deployed in

[52] Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, *Zaiava pro Bez'iadernyi Status Ukraiiny [Statement on the Nonnuclear Status of Ukraine], 1697-XII*, 1991, http://zakon2.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/1697-12.
[53] Leonid Kravchuk, interview by Mariana Budjeryn, April 25, 2017.
[54] *Protocol to the Treaty Between the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics on the Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms*, 1992, https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/27389.pdf.
[55] Andrew Wilson, *Ukrainian Nationalism in the 1990s: A Minority Faith* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

Ukraine, General Volodymyr Toluko became a vocal supporter of Ukraine retaining a nuclear deterrent as part of a joint Russian-Ukrainian operation.[56] Ukraine's Chief of General Staff General Anatoliy Lopata in his memoirs related a call, sometime in 1994, from Russia's deputy defense minister General Boris Gromov, who proposed to leave strategic forces on Ukraine's territory under Russian operational control.[57] Lopata recalls that the idea was not unpopular with the General Staff, which was trying to avoid decommissioning some 30,000 strategic missile troops, and that some documents were signed until all efforts in this direction were thwarted by the Ukrainian foreign ministry.[58]

Another potentially pro-Russian constituency was the defense industry, in particular the enterprises involved in developing delivery vehicles and control systems for the Soviet strategic forces. Yuzhmash, Soviet Union's – and the world's – largest missile factory had a sway over Ukraine's politics. Its former director Leonid Kuchma served as Ukraine's prime-minister in 1992-1993 and in 1994 would be elected Ukraine's second president. Yuzhmash produced the best and newest types of heavy ICBMs with multiple independently targeted reentry vehicles (MIRVs) for the Soviet arsenal, including SS-18s, deployed in Russia and Kazakhstan, and SS-24s deployed in Russia and Ukraine. In the fall of 1991, Yuzhmash was actively lobbying Moscow for a contract to develop a new single warhead ICBM.[59] With the Soviet dissolution, Yuzhmash was facing a grim future unless cooperation with Russia could be sustained.

Throughout the winter of 1992, however, the position of Shaposhnikov and old Soviet military brass aimed at divulging as little to the republics as possible predictably clashed with Ukraine's drive to establish its own conventional army. The conflicts that erupted served to support the claims of Ukraine's national democrats that the new Russia was only a chip of the old imperialist block, silencing potential supporters of defense cooperation with Russia, and further exacerbated tensions Ukrainian-Russian relations.

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[56] Volodymyr Tolubko, "Iadernoie Oruzhiie, Kosmos, Flot: Resheniie Voprosov Ne Terpit Promedleniia [Nuclear Weapons, Space, and Navy: Decisions Cannot Be Delayed]," July 1, 1993, Fond 1, Delo 7058, List 99-106, Archive of the Ukrainian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

[57] Anatoliy Lopata, *Zapysky Nachalnyka Heneralnoho Shtabu Zbroinykh Syl Ukraïiny [Notes of the Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine]* (Kyiv: Voienna Rozvidka, 2015), 375.

[58] Ibid.

[59] Nikolai Sokov, *Russian Strategic Modernization: The Past and Future* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2000), 74.

In January 1992, the Rada defense and security committee recorded that Ukraine's efforts to establish an army are being met with "insane resistance" from the ex-Soviet defense establishment.[60] Reports emerged of CIS command dissuading officer corps from taking the Ukrainian military oath; other reports claimed that the bases under CIS command were being looted.[61] In February, six SU-24M bombers were flown out of a Ukrainian airbase to Russia. In a telegram to Yeltsin, Kravchuk accused the CIS command of a premeditated subversion and requested that the aircraft and the perpetrators are returned to Ukraine.[62] They never were.

