

Chapter 3

Historical Legacies and the Politics of Intervention in the Former Soviet Union

Matthew Evangelista

The former Soviet Union is rife with cases of domestic turmoil spilling over international borders, as well as external actors becoming involved in internal conflicts. Because the fifteen independent successor states of the Soviet Union were part of one country until just a few years ago, in late 1991 — and most are members of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) — the dynamics of external involvement in the region are rather distinctive. Three features in particular stand out.

First, the boundaries of the new states, and the regions within them, are often artificial or arbitrary. The territorial legacy of the Soviet Union — many groups with common linguistic and ethnic identities now divided by international borders — enhances the likelihood that internal conflicts will involve external actors in one way or another.

Second, Moscow's role as the military, political, and economic center of the Soviet empire, and Russia's position as the indisputably preponderant power in the region, mean that Russian external interference in the affairs of the other Soviet successor states is, and will continue to be, common. This is reinforced by Russia's pretensions to continued great-power or even superpower status, which incline its leaders to view any internal conflict in the "near abroad" as engaging Russian national interests.

Third, many influential political leaders in the Soviet successor states, including Russia, seem determined to reverse the Soviet legacy of isolation from international political and economic institutions. Their desire to make their countries members in good standing of the international community increases the opportunities for involvement by international

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institutions and outside powers in the resolution of internal conflicts. At the same time, however, some leaders in the former Soviet Union are preoccupied with acquiring, maintaining, and extending their personal power; they show little regard for the views of international organizations or other states. Only by diminishing the power of such political opportunists can international actors hope to influence the policies of the Soviet successor states.

Those who would attempt to influence the states of the former Soviet Union — to prevent or resolve internal conflicts and keep them from spreading — must recognize two fundamental facts. The first is that more than seven decades of Soviet rule have left a legacy of ethnic division, economic disparity, and political uncertainty that creates powerful pre-conditions for internal conflict. The second is that efforts to resolve conflicts anywhere in the former Soviet Union must give due weight to Russia's power and interests. That does not mean allowing the region to become a Russian sphere of influence. It does, however, mean that strategies for influencing developments in the region must take into account Russia's involvement and try to shift Russian policy in benign directions.

In the first section of this chapter, I describe the historical legacy that provides the pre-conditions for violent conflict in the former Soviet Union. I then analyze the causes of the conflicts that broke out during the last years of the Soviet Union and the first few years of the post-Soviet era. Next, I discuss the involvement of international actors — states and organizations — in internal, post-Soviet conflicts, with particular attention to the role played by Russia. Finally, I look to the future to consider the kinds of violent conflicts that could erupt in Russia and elsewhere in the former Soviet Union, their likely causes, and what outside powers and international institutions might be able to do about them.

Historical Legacies and Changing Conditions

The situation in the former Soviet Union is the product of a historical legacy that includes features common to other major powers, as well as features peculiar to the Soviet experience. As with other large, multiethnic empires, Russia's imperial expansion over several centuries entailed violent conquest of indigenous peoples and wars against neighboring states. Many of these conflicts — in the Caucasus, the Crimea, the Far East, and elsewhere — brought tsarist Russia into conflict with other major powers. The sources of internal conflict in the tsarist empire and factors that contributed to involvement by other powers were not unique to Russia: economic grievances, secessionist campaigns, ethnic strife, political opportunism, power politics.

The early years of the Bolshevik regime were also marked by considerable violence: first, a civil war that involved more than a dozen foreign states; then, reconstitution and expansion of the tsarist empire into Central Asia and the Caucasus — actions that, by contrast, did not occasion much international response.¹ Violent internal conflict was rare throughout most of the rest of the Soviet Union's history — until its last few years. Occasional manifestations of discontent, such as workers' protests against poor living conditions, were quickly and brutally suppressed and therefore had few international, or even local, repercussions. Even military invasions of nominally independent states of the Soviet Union's "external empire" in Eastern Europe — Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968 — met with rhetorical opprobrium from the international community, but little else.

In the decades following World War II, the Soviet Union's possession of nuclear weapons and the bipolar nature of the international system, particularly the antagonistic relationship between Washington and Moscow, undoubtedly contributed to a cautious attitude on the part of states that might have considered taking advantage of any internal Soviet strife. But the nature of the Soviet domestic political system — highly centralized, authoritarian, repressive — restrained potential sources of internal conflict in any case. What has changed with the end of the Cold War — indeed, what in many respects we mean by the end of the Cold War — are two structural conditions: the change in the international system away from bipolarity and represented by U.S.-Russian rapprochement, and the change in the domestic system of Russia, a process that began before, and contributed to, the breakup of the Soviet Union. These structural changes are the permissive conditions that have allowed internal conflicts to erupt in the former Soviet Union and have made external involvement of other states and international organizations possible.

Sources and Types of Internal Conflict

The legacy of the Soviet domestic system, in combination with changes instituted by Mikhail Gorbachev, go a long way toward explaining the outburst of internal conflict in the former Soviet Union, starting in the late 1980s. Many conflicts have been driven by a combination of ethnic

1. On Bolshevik expansion into Central Asia, see Marie Bennigsen Broxup, "Comrade Muslims!" *Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 15, No. 3 (Summer 1992), pp. 40-47; on the Caucasus, see Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Revenge of the Past: Nationalism, Revolution, and the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1993).

strife, political and economic discontent, and opportunism on the part of political leaders.

