

## BELARUSIAN-RUSSIAN INTEGRATION AND ITS IMPACT ON THE SECURITY OF UKRAINE



The emergence of Belarus as an independent state on the political map of Europe has considerably modified Europe's geopolitical landscape. Belarus sits at the crossroads of the military and political interests of key neighboring states and even the major powers of Europe. It has had a sizable impact on the internal developments of its immediate neighbors and on the balance of forces in Eastern Europe.

Belarusian influence is a result of its geopolitical situation, not its size or economic potential. It is situated halfway between the northern and southern subregions of Eastern Europe and between Russia and the Europe of NATO and the EU, a junction that explains its vast geopolitical and military importance. It is defined in part by its ability to act as a link among the three highly dynamic subregions of Europe:

- The first of these is comprised of the Central European nations, such as Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary - nations seeking to integrate themselves into Western political/military/economic structures. Belarus is a crucial neighbor of this subregion and forms a key transportation corridor between Central Europe and Russia. Nearly 70 percent of Russia's exports to Europe pass through Belarus. Without access to this route, Russia would find itself economically and geopolitically isolated from Europe.

- The second subregion, to the immediate north of Belarus, comprises the North European region of Scandinavia and the Baltic Sea states. The three Baltic states of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia have been vigorously integrating themselves into this northern region. By looking north to Scandinavia and west to Germany and Poland, the Baltic states make plain their intention of seeking full-fledged membership in all European structures.

- The third subregion, to the south of Belarus, is the Black Sea area, a fast-growing zone of economic cooperation. Many states in this subregion would like to foster closer ties and links with Northern Europe. This ambition is embodied in the notion of a formal Baltic-Black Sea mechanism for cooperation, announced by former Ukrainian president Leonid Kravchuk. In any such mechanism, Belarus would be a key actor, whether to facilitate or complicate cooperation between north and south. The idea of a Baltic-Black Sea confederation of Lithuania, Belarus, and Ukraine was once put forward by an earlier generation of Ukrainian statesmen and thinkers, chiefly Mikhaïlo Hrushevsky and Stepan Rudnitsky, and then was revived by President Kravchuk in the early 1990s. Belarus's strong pro-Russian attitude, however, has considerably damaged this particular vector of Eastern European integration.

Belarus therefore finds itself in a geopolitical field defined by interaction along four external vectors: north, south, east, and west. The Baltic states, Poland, Ukraine, NATO, the EU, and Russia will all exert their influence on Belarus and be affected in turn by Minsk's response. The

relative strength of developments on these vectors will also help shape Belarus's foreign policy priorities.

The Russian Federation is and probably will remain the strongest influence on the domestic and foreign policies of Belarus. Because of Belarus's geopolitical location and its geostrategic importance; Russia assigns high priority to Belarus. The territory in question constitutes a sort of a springboard that, depending on the particular military-political objectives being pursued, can turn Belarus into a modern day cordon sanitaire, a nuclear-free zone and a zone that counters NATO enlargement, or a zone of expanded external pressure and influence. The military presence of any foreign country in Belarus makes it possible for such a country to put pressure on Ukraine, the Baltics, Poland, and Russia itself—for the simple reason that the shortest route from the West to Moscow cuts through Belarusian territory. In that sense Belarus serves as Russia's natural shield, one that has repeatedly prevented or at least delayed military expansion from the West. Its geographic location has always made Belarus hostage to whatever differences Russia may have had with the West, and for this Belarus has paid a high price. Belarus lost 3 million people (out of a population of 10 million) during World War II alone. Control over Belarus has long been seen as the key to control over Eastern Europe as a whole, and Belarus has always ended up in the midst of East-West military-strategic rivalry.

Which aspect of Belarus's geopolitical position is most important depends on the perspective from which it is evaluated. From the north-south perspective, Belarus is most valuable as a security zone. Strengthening the north-south vector helps solidify Belarus's independent foreign policy course and reduces the chance of resumed confrontation between Russia and the West. Certain political forces in the West, as well as in the Central European countries, tend to view Belarus as a buffer zone, protecting Central and Western Europe against relapses of Russian expansionism.

From the Russian perspective, Belarus's military-strategic significance depends on which model of military-political relations between the West and Russia prevails. The three most likely models are the following:

- Russia exerts limited military-political influence on Central Europe. Since the Central European nations joined NATO in 1999, this scenario could only occur if NATO eventually withered as the key security institution in Europe. Such a scenario does not appear likely. NATO seems, for example, to have withstood the challenge of Kosovo. Moreover, even if the preconditions were in place, implementation of this model would require both the deployment of powerful Russian or Russian-Belarusian military forces near the Polish and Lithuanian borders, and the absence of a similar military force in Poland and the Baltics. Given the current weakness of Russian forces, such a deployment does not seem very likely in the near future.

- Russia uses Belarus as a region to counteract U.S. and Western influence in East-Central Europe. This model is possible if Russia, unhappy with the post-Madrid compromise with NATO, attempts a more confrontational strategy toward the West [1]. This strategy would inevitably result in Russia's construction of a western defense barrier from the Baltic to the Black Sea, consisting of the Kaliningrad region of the Russian Federation and; Belarus, along with attempts to include Ukraine and Moldova in the structure. Belarus would be the principal component of such a defense line, since it is the centerpiece of this axis and, shares a border with Poland, NATO's newest member, on the forward line of the collective defense system of the Atlantic alliance. The presence of a powerful military force in Belarus would enable Russia to maintain a certain balance of forward-based forces relative to NATO.