The Black Sea Fleet (BSF) stationed in Crimea, which was also part of the CIS JSF, became a particularly thorny issue. In January 1992, a delegation of Ukrainian officials from the Rada and ministry of defense was humiliated when it was kept waiting at the gates of the BSF base for over two hours and in the end not allowed to enter.[63] By April 1992, Ukraine's defense minister Morozov reported to the Rada that the process of creation of independent Ukrainian Armed forces proved much more difficult than anticipated due to obstructions from the CIS command.[64]

The tug-of-war between CIS command and Ukraine's nascent defense establishment over the division of military assets spilled over into the nuclear realm. In March 1992, Kravchuk suspended the transfer of tactical nuclear weapons from Ukraine to Russia, declaring that Ukraine had no guarantee that these warheads were being destroyed in Russia.[65] The move was followed by a presidential decree that ordered Ukraine's defense ministry to immediately establish "direct" control over all armed forces on Ukraine's territory and "administrative" control over the strategic forces.[66] In a telegram to his CIS

[60] "Statement of the Commission on Defense and National Security of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine," January 17, 1992, Fond 1-P, Opis 1, Delo 2190, Central State Archive of Ukraine.

[61] For instance during a Rada session in April, MP V. Yatsuba reported the degradation of a base near the town of Krynychky in Dripropetrovs'k oblast in Eastern Ukraine and the looting of surface-to-air anti-aircraft cruise missiles "ZUR" stationed there. Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, "Stenohrama Plenarnoho Zasidannia. Zasidannia Sorok Tretie [Transcript of the Plenary Session. Session Forty Three]," April 8, 1992, 88, http://iportal.rada.gov.ua/meeting/stenogr/show/4700.html.

[62] "Telegram of President L. Kravchuk to President B. Yeltsin," February 17, 1992, Fond 5233, Opis 1, Delo 76, Central State Archive of Ukraine.

[63] "Letter of President L. Kravchuk to General Commander of the Armed Forces of the CIS Marshal E. Shaposhnikov," February 1, 1992, Fond 5233, Opis 1, Delo 76, Central State Archive of Ukraine.

[64] Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, "Stenohrama Plenarnoho Zasidannia. Zasidannia Sorok Tretie [Transcript of the Plenary Session. Session Forty Three]," 55.

[65] Serge Schmemann, "Ukraine Halting A-Arms Shift to Russia," *The New York Times*, March 13, 1992.

[66] President of Ukraine, *Ukaz pro nevidkladni zakhody po budivnytstvu Zbroinykh Syl Ukraiiny [Decree On Urgent Measures regarding the Establishment of the Armed Forces of Ukraine]*, 1992, http://zakon2.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/209/92.

counterparts, Kravchuk cited the interference of certain Russian officials and the CIS command in Ukraine's internal affairs as the reason for this new assertiveness.[67]

April 1992, marked the beginning of Kyiv's more reluctant stance toward unilateral and immediate denuclearization. The domestic and international controversy over Ukraine's nuclear stance would peak in late 1993, when Ukrainians briefly explored the option of keeping the 46 SS-24 ICBMs, produced by Yuzhmash.[68] Ukraine's reluctance to follow through on its commitments to join the NPT would alarm the West and anger Russia. It also precluded any flexibility in Russia's dealing with more friendly 'nuclear' republics, Belarus and Kazakhstan, and solidified the decision carry out the withdrawal of all strategic arms outside of the Russian territory as soon as possible.

Kazakhstan. Kazakhstan's conspicuous abstention in the Almaty and Minsk agreements from any commitments regarding denuclearization or NPT accession was instructive. Under the leadership of young and energetic president Nursultan Nazarbaev, Kazakhstan wanted greater economic independence, particularly the capacity to capture revenues from the republic's plentiful mineral and energy resources, but was keen to remain part of the renewed and reformed Soviet Union that provided security and international political weight. A nationalist opposition that rallied for full political independence was not allowed to formally participate in the March 1990 elections and thus their demands stayed outside of the official political sphere. Thus, as opposed to Belarus and Ukraine, Kazakhstan made no unilateral nuclear renunciation before the Soviet collapse for the simple reason that it envisioned itself firmly within the Soviet military fold.