LEGACIES OF THE SOVIET POLITICAL SYSTEM

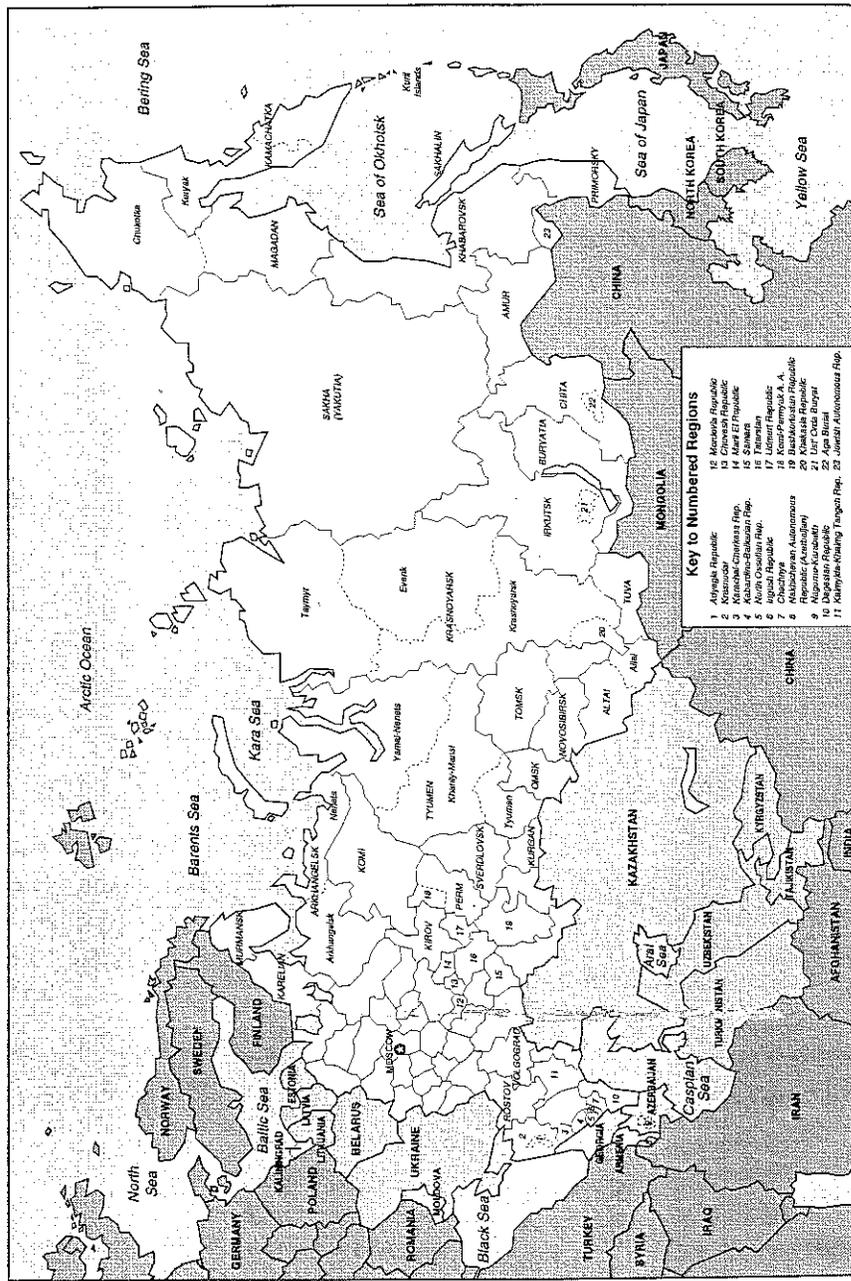
Russia has inherited key features of the Soviet political system — in particular, the contradictory relationship between political-economic power centralized in Moscow and the regional organization of political units based on ethnic or national criteria. These structural features contributed to the disintegration of the Soviet Union and to the violence that erupted in its wake. They are worth reviewing for what they tell us about the context in which events in the region continue to unfold.

The Soviet Union was nominally organized as a federation of republics, each identified with a titular nationality which did not necessarily constitute a majority of the republic's population. In practice, however, the Soviet Union was a highly centralized state in both political and economic affairs. Hypercentralization of the economy contributed to economic stagnation and decline. Political centralization left many local concerns unmet and focused popular anger on Moscow for its high-handed and arbitrary rule. When a reformist leadership came into power in the mid-1980s, it favored timid economic decentralization and a political liberalization intended to give people a stake in the system. The result was the opposite of what the reformers intended. People took advantage of the political opening to criticize the economic results of half-hearted reforms — and much else as well. Ultimately the legitimacy of the Soviet system itself came into question, and along with it, the right of politicians sitting in Moscow's Kremlin to rule over 285 million people spread across eleven time zones.

The peculiar structure of the Soviet Union provided the impetus and opportunity for political action.² The Soviet state was organized into a hierarchy of territorial units, comprised of union republics, autonomous republics, and autonomous provinces (*oblasti*), each identified with a particular ethnic group. As Jessica Stern points out, "the establishment of a federal state based on ethnic divisions gave ethnic groups the expectation, and in some cases the administrative infrastructure, of national

2. This discussion draws on Stephen D. Shenfield, "Armed Conflict in Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union," in Thomas G. Weiss, ed., *The United Nations and Civil Wars* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 1995), pp. 31-50. For background on the relationship between Soviet domestic structure and ethnic mobilization, see Philip G. Roeder, "Soviet Federalism and Ethnic Mobilization," *World Politics*, Vol. 43, No. 2 (January 1991), pp. 196-232; David D. Laitin, "The National Uprisings in the Soviet Union," *World Politics*, Vol. 44, No. 1 (October 1991), pp. 139-177.