- Russia exerts military-political dominance over the Commonwealth of Independent States and the Baltics. This model becomes possible if Russia reaches a consensus with the West that recognizes, officially or unofficially, Russia's dominance in the post-Soviet space, and that views the CIS countries as a zone of Russia's vital interests. In this scenario Belarus plays the role of

"model vassal", since it serves as a testing ground for working out various approaches to military-political reintegration of the CIS countries into Russia's sphere of interest.

The Russia-NATO Founding Act of 1997, if it holds and develops according to plan, essentially limits Russia's immediate choice of a security model to the last one. The potential role of Belarus, given its highly developed military infrastructure, is, however, similar regardless of the particular model. Belarus is home to Russia's first line of early-warning missile attack systems. An example is the Russian military facility in Baranovichi. Belarus also boasts having a key Russian naval communications center and a ramified network of military airfields, all in good working order and well equipped. The problem, however, is that the Russian Air Force is far inferior to that of NATO, making any serious development of a confrontational strategy problematic in the near term.

### THE SECURITY INTERESTS OF UKRAINE

As far as Ukraine is concerned, none of the above models meets its security interests. The impact of Belarus's geostrategic position on Ukrainian security has been reflected in Ukraine's defense concept and military doctrine. Ukraine's Soviet legacy includes individual components of the forward strategic defense line. While these were the most powerful components of the Soviet defense posture, in Ukraine's case they are located in the western parts of the country, facing what the Soviets regarded as the main threats, but not what Ukraine might face today.

Ukraine has articulated a new defense concept in its Program for Reforming and Building the Armed Forces of Ukraine until 2005 [2]. A basic assumption of the program, and of Ukrainian security policy as a whole, is that Ukraine will remain outside any military bloc or alliance. The country's limited military potential, however, makes it impossible to set up multiple lines of defense in all directions. Therefore one of the goals of Ukraine's defense policy is to identify the key strategic directions on which to concentrate the bulk of its defense potential. Such directions will be determined based on an evaluation of its probable enemies, the disruption that restructuring might cause to the existing balance of forces, and an assessment of the most vulnerable parts of Ukrainian territory. Because Ukraine does not see any country as a military enemy, and because the balance of forces in the vicinity of its borders does not pose an immediate military threat, the criterion of Ukraine's territorial vulnerability is emerging as the most important.

In previous wars, the gravest danger to Ukraine's security and defenses came from the north. The first government of newly independent Ukraine was toppled by Bolshevik troops attacking from Bryansk in 1918. A second offensive was launched against the fragile Ukrainian state from the area of Gomel (now part of Belarus). Nazi troops mounted their offensive from the same direction in 1941 and were able to encircle a group of Soviet forces in the vicinity of Kiev. In the past, the northern direction was preferred because of the minimal depth of offensive action required to seize the capital of Ukraine: from that direction the distance between Ukraine's border and Kiev is a mere 90 kilometers. From this perspective, Ukrainian defenses appear to be most vulnerable from the direction of Belarus. Recognition of the importance of that particular direction was one of the reasons for the formation of the Northern Operational Territorial Command, a third military-administrative unit in the Ukrainian armed forces at the operational-strategic level.

Undoubtedly, an independent Belarus does not threaten Ukraine. But Belarus's geopolitical choice will determine whether or not its territory will be used to bring military pressure on Ukraine, as has happened in the past. Given its current geopolitical situation, Ukraine would benefit most from a nonbloc, neutral Belarus. Hence Kiev naturally looks with suspicion at the military consequences of Russian-Belarusian integration.

## FROM NONBLOC STATUS TO ALLIANCE WITH RUSSIA?

As with Ukraine, Belarus's 1990 Declaration of Sovereignty stated that its ultimate foreign policy objective was neutrality and a nonbloc status. The neutrality model that Ukraine, Belarus, and, subsequently, Moldova originally opted for was one of "instrumental neutrality." It involved no rigorous international legal obligations and granted vast freedom of action, including involvement in collective security systems. This model by and large reflected the newly independent states' reaction to the collapse of the bipolar security system.

Generally, neutral nonbloc status is sought by countries whose independence and sovereignty already have a rock-solid platform. The formal status ratifies existing conditions that provide the neutral country with the means to achieve national security. To the CIS nations, however, declaring neutrality and a nonbloc status became a way of achieving sovereignty. It could not be viewed as a mature statement of national security and foreign policy strategy. Yet even in their initial formulations Ukraine and Belarus differed in their respective approaches to neutrality and the avoidance of military blocs.

From the beginning, Ukraine's embrace of neutrality and nonbloc status was an expression of its policy toward Russia, not NATO. Kiev assumed that Russia, being the legal successor to the USSR, would not easily give up its military-political claims to Ukraine. Russia regularly sought to secure Ukraine's adherence to the Tashkent Collective Security Treaty of 1992 and to bilateral agreements on military cooperation. Ukraine's nonbloc principle has enabled it to avoid all such entanglements with Russia or the CIS. In addition, nonbloc status better than any other accommodates the domestic political situation in Ukraine, in which different regions still harbor different geopolitical orientations. Nonbloc status thus serves the interest of internal political stability as well.

