

instability. This is a real possibility if NATO continues to move towards becoming a collective security organization and crisis-management and conflict-prevention institution that embraces all of Europe and eventually much of Eurasia. Here it is important to stress that the first priority of Russia's foreign policy course remains the development of bilateral and multilateral cooperation with the CIS states.⁶⁹ And although as President Putin says, Russia is "not particularly allergic" to US presence in Central Asia, it has no intention of giving up its responsibility for security in the region.⁷⁰ NATO therefore needs to make its actions transparent and involve Russia as much as possible.

The prospects for the success of the new NATO-Russia Council are reasonably good particularly in the short term because, as NATO's dominant power, the US wants to maintain Russian cooperation in the war against terrorism. In the long term, Russia's role really depends on the evolution of NATO's role. If NATO's primary goal is to be peacekeeping and regional crisis management, then Russia's geography alone dictates that it should be a major player. If the goal is stability, this also would be best achieved by a Western-oriented Russia with free markets, open borders and a democratic political system.

President Putin's April 2002 state-of-the-nation address to the Russian federal assembly stressed the continued pursuit of a pragmatic approach based upon Russia's actual possibilities and national interests in economic, political and military fields. Significantly, Putin has softened his objections to issues such as NATO enlargement, US withdrawal from the ABM Treaty and US military involvement in Central Asia. This is not only because of the current coincidence in US/NATO and Russian interests in ending Afghanistan's role as a breeding ground for terrorism, but also because of Putin's realistic assessment of Russia's current weakness.

⁶⁹ Russian foreign minister Igor Ivanov, "The landmarks of Russia's foreign policy" *Kommersant-Vlast*, no.22, June 11, 2002.

⁷⁰ *Ria Novosti*, June 5, 2002.