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statehood."³ Each of the fifteen union republics had, for example, its own parliament and other institutions of government. These became ready vehicles for expression of anti-Moscow sentiments, once Gorbachev's political reforms permitted open discussion of politics and free elections. The most striking examples of this phenomenon were the three Baltic republics of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, whose ties to the Soviet Union were always tenuous, given their forced incorporation into the union during World War II. Beginning in 1987, new political organizations and politicians arose in the Baltic region, demanding and ultimately achieving independence from Moscow — with very little bloodshed.

Elsewhere in the Soviet Union, and later in Russia as well, the same peculiar political structures contributed to intense violence. As Stephen Shenfield has described, the organization of the Soviet state and the Russian Federation into ethnically-based territorial units created "many anomalies that one or another ethnic group perceived as unjust," and thereby fostered interethnic tension: "many titular groups (Tatars, Bashkirs, Yakuts, Abkhazis, etc.) constituted a minority in their territories; in some cases (for example, Tatars, Jews), most of the titular group was dispersed outside 'its' territory."⁴

The war between Armenia and Azerbaijan provides the starkest example of the possibility for conflict inherent in such a system. It was triggered by the grievances of the Armenian majority in the Nagorno-Karabakh region of Azerbaijan, who complained that the central government in Baku denied them their rights as an autonomous province. A similar situation developed in Abkhazia, which sought independence from Georgia even though ethnic Abkhazis made up only 17 percent of the region's population (and 1.7 percent of Georgia as a whole). As Shenfield points out, "were it not for the Soviet tradition of ethnic autonomies, it is doubtful whether the Abkhaz political leadership could have rationalized giving precedence to Abkhaz 'self-determination' over the rights of the Georgian majority" in Abkhazia.⁵

The case of the self-proclaimed "Dniester Republic," or Transdniestria, illustrates the hold of the Soviet legacy on post-Soviet politics. The Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic was created in 1940 when a formerly autonomous republic of Ukraine — a narrow strip of land along

3. Jessica Eve Stern, "Moscow Meltdown: Can Russia Survive?" *International Security*, Vol. 18, No. 4 (Spring 1994), p. 40.

4. Shenfield, "Armed Conflict in Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union," pp. 36-37.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 37.

the left bank of the Dniester River — was combined with Bessarabia, the province seized from Romania under the terms of the Molotov-von Ribbentrop agreement of 1939. As he did elsewhere in the Soviet Union (particularly in the Baltic republics), Stalin sought to dilute the local Moldovan population by fostering immigration of Russian-speakers. Five decades later, when the newly named Republic of Moldova declared its independence from the Soviet Union, the Russian-speaking population of the left bank seceded from the new republic and formed the Dniester Republic. They did so ostensibly to protect the rights of Russians and Ukrainians living there against anticipated discrimination by the Moldovan government, which had announced plans, since downplayed, to reunite with Romania. During the spring and summer of 1992, armed clashes broke out between the Moldovan authorities and the leaders of the breakaway Dniester Republic. The Dniester forces were backed by the Russian (formerly Soviet) 14th Army, based in Tiraspol, the capital of the secessionist republic.⁶

Ethnic Moldovans make up 40 percent of the roughly 740,000 people in the left-bank region, with Ukrainians comprising 28 percent and Russians 25 percent. There are actually more Russians and Ukrainians living in Moldova proper than in the secessionist region.⁷ They have not supported the secession; nor, by and large, have they been mistreated by the Moldovan government. The Dniester Republic government, by contrast, has violated the rights of ethnic Moldovans in the region, for example, by forcing Moldovan schools to adopt the Cyrillic alphabet over the Latin one.⁸ Yet the conflict in Moldova is not strictly or even essentially an

6. For background, see Vladimir Baranovsky, "Conflict Development on the Territory of the Former Soviet Union," *SIPRI Yearbook 1994* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 188–190; Bruce D. Porter and Carol R. Saivetz, "The Once and Future Empire: Russia and the 'Near Abroad,'" *Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 17, No. 3 (Summer 1994), pp. 83–85; Fiona Hill and Pamela Jewett, *Back in the USSR: Russia's Intervention in the Internal Affairs of the Former Soviet Republics and the Implications for United States Policy toward Russia* (Cambridge, Mass.: Strengthening Democratic Institutions Project, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, January 1994), pp. 61–65.

7. According to the 1989 Soviet census, some 564,000 Russians and 598,000 Ukrainians lived in the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic, out of a total population of 4,335,000. See Elizabeth Teague, "Russians Outside Russia and Russian Security Policy," in Leon Aron and Kenneth M. Jensen, eds., *The Emergence of Russian Foreign Policy* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Institute of Peace, 1994), pp. 81–106.

8. The "Moldovan" language is essentially Romanian, a Romance language written in the Latin script until the Russians imposed their alphabet after taking over in 1940. See Vladimir Socor, "Dniester School Conflict," *RFE/RL Daily Report*, No. 210 (November 4, 1994). All citations to the *RFE/RL Daily Report*, and its successor, the Open Media Research Institute's *OMRI Daily Digest*, refer to the electronic versions.

interethnic one — indeed, both sides deny that it is. Rather, it pits supporters of the old Soviet way of life against proponents of change. Journalists who have visited the Dniester Republic describe it as “a living museum of the old USSR” and “a microcosm of the Soviet Union” dominated by “Russians filled with Soviet nostalgia.”⁹ It is the peculiar Soviet legacy that provided the pre-conditions for the conflict — including arbitrary territorial demarcations and the presence of the pro-Russian armed forces on the left bank.