For Belarus, to the contrary, the nonbloc and neutral status had a narrower, more transient, and tactical nature. Belarusian leaders saw the declaration of neutrality and nonaffiliation with military blocs as a way to constrain NATO and prevent pro-Western and pro-NATO sentiments from gaining ground among the Belarusian public. Belarus's communist elite also used nonbloc status as a way to insulate itself from the democratic processes under way in Russia.

Strong pro-Russian sentiments among the Belarusian public, however, forced the national leaders to abandon the country's neutrality and nonbloc status soon after it was declared and to move quickly toward a closer relationship with Russia. The change in Belarus's foreign policy was made, above all, for economic reasons. The most hard-core opponents of Belarus's nonbloc status were the managers of the military-industrial complex, who had considerable influence with the national leadership. More than 100 defense factories in Belarus needed a market. Military production in Belarus depended on Russian-made components, making an eloquent case for closer military-political ties with Moscow. The Belarusian military, too, kept pushing for the alliance, aware that the nation's military industry could meet only 3 percent to 5 percent of the Belarusian armed forces' requirements in armaments and materiel [3]. In 1993, Stanislau Shushkevich, the first leader of independent Belarus, yielded to pressure from industrialists and the military and reluctantly agreed to let Belarus join the Tashkent Collective Security Treaty.

The expected growth of military orders from Russia never took place, although the pro-Russian stance came to prevail and dominate the politics, economy, society, and culture of Belarus. Elected president in 1994, Aleksandr Lukashenko came to personify and embody that trend, as he proposed a model of profound political, military, and economic integration with Russia.

The complete dependence of the Belarusian economy on Russian oil and gas, and the absence of hard currency in Belarus, made integration almost a must. With barter as the principal form of trade, Belarus was unable to reach outside the CIS framework for markets. In the mid-



1990s, Belarus failed to convince Russia to subsidize 50 percent of its oil exports to Belarus and to reschedule Belarus's huge debt in exchange for increased deliveries of farming and industrial products from that country. Bilateral negotiations in 1994 demonstrated that Russia would only write off the \$1.5 billion worth of Belarus's debt if Belarus were to fully reintegrate itself into Russian Federation [4]. To prevent social upheaval and economic collapse, Lukashenko accepted the Kremlin's rules of the game, a step that resulted in the signing of the Union Treaty by Belarus and Russia in the spring of 1997.

### **BELARUS'S ROLE IN RUSSIA'S REINTEGRATION POLICY**

When he came to power in 1994, Lukashenko found Belarus in a difficult economic situation. He had two options to pursue to maintain Belarus's highly developed economic base and social stability. One was comprehensive market reform, which would reorient Belarus's economy toward the West and weaken its dependence on Russia, a course similar to that adopted by the Baltic republics. The other option was to make few changes in the economy and to climb to a priority position in the CIS by reestablishing, to the extent possible, the economic ties that had existed under the once unified economic regime of the USSR.

Lukashenko's choice was predetermined by Belarus's complete economic dependence on the CIS nations, above all Russia. Belarus depended on that market for 70 percent of its raw materials, 90 percent of its energy needs, 80 percent of its imports, and 90 percent of its exports [5]. Lukashenko's policy of integration was highly popular, supported by 90 percent of the population in some polls. Eventually this policy also came to coincide with a revival of Russia's reintegration desires. To take significant steps toward integration, the Belarusian leadership had to fit its needs into the framework of Moscow's reintegration plans.

In his foreign policy strategy, Lukashenko has thoroughly exploited the ideas of pan-Slavism, laying claim to the role of unifier of the Slavic world. These ideas are based on the symbols of Slavic brotherhood, the Slavic triangle of Belarus-Russia-Ukraine, a single pan-Slavic state, or the great power symbols of a restored USSR. As he called on Ukraine to join the Belarus-Russia union during a visit to Kiev in May 1997, Lukashenko noted, "God has so ruled and destiny has so determined that we have set our sights very high, lately, and people have begun to talk about us as a commonsense-driven republic capable of implementing Slavic unity... this is our burden that we have to carry; we must try and glue back together the great Slavic world [6]." Lukashenko limited his definition of the Slavic world to the CIS borders, however, never mentioning that at least half of that world lay to the west of his country's borders.

Whereas Ukraine adhered to the strategy of acting as a bridge between Russia and the West, Belarus tried to play the role of a bridge between Ukraine and Russia. Where Ukraine is seen as a key factor of European stability, Belarus could be referred to as a key factor of the CIS integration. Yet neither Belarus nor Russia can be happy with the current integration processes in the CIS. Hundreds of agreements and accords signed within the CIS framework never went beyond the paper on which they were written. Since 1990, the turnover of goods among the CIS countries has dropped significantly because of basic differences in the way CIS countries approach relations among post-Soviet countries. Russia and, more recently, Belarus view the commonwealth as a stepping stone on the way to a single state, or a substantially integrated union. The other CIS members see the commonwealth as a form of "civilized divorce" and a way to put interstate relations on an equitable, mutually beneficial basis.

