

Essentially, this leaves Russia. Given the growing support within the Russian foreign policy establishment and the attentive foreign policy public for a more assertive policy in the region, the extent of leverage that Russia continues to possess there, the relative weakness of other contenders for presence and influence, the coming period is likely to be one of growing Russian influence. This is so not least because key regional actors such as Turkmenistan's Niyazov (who recently accepted Russian demands for the right of dual citizenship for Russophones in his country) and Uzbekistan's Karimov (who requested Russian engagement in the Tadjik civil war) actively desire Russian involvement as a stabilizing factor in regional politics.

The political role that the West is likely to play is that of counterweight, enhancing the flexibility of those such as Askar Akaev and Nursultan Nazarbaev, who accept the likelihood of significant Russian involvement and influence in the region, but seek to maximize their own independence in that context and to blunt the edge of Russian intrusiveness. The economic role of the West is more vital. Although Russia possesses substantial military and political weight in the region, it lacks the resources necessary for the development and modernization of the Central Asian economies. This in turn is essential to longer term political stability.