Other arbitrary political divisions and combustible agglomerations of ethnic groups — such as Nikita Khrushchev’s 1954 “gift” of the historically Russian Crimean peninsula to Ukraine — could yet produce violent conflict.

Many of the dynamics of interethnic strife that accompanied the breakup of the Soviet Union have been repeated in Russia, where the structure of autonomous regions mirrors the Soviet one. More than a third of the 89 administrative-territorial units that now comprise the Russian Federation are ethnically identified. These include 21 “republics,” such as Chechnya, Tatarstan, Dagestan, and North Ossetia, and 10 autonomous “areas” (*okrugi*). Out of a total population of 150 million, Russia contains 30 million non-ethnic Russians representing more than 100 ethnic groups.¹⁰

Ethnic groups within the Russian Federation, as in the rest of the Soviet Union, were subjected to Stalin’s strategy of divide and rule. Many groups thus remain separated by artificial borders, including inter-state ones. Ossetians, for example, are divided between the Russian Federation (the Republic of North Ossetia) and Georgia (the South Ossetian Autonomous Region). Attempts by the Ossetians of Georgia to gain greater autonomy and unite with their ethnic brethren in the north led in January 1991 to violent repression by Georgian armed forces. Refugees subsequently fled over the border into Russia.

Many ethnic groups still live with the consequences of Stalin’s wholesale deportations of native peoples, particularly Chechens, Ingush, Balkars, and others from the Caucasus, and with subsequent laws (in 1956 and 1991) that sought to reverse the Stalinist legacy by permitting deported peoples to return to their former territories. The Ingush, for exam-

9. The first quote is from a Reuters dispatch of November 1, 1994; the second is from the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* of November 2, 1994. Both are quoted in Vladimir Socor, “A Rare Close-up View of ‘Dniester Republic,’” *RFE/RL Daily Report*, No. 212 (November 8, 1994).

10. Stern, “Moscow Meltdown,” pp. 47–48. Much of the rest of this section draws on this article.

ple, had been expelled during World War II from an area of North Ossetia known as the *prigorodnyi raion* or "suburban district." Their lands were occupied by Ossetians. When Ingush deportees and their relatives sought to resettle the area during the Gorbachev period, the Ossetians resisted. In autumn 1992, with Russian support, they massacred some ten to twenty thousand Ingush residents of the *raion*.¹¹

Evidence of Russian discrimination against a particular ethnic group, combined with historic grievances, contributes in important ways to instability and violence. The most striking example is Chechnya, whose declaration of independence from Russia in 1991 provoked a delayed but extraordinarily violent response from Moscow during the winter of 1994–95. The lessons of Russia's brutal but unexpectedly difficult war against Chechnya may serve to dampen demands for autonomy elsewhere, but the initial reaction from the Caucasus and beyond was, instead, a renewal of suspicion of and opposition to Boris Yeltsin's regime.¹²

One may hope that the Russian army's disastrously inept military performance may have a chastening effect on Moscow, leading to more serious attempts at peaceful resolution of future conflicts, but such an outcome is far from certain. In any case, the preconditions for further ethnic conflict abound throughout the Russian Federation. In combination with other economic and political factors, they could yet produce more violent conflicts of the character, if not magnitude, of the one in Chechnya.

ECONOMIC COMPETITION AND POLITICAL OPPORTUNISM

The territorial-governmental structure of the Soviet Union and Russia, with its arbitrary divisions of ethnic groups and promotion of sometimes artificially constructed national identities, provided only some of the pre-conditions for violent conflict. Other factors that contributed to the outbreak of violence in the former Soviet Union included economic concerns and political opportunism.

11. Shenfield, "Armed Conflict in Eastern-Europe and the Former Soviet Union," pp. 33, 40; Peter Jarman, "Ethnic Cleansing in the Northern Caucasus," *Moscow News*, No. 6 (February 11–17, 1994), p. 13.

12. Vladimir Socor, "Spillover Effect in Caucasus," *RFE/RL Daily Report*, No. 236 (December 15, 1994); Vladimir Socor, "Ingushetia, Dagestan: Resistance to Russian Advance Reported," *RFE/RL Daily Report*, No. 233 (December 12, 1994); Liz Fuller, "Abkhaz, North Caucasians, Crimean Tatars Support Dudaev," *RFE/RL Daily Report*, No. 233 (December 12, 1994); Vladimir Socor, "More from the Region," *RFE/RL Daily Report*, No. 235 (December 14, 1994); Bess Brown, "Reaction in Kazakhstan to Situation in Chechnya," *RFE/RL Daily Report*, No. 235 (December 14, 1994); Vladimir Socor, "Resistance in Ingushetia . . . and in Dagestan," *RFE/RL Daily Report*, No. 234 (December 13, 1994); Vladimir Socor, "Regional Reverberations," *RFE/RL Daily Report*, No. 235 (December 14, 1994.)

REGIONAL ECONOMIC DISPARITIES. Many of the conflicts in the former Soviet Union are fueled, at least in part, by economic discontent. Although the entire region has suffered dramatic drops in production and economic growth, poverty and declining standards of living are not the main economic factors giving rise to conflict. Even the growing disparities between the poor and the recently rich do not figure prominently among explanations for internal violence — at least not yet.¹³ More important are regional disparities, the breakdown of the administrative-command economy, and the attendant scramble for control of economic resources, especially by former members of the Soviet *nomenklatura* or administrative elite.