These two views are diametrically opposed. Russia has claimed the key positions in all CIS structures, virtually subordinating the other countries to its national interests and essentially seeking to recreate a single state on the basis of the commonwealth. The resulting encroachment on the interests of the other CIS members has prompted them to deepen bilateral and mul-

tilateral cooperation with each other and beyond the borders of the CIS. At least three different processes are taking place within the CIS at present: (1) the reintegration that Russia vigorously lobbied for; (2) disintegration in response to the first process; and (3) an integration intended to strengthen bilateral cooperation at the interstate level. The third trend leads to the emergence of regional power centers other than Moscow, a phenomenon that Russia sees as a threat to its security and domination [7].

The union of Russia and Belarus embodies both reintegration and integration. Such processes lead to the formation of supranational structures. Russia needs a supranational structure to bring the CIS nations into the embrace of its own statehood. Belarus needs a supranational structure as a formal mechanism for manipulating Russia's governmental institutions in its own interests.

The creation of supranational structures dominated by Russia means changing the relations of dependence currently existing in the CIS to relations of subordination that paradoxically would derail the commonwealth or, at the very least, strengthen the disintegrative tendencies within it. It is no accident that most of the CIS leaders have reacted coldly to the Belarus-Russia partnership. Ukraine's President Kuchma stated, for example, that "unification of countries at different levels within the CIS is nonsense. It is a road to the collapse of the commonwealth" [8].

Advancement of reintegration and integration processes in Belarus-Russia relations will take place within the framework of confederation-federation. Russia's strategic objective is to incorporate Belarus as a subject of the Federation. Some in Russia would like to see unification lead to the creation of a single federated state [9]. Many in the Russian foreign policy community support the idea of Belarus joining Russia as a new subject of the Russian Federation, or as six separate subjects (corresponding to Belarus's six regions) [10]. The Belarusian leaders, however, will not give up sovereignty to the point at which they lose complete authority in their own country. Hence they opt for a confederation.

### **THE 1997 UNION TREATY OF RUSSIA AND BELARUS**

Currently, the most promising form of Russia-Belarus unification is the confederation that has been formalized as the Belarus-Russia union. The name of the union does not refer to Russia as the Russian Federation. Is this omission meaningful? Creation of a confederation on the basis of or within the Russian Federation would result in the disintegration of the confederation itself, as well as in the collapse of the Russian state, because oblasts and autonomous regions within the Russian Federation would demand a similar confederate status. What has Belarus gained from being in the union? In the short run it has gained concrete economic support for its failing economy. This support includes Russia's continued acceptance of Belarusian manufactured goods, often through barter arrangements, the management of Belarus's energy debt, the development of joint infrastructure, unified transport and energy systems, an integrated communications and information system, and joint research and technological programs. In exchange, Belarus is obliged to apply to its other trade partners the same foreign trade treatment, customs tariffs, and nontariff regulations as Russia does. With regard to Ukraine, such regulations would tie Belarus to Russia's lead, should Russia adopt discriminatory trade measures in its dealings with Ukraine.

Belarus must also coordinate its policies with Russia if it is to make use of the economic potential of the union and create an environment for the activities of Russian transnational corporations and financial-industrial groups. Such coordination inevitably leads to the preservation of Belarus's structural dependence on the Russian economy. By looking exclusively toward Russia and honoring the provisions of the Union Charter, Belarus will eventually isolate itself from

international economic relations, trends, and structures. It is worth noting, however, that in most cases advanced and state-of-the-art technologies are not to be found in Russia these days, but elsewhere.

In the military-political area, Belarus could in theory count on the union to help develop and pursue joint military purchases, ensure deliveries of arms and materiel on the basis of those purchases, and create a unified system of technical support for the nation's armed forces. There is little hope, however, that such support will be forth-coming from the arrangement. The Russian defense ministry, like its Belarusian counterpart, is strapped for cash and unable to subsidize the military needs of Belarus. In addition, the Belarusian military-industrial complex is only a fraction of Russia's. Where, in the past, Ukraine's 700 military works accounted for 18 percent of the USSR's military output, Belarus had a mere 100 defense plants whose share in overall military production accounted for a tiny one percent [11.] Russian industry has long learned to get along without this input. It is now more in the interest of Russian manufacturers to keep their government's declining support for defense production to themselves.

In legal terms, Belarus has achieved—on paper—equality with Russia in the union's bureaucracy. Decision making in the Supreme Council currently operates on the "one state-one vote" principle [12]. Nonetheless, the powers of the national governments and parliaments far exceed those of the supranational agencies. There is also the matter of resources and capabilities, an area in which Russia exceeds Belarus's potential many times over. Should decisions made by the Supreme Council fail to meet Russia's interests, Russia will simply ignore them. Still, the union of Belarus and Russia tends to cast in concrete a certain structure of international relations in the post-Soviet space and to define the development prospects of the former Soviet republics.

Only time will tell in which direction these relations will go. It is most likely that the union will strengthen centrifugal forces in the region. The CIS will continue to transform itself into an even more amorphous entity, while the union of Belarus and Russia will be even more short-lived than the commonwealth. Russia does not stand to benefit from stronger supranational agencies in the union, as they may invite resentment on the part of the subjects of the Russian Federation. A weakening of the authority of supranational agencies will make the union even less effective than the CIS. Hence, further modification of the union will be by the steady transfer of functions and powers from the Belarusian state to Moscow, something that has already occurred in the area of military policies.

