



Disappointment in Dushanbe by Joseph Ferguson

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In the wake of the Russian military incursion into South Ossetia and Georgia in early August, the Russian government has looked far and wide for support. As Russia's European neighbors discussed economic sanctions and both U.S. presidential candidates spoke of naked aggression, Russian leaders looked to their partners in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) for moral support.

By coincidence the annual SCO summit took place in Dushanbe, Tajikistan three weeks after the commencement of hostilities between Russian and Georgia, and two days after Moscow recognized the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. If Moscow was hoping for recognition of these two rump republics – if not overt support for Russia's military actions – then the response they received in Dushanbe had to have been disappointing.

Russian President Dmitry Medvedev attended the Dushanbe summit where he hoped to rally the support of the organization's core members, especially the Central Asian states that once formed part of the Soviet Union. If a public show of support from China could be had, all the better. But even the most optimistic pundits in Russia recognized that China would be unlikely to come out in support of Russia on the heels of the successful Olympic Games. Additionally, China would be hard pressed to recognize the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, given its own secessionist problems in Tibet and Xinjiang, not to mention Taiwan.

Nevertheless, the Russian government was hoping to gain public support from the governments in Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan, Moscow's closest allies in Central Asia. Kazakhstan, in particular, was a target of opportunity for Moscow at the SCO summit. But the Kazakh government has been building closer ties with Georgia over the past few years. Although the initial reaction in Astana was to back Moscow, the public stance there has become much more vague. In what must have been a disquieting moment for Medvedev, the SCO issued a final declaration in which SCO member nations "affirmed their commitment to the principles of respect for historical and cultural traditions of any country and efforts made to preserve the unity and territorial integrity of any state." Russian analysts spun this as an oblique criticism of Georgia's 'aggression,' but the muted reaction of the SCO membership vexed the Kremlin. Would Vladimir Putin, by force of his personality, been able to convince Russia's SCO partners?

Meanwhile, after his performance as war chief in the Caucasus, Prime Minister Vladimir Putin traveled to the Russian Far East ostensibly to demonstrate to the European Union that Russia has other outlets for energy exports. Putin demanded that work be speeded up on the East Siberian-Pacific Ocean (ESPO) oil pipeline to have the first section (Taishet-Skovorodino) completed by the end of 2009. Putin made this announcement just before the start of an emergency session of the EU to consider actions to take against Moscow in the wake of the crisis in Georgia. The *Daily Telegraph* suggested that Putin made this statement to "intensify the Kremlin's pressure on Europe over energy supplies."

Putin visited the construction site of a giant terminal and oil refinery on Kozmino Bay where oil will be shipped to Japan, South Korea, China, and other nations in the Asia-Pacific region. Kozmino Bay will also be the end stage of the final section of the ESPO. Moscow announced last year that it aims to increase energy exports to the Asia-Pacific basin from the current level of 3 percent of total energy exports to 30 percent. This is an ambitious goal: even in the most optimistic scenarios, the East Siberian fields would be unable to meet these levels of supply, so the oil and gas will have to come from West Siberian fields, which currently supply mainly European customers. In a barb directed at the EU, a Russian analyst told the *Moscow Times*, "the unfolding of this [Georgian] crisis requires a more intensified eastward turn."

These ambitious energy expansion plans are part of a grand scheme to invest in and develop the infrastructure of the Russian Far East, not just in preparation for the 2012 APEC Summit in Vladivostok, but as part of an effort to revitalize the region's economy and Russia's diplomatic clout in the Asia-Pacific region.

But Moscow might be hard pressed to find partners in the region. Recent events have shown how far the Chinese government is prepared to go in backing Moscow. Neither can Moscow look to Tokyo for cooperation. The Japanese government, in line with Washington and Europe, condemned the incursion into Georgia and demanded that Moscow fully implement the six-point peace plan brokered by French President Nicolas Sarkozy. On Sept. 5, the Japanese Ministry of Defense issued a warning in its 2008 White Paper about the build-up of Russian forces in the Far East. The report also noted the increase in patrols by submarines (including nuclear SSBNs) and aircraft around Japan's periphery.

Prior to the report's release, Japan's Maritime Self-Defense Forces decided to postpone the bilateral naval search and rescue exercises (SAREX) that have been held since 1998. The SAREX is the only regular bilateral training exercise between the two countries' militaries. The decision was in line with NATO's cancellation of joint exercises with Russia until the crisis in Georgia is resolved. In addition, the

Japanese government is still embittered by the Kremlin's stonewall approach to the territorial dispute during the past eight years.

It looks as if Russia's "eastern vector" in its diplomacy has met a brick wall. China, Japan, Korea, and others in the Asia-Pacific region are happy to take Russia's energy exports. But Moscow will be hard pressed to find solid partners or allies in East Asia when it comes to confrontation with the United States and Europe. This is not to say that things could not change in certain scenarios. But for now Moscow learned that even in the friendly confines of the SCO, its aggressive diplomatic and military agenda will only go so far.