Many of the conflicts that ultimately take on ethnic dimensions are disputes over control of economic resources that pit a given region against the “center.” Nature has endowed some regions of Russia and the former Soviet Union with greater natural resources than others, especially in the energy sector.¹⁴ Many of the richest endowments are located in autonomous republics and areas identified with particular ethnic groups. Sakha (formerly Yakutia), Tatarstan, and Chechnya are prime examples.

Although many of these regions bear historical grievances against Moscow, the more immediate source of discontent during the late Soviet period was the perceived disparity between what the regions contributed to the Soviet economy and what they received back in funds for education, culture, health care, and other services.¹⁵ The initial demands of the

13. For background on the economic disparities and decline, see Rustam Arifdizhanov, “The Middle Class is Turning into the Poor, as More and More Mercedes and Beggars Appear,” *Izvestiia*, September 15, 1993, trans. in *Current Digest*, Vol. 45, No. 36 (1993), p. 16; Alastair McAuley, “Poverty and Underprivileged Groups,” in David Lane, ed., *Russia in Flux: The Political and Social Consequences of Reform* (Brookfield, Vt.: Edward Elgar, 1992), pp. 196–209; Mary Buckley, “The Politics of Social Issues,” in Stephen White, Alex Pravda, and Zvi Gitelman, eds., *Developments in Russian and Post-Soviet Politics* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1994), pp. 187–207.

14. James P. Dorian and Vitaly P. Borisovich, “Energy and Minerals in the Former Soviet Republics,” *Resource Policy*, Vol. 18 (September 1992), pp. 205–229; Gertrude E. Schroeder, “Regional Economic Disparities, Gorbachev’s Policies, and the Disintegration of the Soviet Union,” pp. 121–145, and Jeffrey W. Schneider, “Republic Energy Sectors and Inter-state Dependencies of the Commonwealth of Independent States and Georgia,” pp. 475–489, both in Richard F. Kaufman and John P. Hardt, eds., *The Former Soviet Union in Transition*, papers prepared for the U.S. Congress Joint Economic Committee (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1993).

15. See Roeder, “Soviet Federalism and Ethnic Mobilization”; Donna Bahry, “*Pere-stroika* and the Debate over Territorial Decentralization,” *Harriman Institute Forum*, Vol. 2, No. 5 (May 1989), pp. 1–10.

various regions of the Soviet Union to correct perceived economic disparities were relatively moderate. They became more radical as they encountered resistance from Moscow.

The Baltic republics, for example, initially sought changes within the existing Soviet system. In the mid-1980s they sought to implement Gorbachev's policy of *perestroika* and economic decentralization and to reduce Moscow's economic tutelage. Failing that, they issued formal declarations of economic autonomy or "sovereignty" in 1988 and 1989. In 1990, they demanded full independence.¹⁶ In the Tatar Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR), initial demands were also rather modest. In 1989, the consensus position of Tatar political activists was to demand an "upgrade" of their region to the level of Union Republic. In 1991, Tatarstan declared its independence — a claim as yet unrecognized by any other country.

POLITICAL OPPORTUNISM AND RADICALIZATION. Many of the demands for more economic autonomy from Moscow were understandable responses to the hypercentralization of the Soviet economy, and, as such, probably represented a consensus view of the people who lived in these regions. In many cases, though, economic and political grievances provided opportunities for political figures to gain (or retain) power. Their escalation and radicalization of demands, in combination with Moscow's recalcitrance, often inflamed conflicts and made compromise solutions difficult.

In some cases, pressure for radicalization has come "from below," as in 1989, when Tatar activists declared a prominent writer an "enemy of the Tatar people" because he opposed making Kazan Tatar the official language of the Tatar autonomous republic. (Given that Tatars and Tatar-speakers constituted a minority in the Tatar ASSR, his position was not unreasonable.¹⁷) Many activists adopted such radical stances as a means of launching their political careers. Some embraced extreme positions in order to discredit their opponents; this was true, for example, of Zviad Gamsakhurdia in Georgia and Abulfaz Elchibey in Azerbaijan.

Many of the most radical nationalist views were espoused not only by former dissidents such as Gamsakhurdia and Elchibey, but by former

16. Edward Walker, "Appendix: A Chronology of Nationality-Related Events, 1985–1991," in Charles F. Furtado, Jr. and Andrea Chandler, eds., *Perestroika in the Soviet Republics: Documents on the National Question* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1992). I am grateful to Sharon Werning for research on these declarations of sovereignty and independence.

17. Uli Schamiloglu, "The Tatar Public Center and Current Tatar Concerns," *Report on the USSR*, December 12, 1989, pp. 11–15; see p. 15.

Communist Party officials who sought new identities and bases of support in the post-Soviet world. Prominent examples include Leonid Kravchuk, the former Communist Party leader of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, who was elected president of Ukraine on a nationalist platform, and then worked hard to learn to speak Ukrainian as well as he spoke Russian; and Dzhokhar Dudaev, the highly Russified former Soviet air force general who served most of his career outside his native Chechnya, but returned in time to lead its disastrous independence drive from Moscow. Significantly, however, some former communist officials have not embraced radical nationalism. Eduard Shevardnadze of Georgia and Nursultan Nazarbaev of Kazakhstan are notable in this regard. So, too, is Heidar Aliiev, former KGB official, Soviet Politburo member, and communist leader of Azerbaijan, whose interest in improving relations with Russia apparently led Moscow to support him and help depose his predecessor Elchibey in a coup.¹⁸

In addition, non-communists who were new to politics often adopted increasingly radical positions in order to distance themselves from their previously apolitical accommodation to Soviet rule. A journalist captured the essence of this transformation in describing his 1991 interview with Vytautas Landsbergis, the professor of musicology who became the first post-Soviet president of Lithuania: "his once elegant Russian had become gradually more accented; now it seemed almost painfully halting, or pointedly tentative, as if he was carefully shedding any traces of the Soviet past."¹⁹

The radicalization of political views between the regions and Moscow or between ethnic groups within a region makes peaceful compromise difficult. Politicians interested more in furthering their own political and economic ambitions than in providing for the security and welfare of their constituencies are sometimes prone to incite ethnic hatred and violence in order to attain or maintain power.