### **ECONOMIC RAMIFICATIONS OF THE UNION**

The union also has economic ramifications. The specifics of the developing market economy in Russia are determined in part by the heritage of its imperial civilization, its vast deposits of natural resources, and a still powerful military-industrial complex. Given this combination of important factors, national capital is being formed on the basis of traditional export-oriented production of raw materials and defense industries, to the detriment of an intensive development model involving technical restructuring of civilian industries and agriculture [13].

Russian economic development is rapidly narrowing to a focus on the domestic market, prompting Russia to export its raw materials and weaponry primarily to its former trade partners, particularly to the nearby, but relatively closed, markets of CIS countries. Such exports are only competitive within an artificial CIS monopoly that inflates the demand for Russian products and handicaps the economic progress of the other CIS countries. Access to these external markets is best ensured through Russia's military-political domination and restoration of its imperial-style relations with the CIS nations. As Boris Yeltsin clearly told the heads of state at a CIS meeting in March 1997, "we do not want anybody's domination in the former USSR, especially

in the military-political sphere. We do not want any states to act as buffer states" [14].

The last statement referred mainly to Ukraine and Belarus. Ukraine, the largest consumer of Russian energy, imports 30 percent of all Russian gas exports (57.2 billion out of 196.5 billion cubic meters) [15]. Even today the Russian energy corporation Gazprom has a tangible impact on the domestic and foreign policies of Ukraine. Belarus, for its part, is attractive to Russia as a route for the raw materials it sells to European markets. Over the past two years alone, this route has earned Russia \$1.5 billion in profits, far in excess of the total Belarusian debt written off by Moscow [16].

### **MILITARY ASPECTS OF RUSSIAN-BELARUSIAN INTEGRATION**

As Russia fails to accomplish its objectives in the CIS exclusively by economic means, it employs political and military-political means to reintegrate those countries into the safety of Russian statehood. Such policies enjoy popular support in Russia, appealing to nostalgic sentiments favoring restoration of the Soviet Union and recovery of Russia's great power status. In this view the most important attribute of great power status would be to restore the "natural borders" in the framework of the former USSR, or at least allow complete Russian domination within those borders. Vitaly Tretiakov, editor of the influential *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, makes this aspect of Russian policy plain:

One of the objectives of Russia's geopolitical game plan that is never mentioned by official politicians, let alone diplomats, but that is always implied, is as simple as can be: Russia today is a nation with artificial borders. What is artificial gravitates toward a natural state, and the natural state can be achieved either by increasing territory or by losing it. Two graphic examples: it would be natural for Russia both to lose the Kaliningrad region and to bring on board the Crimea and the left-bank Ukraine. ... But that cannot be done simultaneously. The question is, which of the processes will start sooner? [17]

This candid quote indicates that the period of ultimate and irreversible separation of the periphery of the Russian Empire from its nucleus is not yet over. Moreover, a strong tendency is evolving toward restoration of the empire in the form of military-political hegemony of the nucleus over the periphery. So far three stages for such restoration have been outlined: (1) the military presence of Russia in the CIS countries and joint protection of the borders of the former USSR; (2) the Tashkent Treaty on Collective Security; and (3) the creation of bilateral military alliances. The long-term plans apparently include the creation of a single military organization within the framework of a unified state.

It is a known fact that a foreign military presence performs external and internal functions. The external function is to protect one's military ally against external aggression. The internal function, in contrast, is to control the ally and its domestic situation. As for the presence of Russian troops in the CIS countries, only the border guards of the Russian Federation perform - to a certain extent - the external function. The main objective of Russian troops stationed in the CIS countries is to control the territory and the internal political developments of the host countries, and to shape the foreign policies of national leaders in line with Russia's national interests. Depending on the nature of such interests, Russian troops may stabilize or destabilize the situation in the host country, pushing it toward an even more rigid type of military-political dependence, that is, the Tashkent Treaty on Collective Security. A case in point is the situation in Georgia and Azerbaijan.

Elements of Russia's military presence in the CIS countries include use of the military infrastructure facilities of the CIS by or in the interests of Russian troops, peacekeeping operations, joint protection of borders, and joint handling of military and military-political problems. Russia's military presence in the CIS nations is intended to prevent them from entering into alliances



and blocs with other nations and at the same time to "encourage the intentions of the Tashkent Treaty members to come together into a defense alliance based on common interests and shared military-political objectives" [18].

The Tashkent Treaty on Collective Security has not become an effective security system for the signatories. No single conflict, either within member states or between them, has been resolved completely. One of the key reasons is that Russia sees the treaty as a mechanism to strengthen its military-political domination of the member states and has repeatedly attempted to transform the Tashkent pact into a defense alliance. That transformation has taken place in the following stages:

- Originally the Tashkent Treaty was to follow the Warsaw Treaty model. The alliance was to have consisted of central and national agencies in command of the coalition forces, governed by a joint staff. The alliance's main goals were to contain aggression in times of peace and to rebuff aggression in times of war. In the event of aggression against any signatory to the treaty, all the other signatories were to help rebuff it. It soon transpired, however, that the alliance, while accommodating the large-scale interests of Russia, failed to cater to the military-political interests of the other signatories, which were primarily regional in nature. The withdrawal of Uzbekistan and other members in 1999 demonstrate the treaty's inherent flaws.