In the wake of the August coup, Nazarbaev continued to support the idea of a reconstituted Union and came out categorically against any suggestion that nuclear weapons in Kazakhstan – some 104 SS-18 ICBMs carrying 10 warheads each and 40 TU-95MS strategic bombers armed with 370 ALCMs – should be removed from its territory.[69] As the Center increasingly lost political power throughout fall

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[67] "Telegram of President L. Kravchuk to the Heads of Commonwealth States," April 5, 1992, Fond 5233, Opis 1, Delo 42, Central State Archive of Ukraine.

[68] For a more detailed account of Ukraine's nuclear debates see Mariana Budjeryn and Polina Sinovets, *Interpreting the Bomb: Ownership and Deterrence in Ukraine's Nuclear Discourse*, NPIHP Working paper #12 (Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, December 13, 2017), https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/interpreting-the-bomb-ownership-and-deterrence-ukraines-nuclear-discourse; Mariana Budjeryn, "The Power of the NPT: International Norms and Ukraine's Nuclear Disarmament," *The Nonproliferation Review* 22, no. 2 (June 2015): 203–237.

[69] Harumi Tokunaga, "Kazakhstan's Nazarbayev on Nuclear Control, Japan," *Asahi Shimbun in FBIS-SOV-91-191-A*, September 21, 1991.

1991, Nazarbaev floated the idea of dual nuclear control. In an interview in November 1991, Nazarbayev stated:

> Kazakhstan does not claim the role of a nuclear power either of the global or regional level. At the same time, it is not going to become a nuclear hostage of the center or Russia if it unilaterally proclaims itself as successor to the Union in the military field. The solution of the problem lies in establishing a double control over nuclear weapons.[70]

When the Soviet Union was dead, Nazarbayev labored persistently to preserve a single military and a political union within the CIS. There were at least two reasons for this. One was military necessity: Kazakhstan's enormous territory, world's ninth largest, in the middle of Eurasian landmass, with some 7,500 mi of borders, was populated by mere 16 million in 1991, more than half of which were not ethnic Kazakh. The lion's share of officer corps in the Soviet military were Slavs. After the Soviet collapse, those serving in Kazakhstan were eager to return to their home republic.[71] Kazakhstan's initial plan was to create a 20,000-strong national guard but even this number proved difficult to enlist.[72] In short, Kazakhstan risked being left without an army. Another reason was political: not unlike other republics, Kazakhstan was apprehensive of Russia emerging the dominant force and a nuclear monopoly in the post-Soviet space. Nazarbayev was thus hoping that a strong collective body, in which Kazakhstan could have a say, would serve to contain Russia, a sort of 'containment by engagement' strategy.[73]

On the military issues, Nazarbayev and Shaposhnikov saw eye to eye, and perhaps strong support from the former served to encourage the later. Yet, as we saw above, efforts to preserve a single or even united military force proved counterproductive in view of the Ukrainian position, but also, as we shall see below, due to the emergent opposition in Russia itself. Seeing that the CIS is getting mired in dysfunction, Nazarbayev became the driving force behind the Collective Security Treaty, which was ultimately signed in Tashkent on May 15, 1992 by Russia, Kazakhstan, Armenia, Uzbekistan,

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[70] "Nazarbayev Comments in TRUD on Arms, Yeltsin," *TASS in FBIS-SOV-91-218*, November 9, 1991.
[71] Vladimir Ardaev, "AWOL," *The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 49, no. 8 (October 1993): 36.
[72] Martha Brill Olcott, *The Kazakhs* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1995), 288–9.
[73] Mikhail Alexandrov, *Uneasy Alliance: Relations Between Russia and Kazakhstan in the Post-Soviet Era, 1992-1997* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999).

Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan.[74] Nazarbayev was keen to interpret this alliance with Russia as a license to leave strategic nuclear forces on the Kazakh territory under Russian operational control. Indeed, during his first visit to Washington on May 18-20, 1992, Nazarbayev continued to insist that the question of stationing of nuclear weapons in Kazakhstan should be decided between Russia and Kazakhstan, as allies, and even brought with him a representative of the Russian General Staff, who could help him address nuclear-specific questions.[75]

Yet increasing concerns about Ukraine's new nuclear assertiveness, uncertainties about possible future development in Kazakhstan, and the change of mood within Russia all combined to consolidate a joint US-Russian position that all nuclear arms from the non-Russian republics would be removed. The signature of the so-called Lisbon protocol on May 23, 1992 that admitted Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan as parties to START, as well as the accompanying letters of the presidents of these states, formalized their acquiescence to complete withdrawal.[76]

Belarus. Similarities of paths taken by Belarus and Ukraine toward their independence ended with the demise of the Soviet Union. The national-democratic opposition in Belarus was far weaker than in Ukraine, comprising only some 10% of the parliamentary seats. Even though Belarus's declarations of neutrality and nuclear renunciation closely mirrored those of Ukraine, the government and the military were favorably disposed to cooperating with Russia.

Unlike Ukraine, which was reluctant to relinquish the former Soviet space to Russian domination, Belarus saw itself as Russia's partner in whatever post-Soviet settlement Russia would build, partly out of futility of resistance, partly due to common history and military tradition. Furthermore, Belarus, a republic of just 10 million people, was highly militarized: according to Belarusian prime minister Vyacheslav Kebich, one in every 43 inhabitants of Belarus was military, while the ratio in Ukraine was

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[74] According to Russian foreign ministry, the treaty was Nazarbayev's idea and was drafted jointly with the CIS high command. The ministry complained that its input in the draft of the treaty was ignored. Committee on Foreign Affairs and Foreign-Economic Relations of the Supreme Soviet of the Russian Federation, "Stenogramma Parlamentskikh Slushanii Po Obsuzhdeniiu Dogovora o Kollektivnoi Bezopasnosti [Transcript of Parliamentary Hearings of the Collective Security Treaty]," October 30, 1992, Fond 10026, Opis 4, Delo 2615, State Archive of the Russian Federation.
[75] Nursultan Nazarbayev, *My Life, My Time and the Future...*, trans. Peter Conradi (Northamptonshire: Pilkington Press Ltd, 1998), 148.
[76] The texts of all three letters are reprinted in *Arms Control Today*, June 1992, 35-36.

one in 98 and in Russia – one in 634.[77] As a small independent nation, burdened disproportionately with the aftermath of the Chernobyl disaster, Belarus could not sustain this number of troops and finance the military infrastructure associated with it.

Belarusian leaders fully supported Gorbachev's idea of the reformed Union and the preservation of the single military within the CIS.[78] Indeed, even after the Soviet collapse, Moscow continued to execute left-over military plans: a further division of single-warhead mobile SS-25 ICBMs was deployed to Belarus, likely in February 1992, bringing the total number of these missiles on its territory from 54 to 81.[79]

Belarus signed up to all CIS joint military arrangements nuclear and conventional, although its proclaimed neutrality prevented it from joining the Collective Security Treaty in May 1992. Despite that, in July 1992, Belarus and Russia signed a package of agreements on cooperation in military sphere, where Russia assumed direct command and control over all strategic forces units in Belarus until they were removed. This gave Russia temporary command and financial responsibility for some 33,000 troops, 160 military units and installations in dozens of locations across the country.[80]

These ties with Russia were only strengthened after Aleksandr Lukashenka was elected president in July 1994. Under his leadership, Belarus dropped its claim to neutrality and signed the Collective Security Treaty. Like Nazarbayev before him, Lukashenka tried, ultimately unsuccessfully, to use the alliance with Moscow as a reason for preventing the full withdrawal of Russian ICBMs from Belarus's

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[77] Quoted in Jan Zaprudnik, *Belarus: At the Crossroads of History* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, Inc., 1993), 207.