International Implications and Involvement

The end of the Cold War increased the scope for non-Russian international involvement in the internal affairs of the Soviet successor states in a number of ways — including the participation of international organi-

18. Ilja Dadashidze, "Geidar Aliiev Has Become President of Azerbaijan," *Moscow News*, No. 41 (October 8, 1993), p. 8; Thomas Goltz, "Letter from Eurasia: The Hidden Russian Hand," *Foreign Policy*, No. 92 (Fall 1993), pp. 92-116; Hill and Jewett, *Back in the USSR*, pp. 10-17.

19. Paul Quinn-Judge, "Do Svidaniya," *Boston Globe Magazine*, October 4, 1992, p. 43.

zations in conflict resolution, peacekeeping, and monitoring, and the possibility of unilateral action, such as making aid contingent on maintaining certain standards of internal behavior. The possibility for such international involvement is the legacy of Gorbachev's foreign policy reforms. Under Gorbachev, the Soviet Union sought to improve its relations with and become better integrated into the international community. Soviet foreign policy increasingly took into account the legitimate interests of other states. Soviet support for, and involvement in, international institutions grew.

Boris Yeltsin continued the trend, to the point where at least some portion of the Russian foreign policy community came to advocate multilateralism and reliance on international institutions as an alternative (or supplement) to traditional, unilateral, power politics.²⁰ Although the attachment to international institutions is tenuous in some cases and merely rhetorical in others, the fact that leaders in Russia and the other former Soviet republics have explicitly expressed their intention to participate actively in international institutions gives those institutions wider scope for involving themselves in conflicts in the region.

The end of the Cold War has also transformed the role that other states can play in post-Soviet affairs. Whereas external criticism of Soviet internal policy — and Soviet rejection of that criticism — were the common currency of the Cold War, the situation has changed. The Soviet successor states' rhetorical embrace of human rights, individual freedoms, and democracy means that they can less readily dismiss criticism of their behavior. The fact that the United States and the advanced industrialized countries of Europe provide economic aid to Russia and the other states gives them more standing to comment on these matters. For example, the French foreign minister, German chancellor, and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) secretary-general have all criticized Russia for its invasion of Chechnya.²¹ At the same time, Western governments often seem reluctant to criticize the practices of the Soviet successor states — particularly Russia — for fear of undermining leaders whom they support. This was clearly the thinking behind the weak U.S. response to Russia's war on Chechnya.²²

20. Celeste Wallander, "International Institutions and Modern Security Strategies," *Problems of Communism*, Vol. 41, No. 1-2 (January-April 1992), pp. 44-62.

21. Liz Fuller, "International Reaction," *OMRI Daily Digest*, Vol. 1, No. 5 (January 6, 1995); Liz Fuller, "International Diplomatic Responses," *OMRI Daily Digest*, Vol. 1, No. 7 (January 10, 1995).

22. Elaine Sciolino, "Administration Sees No Choice but to Support Yeltsin," *New York Times*, January 7, 1995, p. 4.

Although substantial changes in Soviet and post-Soviet policies toward the international community have taken place, in crucial respects the prospects for international involvement in internal conflicts depend, as in the past, on considerations of relative state power. As far as Russia is concerned, international involvement in the former Soviet Union is "by invitation only." Formally, Russia can veto any international intervention conducted under the auspices of the United Nations (UN) by virtue of its permanent seat on the Security Council. In practical terms, it has the military power to deter unwanted interventions. Russia can also reject outside economic assistance to which unacceptable strings are attached — as can the other post-Soviet states. Finally, Russia can simply break the constraints imposed by international institutions when it so chooses. In its invasion of Chechnya in December 1994, for example, Russia violated the provisions established by the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE, now OSCE, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe) for prior notification of large troop movements.

To the extent that we characterize Russia's own involvement in the conflicts along its periphery as "external," "regional," or "international," considerations of relative power are again crucial. Because of its predominant position, Russia needs no invitation to intervene in the affairs of its weaker neighbors. The situation is more ambiguous with regard to the intervention of other states in the affairs of Russia's neighbors in the "near abroad." Turkey, Iran, and Afghanistan have sought in various ways to increase their influence in several former Soviet republics, at Russia's expense. There is not much that Russia can do about this without explicitly raising the prospect of military conflict.

REGIONAL INVOLVEMENT

The most prominent regional actor involved in the conflicts on the territory of the former Soviet Union is Russia. Acting independently, as well as through the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) — the regional organization that nominally succeeded the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics — Russia has interfered in some way in every conflict of consequence. Other former Soviet states, such as Ukraine and Uzbekistan, have sought to act mainly through the CIS to assert their influence in conflicts that affected their interests. They have also sought to use the CIS collective decision-making procedures to temper whatever imperial ambitions Russia might harbor. Finally, neighboring states to the west, such as the Baltic countries and Poland, and to the south, such as Iran, Turkey, and Afghanistan, have expressed concern about conflicts on former Soviet territory; the latter three states have become directly involved in some of

these conflicts — sometimes as partisans of one side, sometimes as mediators.