- The second stage of the treaty's evolution was the reconstruction of its structures on the regional principle. The defense alliance was to consist of several regional security systems and responsibility zones: Eastern Europe, Caucasus, Central Asia, and East Asia. A coalition of forces would be formed in each of the regions, reporting to the united command in the region. The scheme lacked viability and coherence and was bound to compromise centralization and coordination.

- Finally, Russia set about implementing a third stage - the creation of military alliances based on a highly differentiated selection of the most loyal strategic allies. This approach produced the military alliance between Belarus and Russia, formalized in the Union Treaty. The parties agreed to undertake joint measures to prevent threats to each other's sovereignty and independence, to coordinate military restructuring and the improvement of their respective armed forces, to use existing military infrastructure jointly, and to pursue coordinated border policies and joint programs on border issues [19]. The Belarusian and Russian defense ministries approved the draft of a joint military policy to implement these agreements. The common military policy is intended to create a system for armed protection of the union and to ensure the two nations' military security in their part of the world. The two countries plan to form a military structure made up of a regional grouping of Belarusian and Russian forces and a command and control body. The joint task force will be used for common purposes, agreed upon in advance. The two countries' defense ministries intend in the coming years to switch to joint strategic and operational planning.

Obviously, if implemented, the policy will turn the territory of Belarus into a forward-based military-strategic springboard for the Russian Federation, similar to its role during the Soviet period. The Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic was the most militarized zone of the former USSR, with one soldier for every 43 civilians, in contrast to the 1 to 98 ratio of soldiers to civilians in Ukraine and the 1 to 634 ratio in Russia [20].

The 1996 revisions on the CFE Treaty limit Belarus to 1,800 tanks, 2,600 armored personnel carriers, 1,615 artillery pieces, 260 combat aircraft, and 80 attack helicopters. Efforts to build up the combat potential of regional forces are likely to consist of deploying medium- and short-range missiles to the theater, allowing Russian air forces to use Belarus's airfields, redeploying Russian forward-based forces if necessary, enhancing the air defense forces of Belarus with a Russian contingent, and conducting joint reconnaissance missions.

Much attention will go toward maintaining the military infrastructure left over from the Soviet period and toward improving access to and use of such infrastructure for airlifting Russian troops. Belarus has twelve military airfields and twenty-three missile bases at its disposal. Russia has about 100 airfields with concrete runways, including 65 in European Russia, although 40 percent of them are in need of repair [21]. Availability of the Belarusian airfields would thus open up vast opportunities for maneuver during operational missions of the union's joint air force. Indeed, the Russian and Belarusian air defense troops have gone on joint combat duty. Russia's contribution includes units from the Moscow Air Defense Military District and the Air Defense Army, which are deployed in Russia's northwest.

In late April 1997, Russia and Belarus held joint air force exercises whose chief objective was to restore the skills involved in the redeployment of air groupings in Belarus. Several military experts offered bold forecasts that "it [was] possible within a very short period of time to deploy in Belarus a joint Belarusian-Russian air grouping capable of counteracting the NATO air groupings" [22]. Speaking about the joint exercises, General Pyotr Deinekin, commander in chief of the Russian Air Force, said, "Undoubtedly, we cannot but think about confrontation. From the military perspective, advancement of NATO to the east is aggression, but so far without the use of arms" [23]. The general's remarks confirm that the military alliance of Belarus and Russia is clearly anti-NATO in nature. Its mere existence, however, poses threats to Ukraine as well.

### **THE IMPACT OF INTEGRATION ON UKRAINE**

Ukraine opposes the creation of any new military blocs, especially in proximity to its borders. The creation of a Belarusian-Russian military bloc not only brings military confrontation back to Eastern Europe but also significantly increases Russia's military-political hegemony over the CIS countries. During its dialogue with NATO, which culminated in the signing of the Founding Act in May 1997, Russia considerably strengthened its military-political position by securing its military presence in Ukraine for at least another twenty years (the May 1997 Black Sea Fleet Agreement) and by developing a military alliance with Belarus.

As compared with the other military blocs, the Russian-Belarusian alliance provides for a high level of centralization and integration. In the language of Article 3 of the Union Charter, the alliance suggests "a consistent movement towards a voluntary association of the member states of the Union" [24]. A structure therefore has evolved for stage-by-stage restoration of Great Russia within its natural borders in the framework of the commonwealth. Of course, Belarus and Russia, just like Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic, are free to enter into any alliances or unions. In fact, the president of Ukraine stated that, "it is the right of the Belarusian and Russian peoples to enter associations. And we, being neighbors, must respect that right" [25]. However, such associations should be formed without damaging the security of neighboring countries.

The danger of this model, geared for the restoration of Russia's great power status, is that Russia may begin to apply it to the other CIS members - most likely, and first, to Ukraine. President Yeltsin has already announced an initiative to get the other former Soviet republics to join the union of Belarus and Russia [26]. Obviously, now that Minsk has signed up, Moscow will seek to expand the unification process by prodding the other Tashkent Treaty signatories to move up to the level of Russian-Belarusian military-political relations and by encouraging Ukraine to sign the treaty. In August 1997, Igor Sergeev, Russia's defense minister, visited Kiev primarily to convince Ukrainian leaders of the need to accede to the Tashkent pact and to join a common defense space with Russia. President Lukashenko has also been active in enhancing the Belarusian-Russian union. In Kiev in May 1997, he repeatedly noted that he "would very much like

Ukraine to join the union between Russia and Belarus." [27]. These attempts to involve Ukraine in the Belarusian-Russian unification have generated added challenges to Ukraine's security.