[78] Petr Kravchenko, *Belarus Na Rasputie, Ili Pravda o Belovezhskom Soglashenii: Zapiski Diplomata i Politika [Belarus at the Crossroads, or Truth about Belavezha Accords: Notes of a Diplomat and Politician]* (Moscow: Vremia, 2006), 145. Kravchenko served as Belarus's first foreign minister in 1991-1993.

[79] Mark D. Skootsky, "An Annotated Chronology of Post-Soviet Nuclear Disarmament 1991-1994," *The Nonproliferation Review* 2, no. 3 (Spring-Summer 1995): 69.

[80] "'Prilozheniie 1. Spisok Soiedineii, Chastei i Uchrezhenii RVSN Vkliuchennikh v Strategicheskie Sily.' Dokumenty Po Vstreche Pravitelstv Respubliki Belarus i Rossiiskoi Federatsii 20 Iiulia 1992 Goda ["Attachment 1. List of Detachments, Units and Facilities of Strategic Rocket Forces Included in Strategic Forces." Documents of the Meeting of the Governments of the Republic of Belarus and the Russian Federation on July 20, 1992]," n.d., Fond 968, Opis 11, Delo 14, List 35-36, National Archive of the Republic of Belarus; "'Prilozheniie 2. Spisok Soiedineii, Chastei i Uchrezhenii Strategicheskikh Sil Vremenno Razmeshchennykh Na Terretorii Respubliki Belarus.' Dokumenty Po Vstreche Pravitelstv Respubliki Belarus i Rossiiskoi Federatsii 20 Iiulia 1992 Goda ["Attachment 2. List of Detachments, Units and Facilities of Strategic Forces Temporarily Stationed on the Territory of the Republic of Belarus." Documents of the Meeting of the Governments of the Republic of Belarus and the Russian Federation on July 20, 1992]," n.d., Fond 968, Opis 11, Delo 14, List 37-45, National Archive of the Republic of Belarus.

territory.[81]   In the end, Belarus proved Moscow's most pliable and loyal ally and enjoys the highest degree of integration with Russia in the military sphere of all CSTO members.

Russia, the Dependent Patron

While the preference to preserve the single military-strategic space seemed to prevail in the CIS arrangements, there was another take on Russia's national security narrative that was quickly emerging in Moscow. This other narrative came from academic circles and young westernized reformers in Moscow's foreign policy circles. These 'Young Turks' saw the surrounding republics as a ballast of dependencies, which Russia needed to drop to westernize and develop quickly.[82] More than republican free-riding on Russia's resources, it was the dependence of Russia on the republics, especially Ukraine, in the military realm that was threatening to Russian national interests.

As much, or perhaps more so than other constituent Soviet republics, Russia was undergoing a difficult redefinition of its identity and purposes in the world, in which the Cold War was over and so was the Soviet Union. Georgiy Shakhnazarov, Soviet political scientist and a reformer on Gorbachev's team, characterized this process as a split of Russian national consciousness between two tendencies, a struggle between which presented a historical choice.[83] One was to become a nation state and integrate into European and international community, the other was to remain a Eurasian superpower.[84]

In November 1991, a memorandum outlining this autarchic security policy, drafted by Sergei Rogov and Andrei Kokoshin of ISKAN was circulated to the key officials in Moscow, but not to Gorbachev or the leaders of the republics.[85]   The memo proposed to cut off essential military-industrial ties to the republics:

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[81] Viktor Litovkin, "President Lukashenka Has Suspended the Withdrawal of the Russian Strategic Forces from Belarus," *Izvestiya in FBIS-SOV-95-129*, July 6, 1995.

[82] See Andrei Tsygankov, "The Return to Eurasia: Russia's Identity and Geoeconomic Choices in the Post-Soviet World," in *Economic Nationalism in a Globalizing World*, ed. Eric Helleiner and Andreas Pickel (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005).

[83] Georgy Shakhnazarov, *Tsena Svobody. Reformatsiia Gorbacheva Glazami Iego Pomoshchnika [The Price of Freedom. Gorbachev's Reformation Through the Eyes of His Aid]* (Moscow: Rossika, 1993), 193–4.