RUSSIA'S ROLE. Because of Russia's predominant position among the Soviet successor states and the great-power sensibilities of Russia's leaders, few violent conflicts of any consequence in the former Soviet Union have failed to engage Russia in one way or another. In social-science jargon, Russian intervention is "overdetermined." One can adduce various motivations for Russian involvement: strategic requirements for a system of military bases along Russia's periphery; protection of Russian nationals in the "near abroad"; the need to restore stability to conflict-ridden areas; the desire to gain or retain control of resources, particularly energy; a preference for "friendly" leaders in neighboring states; even the need to stop organized crime, as Yeltsin suggested in demonizing Chechnya as a "criminal republic." Removing one or several of these motivations might still not remove the impetus for intervention. It may be that Russian activity in the "near abroad" is mainly a function of a hypertrophied security establishment, or it may be that prominent members of the Russian foreign policy establishment are determined to reconstitute the Soviet Union — something that cannot be done by peaceful means.

In any case, Russia has managed to involve itself indirectly in all of the civil wars along its periphery.²³ Shenfield has offered this "rough generalization" of Moscow's role:

Russia first helps the side it favors up to the point at which a politico-military result that it considers satisfactory has been achieved. It then shifts to the role of an impartial peacekeeper, prepared to use force even against those maverick extremist elements of the previously favored side who are determined to fight for a result better than the one secured for them by Moscow.²⁴

The conflicts in Georgia, Moldova, Tajikistan, and Azerbaijan fit this generalization quite well.

In Georgia, Russian military forces intervened twice in conflicts between the central government and regional minorities. The secession movements in South Ossetia and Abkhazia mobilized in response to the

23. A detailed overview of these conflicts is found in Hill and Jewett, *Back in the USSR*. The Russian "peacekeeping" role is discussed in Roy Allison, *Peacekeeping in the Soviet Successor States*, Chaillot Paper 18 (Paris: Western European Union (WEU) Institute for Security Studies, November 1994), especially pp. 2-11, and in Porter and Saivetz, "The Once and Future Empire."

24. Shenfield, "Armed Conflict in Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union," p. 43.

nationalist rhetoric and policies of Zviad Gamsakhurdia, elected chair of the Georgian Supreme Soviet (in effect, the president of Georgia) in October 1990, more than a year before the breakup of the Soviet Union. Russia took advantage of the conflicts in Georgia to support the secessionists and to put pressure on the central government in Tbilisi. Its main objective, following the dissolution of the Soviet Union in December 1991, was to blackmail Georgia into joining the CIS and permitting the permanent basing of Russian military forces on Georgian territory.

In January 1991, efforts by the South Ossetian Autonomous Region (*oblast'*) to secede from Georgia and unite with neighboring North Ossetia, a republic within the Russian Federation, resulted in violence when Gamsakhurdia ordered the Georgian army to crush the secessionists. The ensuing fight led to a mass exodus of thousands of South Ossetian refugees across the border into North Ossetia. They exacerbated an already tense situation in the region, where Ossetians were resisting the return of deported Ingush settlers seeking to reclaim their land. Russian troops became involved in the conflict in two ways. First, in October and November 1992, they supported the operations of Ossetian special forces in their massacre of Ingush civilians.²⁵ Second, in July 1992, the Russian army intervened in South Ossetia as "peacekeepers," providing a foothold for further operations in Georgia.²⁶

In August 1992, Abkhazia's attempt to secede from Georgia led to warfare with the central government, headed by Eduard Shevardnadze following the ouster of Gamsakhurdia in December 1991. While the Russian government formally professed neutrality, Russian military forces provided the Abkhaz separatists with arms, equipment, personnel, and training as they fought to gain control of the Abkhaz capital of Sukhumi. Russian Su-27 aircraft bombed the city, on behalf of the secessionists, even as President Shevardnadze traveled to the city to organize its defense and attempt — unsuccessfully, as it turned out — to keep it under Georgian control. With Shevardnadze preoccupied with the war against Abkhazia, Gamsakhurdia returned from exile in September 1993 to launch an attack from the western region of Mingrelia. Not until the Abkhazis had taken Sukhumi and Gamsakhurdia's forces were pressing their offensive did Russia come to Shevardnadze's aid, even though he had already acceded to all of Russia's demands. Georgia was to join the CIS, grant Russia

25. Shenfield, "Armed Conflict in Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union," pp. 33, 40; Jarman, "Ethnic Cleansing in the Northern Caucasus," p. 13.

26. Hill and Jewett, *Back in the USSR*, p. 48; Porter and Saivetz, "The Once and Future Empire," p. 85.

long-term military basing rights on the Black Sea, and agree to an indefinite Russian military presence in Georgia.