The creation of the Belarusian-Russian union indeed brought about highly noticeable, albeit short-lived, signs of destabilization of the internal political situation in Ukraine. Left-wing forces mounted an unprecedented campaign for changes in the country's foreign policy and for accession to the Belarusian-Russian union, while Ukraine's parliament was frequently bogged down in a battle of foreign policy resolutions. Leftist forces also conducted a broad scale anti-NATO propaganda campaign both inside and outside the parliament. Following in the footsteps of the State Duma of the Russian Federation, 170 deputies of the Supreme Council of Ukraine created an anti-NATO bloc in 1997. The anti-NATO campaign peaked when deputies of the Supreme Council and political forces in the Crimean Peninsula attempted to frustrate the international war game, Sea Breeze-97. This effort was intended to discredit Ukraine and make the country, which had just signed a Charter on Special Partnership with NATO in July 1997, appear to be an unreliable partner to NATO alliance members. However, Sea Breeze took place with much less controversy and resistance.

Russian-Belarusian unification has had some indirect positive implications for Ukraine. First, the idea of a Slavic union, lobbied for by Lukashenko and the Ukrainian Communists, nudged secessionist sentiments out of the minds of the Crimean leadership within Ukraine, considerably weakening the influence of the separatist forces. Second, the campaign for Ukraine to join the Belarusian-Russian union clearly revealed that certain political forces wanted to involve Ukraine in a confrontation against NATO. Third, after Russia made a defense alliance with Belarus and obtained the right to lease the Crimean seaport of Sevastopol, Ukraine found itself virtually surrounded by Russian troops, with the exception of a segment of its western border. This massive Russian presence created strong resistance within Ukraine to such pressure.

### UKRAINIAN AND BELARUSIAN DIFFERENCES ON NATO

Kiev's position on NATO is as drastically different from Moscow's and Minsk's positions as its policy toward post-Soviet integration is. As described by President Kuchma, Ukraine seeks "friendly and mutually beneficial relations with NATO." Unlike Belarus and Russia, Ukraine sees NATO expansion as an element in the adaptation of the European security structure to new conditions, not as a threat to its national security. Ukraine also believes that the process of NATO expansion cannot happen overnight: after admission of the early candidates, the NATO expansion should continue. NATO's openness to cooperation with other countries, as well as to incorporation of new members, should remain one of its defining principles.

The European integration process should assign an important role to building relations and deepening cooperation among the new European democracies. This multidirectional process will inevitably bring completion to general European integration. NATO expansion is an important component of that process. On the basis of this approach, Ukraine signed a Charter on Special Partnership with NATO, committing itself to an expanded relationship with NATO. Belarus has followed Russia's foreign policy lead, choosing a more 'confrontational model for its relationship with NATO. Minsk has expressed its complete opposition to NATO's expansion to the east. In Lukashenko's words, this opposition is "not only the view of the "leadership of this country but, above all, the position of the Belarusian public, 90 percent of whom strongly reject the expansion of the North Atlantic bloc" [28].

Russia, unlike its Belarusian ally, was busy bargaining for a special military and political role in Europe at the same time that it was counteracting NATO. Moscow created a mechanism for influencing NATO decision making to uphold Russia's interests, including legitimization of its military presence in the CIS. Belarus adopted a stance of out-and-out rejection of NATO ex-

pansion, which left it in an uncertain relationship with the Atlantic alliance and without any international security guarantees whatsoever. Belarus will likely have to make do with whatever the NATO-Russian Joint Council provides and may eventually choose to negotiate its own agreement with NATO - although the best time for such a policy was before the 1997 NATO summit in Madrid, not after. There appears to be no sense of urgency in Brussels about a NATO-Belarusian partnership. There is a certain asymmetry built in to the NATO-Russian relationship. Russia succeeded in obtaining a NATO promise not to deploy its troops or nuclear weapons in the new member states. Russia/ however, is free to make use of the military infrastructure of the former USSR in the CIS countries and is deploying forward-based forces there.

Even more uncertain is whether Eastern Europe will see the deployment of nuclear weapons or become a nuclear-free zone. At a 1995 conference on renewal of the NPT, Belarus suggested creating a nuclear-free zone in Eastern Europe. Ukraine was the first to support the initiative because, as a nuclear-free country, it is interested in denuclearizing its neighbors and the region as a whole. The first practical step toward a nuclear-free zone in Eastern Europe could come in the form of a joint Ukraine-Belarus statement declaring the territory of both countries free from nuclear weapons. Moscow's response to such a nuclear-free zone initiative, however, remains a major question. Minsk obviously clears its initiatives with the Russian foreign ministry, and so far Russia has supported the initiative. But Russia's primary concern has been to ensure that no nuclear weapons are deployed in the new NATO member states. Should the nuclear-free zone fail to include the new NATO members, Russia is likely to oppose it. According to Vladimir Orlov, a prominent Russian expert on nuclear non-proliferation, "the creation of nuclear-free zone made up only of Ukraine and Belarus would run counter to Russia's interests; at least, it would run counter to the hypothetical calculations of a 'power adequate response' to NATO expansion in the form of deployment of tactical nuclear weapons in Belarus" [29].