[84] Georgy Shakhnazarov, *Tsena Svobody. Reformatsiia Gorbacheva Glazami Iego Pomoshchnika [The Price of Freedom. Gorbachev's Reformation Through the Eyes of His Aid]* (Moscow: Rossika, 1993), 194.

[85] Sokov, *Russian Strategic Modernization: The Past and Future*, 91–94.

Beginning in the middle of 1992, all R&D performed by chief designers outside Russia should be terminated. First of all, this measure should affect NPO Yuzhnoye, plants in Dnepropetrovsk and Pavlograd… If these measures are not taken, a real danger of a military-technical dependency of our country could emerge, in particular from Ukraine, a danger of losing strategic information to the West and, in practice, of long-term financing of Ukraine's economy from the Russian budget.[86]

Sergei Rogov at ISKAN, Sergei Karaganov at the Institute of Europe, Andrei Kokoshin, who in April 1992 became deputy minister of defense, and Andrei Kozyrev, Russia's new minister of foreign affairs would become the chief advocates and implementers of this Russian nation-state security policy in 1992-1993. This approach struggled on adequate prescriptions for Russian policy toward Ukraine. In a January 1992 report, Karaganov, for instance, argued that while Russia should treat Ukraine as a "potentially friendly state," it should also aim to curb its economic independence and growth as well as make careful attempts to isolate it internationally and prevent it from receiving foreign aid.[87] Needless to say, such an approach was hardly conducive to cultivating an ally.

One of the main tenets of this policy was the indisputable status of Russia as the only legitimate nuclear successor of the Soviet Union, something the CIS joint strategic command served to obscure. Russia put up a staunch opposition to multilateralizing START, insisting that the treaty concerned Russia alone. At a meeting of CIS foreign ministers in April 1992, foreign minister Kozyrev stated: "If Ukraine is a nuclear-free state and in the near future becomes a member of the [NPT] as a nuclear-free state, then it is absolutely unclear how it can be a side in the treaty on strategic offensive arms, which just deals with the nuclear arsenal."[88]

While START was in the end multilateralized by the Lisbon protocol, which recognized Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan as equal successor states in relation to that treaty, Russia refused to

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[86] "Letter of A. Kokoshin and S. Rogov to A. Kozyrev, 'O Predlozheniyakh Presidentov SSSR i SShA i Interesakh Natsionalnoi Bezopasnosti Rossii' [On Proposals of the Presidents of USSR and USA and the National Security Interests of Russia]," November 21, 1991; in Sokov, *Russian Strategic Modernization: The Past and Future*, 93.

[87] Sergei Karaganov, "O Politike v Otnoshenii Ukrainy [On Policy in Relation to Ukraine]," January 24, 1992, Fond 10026, Opis 4, Delo 1277, State Archive of the Russian Federation.

[88] "'Discrepancy' in Ukraine's Claim Eyed," *Radio Mayak in FBIS-SOV-92-071*, April 12, 1992.

acknowledge the legitimacy of any claim by the non-Russian Soviet successors deriving from that recognition. This contributed to tensions in relations with Ukraine, who thought it was entitled to financial compensation and security guarantees in exchange for surrendering what Ukraine thought rightfully belonged to it.

The effort to end Russia's dependence on the former republics also contributed to Russia's acquiescence to START-II, a de-MIRVing treaty with the United States. Soviet strategic establishment had long resisted US proposals for de-MIRVing ICBMs, considering the significance of heavy MIRVed ICBMs in Soviet strategic triad. For the Young Turks, however, START-II would kill two birds with one stone: it would cut off Ukraine's Yuzhmash, the major producer of MIRVed ICBMs for the Soviet arsenal, and ensure the disarmament of Ukraine and Kazakhstan, where all ICBMs deployed were MIRVed. Due to their efforts, the basic positions of START-II were agreed during the first Yeltsin-Bush summit in June 1992 in Washington. At the hearings of Russia's legislative Committee on defense and security in March 1993, foreign minister Kozyrev, chief of Russian General Staff Mikhail Kolesnikov, and defense intellectuals from Russia's think tanks all cited Ukraine as a major reason for acquiescing to START-II.[89]

While the approach of Shaposhnikov and traditionalists in the old Soviet military establishment damaged the prospects of a post-Soviet alliance by trying to do too much, the Young Turks undermined the prospects of an alliance by doing too little to maintain Russia's leadership position vis-à-vis its potential junior allies. They treated the republics as burdensome leftovers from the Soviet days and as competitors in a scramble for Western aid. Their successful push for cutting defense-industrial ties with Ukraine, lost for Russia the support of Ukraine's powerful missile lobby, a potential advocate for a defense alliance with Russia. Ultimately, Russia was successful in preserving its nuclear monopoly in the post-Soviet space: by the end of 1994, Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan joined the NPT as non-nuclear-weapons states and proceeded, with US technical assistance, to dismantle their strategic nuclear systems. At the same time, it marked further strategic retreat for Russia and made the loss of Ukraine, as a potential ally, all the more certain.

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[89] Committee on Defense and Security of the Supreme Soviet of the Russian Federation, "Stenogramma Slushaniy Komiteta Po SNV-2 [Transcript of Committee Hearings on START-2]," March 2, 1993, Fond 10026, Opis 4, Delo 3189, State Archive of the Russian Federation.

Conclusion

Rome was not built in a day, nor was the Soviet Union demolished overnight. As central political structures collapsed and transmutated into those of the newly independent states, the giant Soviet armed forces and defense-industrial complex stood intact. It took time and effort to dismantle. A reconstitution of former Soviet space along the lines of a defense alliance between newly independent states was not an unrealistic possibility. In the immediate aftermath of the Soviet collapse, there was at least as much pull to preserve a sort of military alliance in the former Soviet space as there was the rejection of it. Ukraine notwithstanding, most republics were favorable toward continuing military and defense cooperation within the former Soviet realm. Few republics had well-defined strategic interests.

Two most important potential allies became the two main impediments to the success of a post-Soviet nuclear alliance. Ukraine's insistence on creating its own armed forces, removing military linkages to Moscow, and staying out of military and political arrangements within the CIS, made it a challenging candidate for an ally. Kazakhstan's collusion with the CIS command in 1991 and early 1992, to preserve the single post-Soviet armed forces and supranational political structures within the framework of the CIS, created ground for unnecessary conflict, particularly between Moscow and Kyiv. This served to only harden Ukraine's resolve to pull away and exacerbated impediment number one.

Meanwhile Russia failed to find the approach that could accommodate its most important potential allies. Despite proclaimed goals to reconstruct relationship with the republics along the lines of a collective security system, political preferences in Moscow oscillated between attempts to preserve the single military force and complete disentanglement with the former republics for the fear of dependence that could compromise its strategic deterrent. The latter position, in turn, disappointed potential Russian allies in the former Soviet republics, including political constituencies inside intransigent Ukraine, such as a group of industrialists from Eastern Ukraine. Russia was not a passive onlooker, but an active participant in dismembering the Soviet military and defense complex.

Strategic nuclear forces deployed on the territory of Russia's key potential junior allies - Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and Belarus - played an ambiguous role in the effort to maintain an alliance in the former Soviet space. On the one hand, due to military-institutional connections and the centralized command

and control, the former Soviet strategic forces had the potential for serving as a basis upon which a Russian-led alliance could be built. On the other hand, in Ukraine, this entanglement, combined with the country's course to create an independent conventional military, created a venue for friction and conflict with Moscow that solidified the decision to withdraw all strategic arms from territories outside of Russia. The mighty Strategic nuclear forces that underpinned Soviet Union's status as a superpower became one of the obstacles to Russia's preservation of a post-Soviet alliance after the Soviet collapse.