To accommodate Russia's demands, the NATO member states reaffirmed in the NATO-Russia Founding Act that they "do not have intentions, plans, or reasons to deploy nuclear weapons in the territories of new member states and have no need for changing any aspect of the structure of the NATO nuclear forces or NATO's nuclear policies, nor do they foresee any need for doing so in the future" [30]. But the Founding Act includes no such language on Russian nuclear intentions in Belarus.

Russia's caution in undertaking similar commitments can probably be attributed to the fact that, from the military-political point of view, it would benefit from deploying tactical nuclear weapons in forward areas, given that it is considerably inferior to NATO in conventional forces. Experts of the Russian Research Center of the Committee of Scientists for Global Security note that, in the context of its economic crisis and limited capacity to equip its armed forces new weaponry, Russia will only be able to ensure its security through reliance on nuclear weapons, both now and in the fairly distant future.

### **LOOK FOR RELATIONS BETWEEN UKRAINE AND BELARUS**

Kiev's early response to Belarus-Russia unification included public efforts to distance itself from the process as well as to limit Ukrainian-Belarusian dialogue. Ukrainian leaders realized that, if the union were realized, Ukraine's bilateral security issues with Belarus would no longer be under Minsk's control but would be decided in Moscow. Ukraine thus decided to act to resolve outstanding issues with Minsk, before it was too late. One such issue was the delimitation and demarcation of the Belarusian-Ukrainian border. Delimitation was put on a fast track and completed in April 1997. On May 12, 1997, during a visit to Kiev by President Lukashenko, the two countries signed a Ukraine-Belarus Treaty on the State Border, which allowed them to start demarcation work.



Next came an attempt to enhance bilateral economic cooperation. When the two presidents sat down to the negotiating table in the Belarusian city of Gomel, near the border with Ukraine, the two sides made progress on joint environmental work and economic cooperation between the border regions, to the benefit of both. Ukraine's continued interest in an independent and fully sovereign Belarus meant that Kiev tried not to leave Minsk alone with Moscow, while the Belarusian president used his dialogue with Kiev to increase his leverage vis-à-vis Russia. Despite a certain amount of progress, economic cooperation between Ukraine and Belarus trudges along at a slow pace and at a low level, while military cooperation remains one of the narrowest bottlenecks in the Belarusian-Ukrainian relationship. There are virtually no contacts between the two countries' defense ministries, with the exception of a few working meetings over the past four years on barter trade in components, repairs of armored equipment, and reconciliation of aeronautical charts.

Despite these limitations, Kiev appears to have found the right formula for a relationship with Minsk - to develop a bilateral political dialogue with Belarus while building up regional political cooperation within the Warsaw-Kiev-Vilnius-Minsk quadrangle. With such a policy, Ukraine is both encouraging a more independent Belarus and hedging its bets, should such a Belarus disappear.

#### NOTES

1. The NATO conference in Madrid that defined the terms of enlargement took place in 1997.
2. S. Markiv, "Ukraine Adopts Military Reform Program," *Jamestown Monitor Prism*, vol. 3, no. 3 (March 21, 1997).
3. *Narodna armia*, September 11, 1996.
4. *Politika*, February 5, 1994.
5. George Sanford, "Belarus on the Road to Statehood," *Survival*, vol. 38 (Spring 1996), pp. 83, 131-53.
6. *Vseukrainskiye vedomosti*, May 13, 1997.
7. *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, April 5, 1997, p. 2.
8. *Vseukrainskiye vedomosti*, April 2, 1997.
9. *Nezavisimaya gazeta*. May 22, 1997.
10. *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, April 22, 1997. It needs to be stressed, however, that the financial crisis of August 1998 significantly reduced the enthusiasm of many Russian policy makers and politicians for a union with Belarus, as the costs of the union would put an additional burden on the sorely troubled Russian economy.
11. *Narodna armia*, September 11, 1996.
12. "Ustav Soyuzu Belarusi i Rossii" (Charter of the Union of Belarus and Russia), *Rossiiskaya gazeta*, May 24, 1997.
13. *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, May 28, 1997.
14. *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, April 5, 1997.
15. *Den*, July 15, 1997.
16. *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, April 22, 1997.
17. *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, May 21, 1997.
18. *Nezavisimost*, October 4, 1995.
19. "Ustav Soyuzu Belarusi i Rossii".
20. Sanford, "Belarus on the Road to Statehood," p. 84; *Krasnaya zvezda*, March 15, 1997.
21. *Nezavisimoe voennoe obozrenie*, no. 15, April 19-25, 1997.
22. *Ibid.*
23. *Ibid.*

24. "Ustav Soyuzu Belarusi i Rossii."
25. Vseukrainskiye vedomosti, May 14, 1997.
26. Nezavisimaya gazeta, January 15, 1997.
27. Vseukrainskiye vedomosti, May 14, 1997.
28. Ibid.
29. "Osnovopolagayushii Akt o Vzaimnix Otnosheniyax, Sotrudnichestvo, i Bezapasnosti Mezhdru Rossiiskoi Federetziei i Organizatsiei Severoatlanticheskovo Dogovora" (Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation, and Security between the Russian Federation and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization), Nezavisimaya gazeta, May 28, 1997.
30. Politika chas, no. 5, 1996, p. 32.