Russia's approach to the conflict between Moldova and the secessionist Dniester Republic followed the same pattern. Like Georgia, Moldova initially refused to join the CIS. The Moldovan government in Chisinau demanded the withdrawal of the Russian 14th Army from its territory. Instead, Moscow sided with the Russian-speakers in their conflict with the Moldovan authorities. It allowed Russian Cossack forces from throughout the Russian Federation to travel to Moldova to support the Dniester secessionists. It directed the 14th Army, led by Lieutenant-General Aleksandr Lebed, to support the breakaway republic (Lebed himself was elected to its parliament), and it provided massive subsidies of energy and raw materials to Tiraspol. Only when Moldova capitulated to Russia's demands — CIS membership, economic and security integration — did Moscow take a more evenhanded approach to the conflict, including promises, as yet unfulfilled, to withdraw the 14th Army.²⁷

In 1992, Russia became involved in a full-scale civil war in Tajikistan. To simplify an extremely complicated situation, the war pitted stalwarts of the old Soviet *nomenklatura*, supported by an array of organized criminals largely drawn from the province of Kulob, plus Tajikistan's ethnic Uzbek minority, against a loose coalition of Muslims, democrats, nationalists, and residents of the Garm and Pamir regions that have long been Kulob's rivals. The opposition coalition claimed the 1991 election of President Rakhmon Nabiev was fraudulent, and agitated for new elections in March 1992. Nabiev responded by forming a paramilitary presidential security force, led by Yakub Salimov, a "notorious racketeer," to disperse the opposition by force.²⁸ His opponents rebuffed Nabiev's attack and he was obliged to form a coalition government, granting the opposition eight ministerial portfolios. Nabiev's pro-communist allies refused to accept the new arrangement, however, and managed to depose the coalition government by seizing the capital, Dushanbe, in December 1992. The communists were backed by the so-called Popular Front, an armed band led by Sangak Safarov, an ex-felon recently freed after twenty-three years in prison. In taking Dushanbe, the Front carried out an "ethnic cleansing" of opposition sympathizers (mainly people from the regions of Garm and Badakhshon). Tens of thousands of people were

27. This account draws mainly on Hill and Jewett, *Back in the USSR*, pp. 61–65.

28. Vladimir Klimenko, "A Tale of Two Countries," *Mother Jones* (July/August 1993), pp. 54–57; Shahrbanou Tadjbakhsh, "The Bloody Path of Change: The Case of Post-Soviet Tajikistan," *Harriman Institute Forum*, Vol. 6, No. 11 (July 1993), pp. 1–10.

killed between October 1992 and March 1993, more than in any other conflict in the former Soviet Union.²⁹

The Russian military role in the conflict is somewhat uncertain, but hardly inconsequential. Many reports indicate that Russia's 201st Motorized Rifle Division, stationed in Tajikistan, armed both sides in the early stages of the conflict, either deliberately or by negligence (for example, by allowing the theft or sale of Kalashnikov rifles, armored vehicles, and tanks).³⁰ In autumn 1993, Russia accused Afghan groups of smuggling weapons across the Afghan-Tajik border to the opposition forces. In late September, Russian troops seized control of the Dushanbe airport and reinforced their deployments along the border. In October, the CIS deployed "peacekeeping" forces to Tajikistan — mainly Russian units, with some Uzbek troops, all under Russian command. The substantial Russian military presence in Tajikistan has helped keep the country in Russia's sphere of influence and insure that the Tajik government continues to pursue pro-Moscow policies.

The conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh combines elements of civil war with inter-state war. Russia has manipulated both aspects of the conflict, seeking mainly to secure the integration of Armenia and Azerbaijan into the CIS and the deployment of Russian troops on their territories. Unlike the Soviet government, which tended to support Baku's position by denying Nagorno Karabakh's right to secede from Azerbaijan, Yeltsin's government has favored the Armenians. The Republic of Armenia depends on Russia for protection against its historic enemies, Turkey and Azerbaijan, and has allowed the stationing of Russian troops on its territory. Azerbaijan, by contrast, refused to join the CIS or adhere to its economic and military accords, as Armenia had done.

Russia's actions seem to have been calculated to undermine Azerbaijan's intransigence. On May 17, 1992, the day after Azerbaijan refused to sign the CIS Mutual Security Pact, troops from Nagorno-Karabakh launched a successful offensive on the Azeri town of Lachin, creating a land bridge between the breakaway province and Armenia. With Russian troops patrolling Armenia's borders during the attack, few considered the timing coincidental. Russia subsequently contributed to the downfall of the recalcitrant government of Abulfaz Elchibey in Baku by backing Surat Huseinov, a renegade Azeri military commander who inherited much of

29. Tadjbakhsh, "The Bloody Path of Change," pp. 1-3; Klimenko, "A Tale of Two Countries."

30. Porter and Saivetz, "The Once and Future Empire," p. 86; Tadjbakhsh, "The Bloody Path of Change," p. 7.

the weaponry of the Russian 104th Airborne Division when it withdrew unexpectedly in May 1993. Huseinov, who supported the return of Heidar Aliev to power, conducted an assault on the Elchibey government; this coup attempt, which followed another military victory for the Karabakh Armenians, contributed to the collapse of the Elchibey government in July.³¹

Ironically, Azerbaijan had been close to an agreement with Armenia on the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh. Indeed, Baku had announced a unilateral cease-fire just two weeks before the Karabakh forces attacked. The Elchibey government had, however, resisted Russia's demand to deploy its troops as peacekeepers to secure the agreement. Russia seems to have encouraged the Karabakh offensive to persuade Azerbaijan to agree to its conditions for a settlement.

When Heidar Aliev took over from Elchibey, Azerbaijan still faced intense military pressure from the Armenians as well as from Turkish and Iranian forces which had mobilized along the border. Russian tanks were reported to be supporting the Armenian offensive. In desperation, Aliev made a play for Russian support by securing a mandate from the Azeri parliament to have Azerbaijan join the CIS and accept Russian troop deployments. Russia consequently switched sides in November 1993 and sent 200 military officers to help train the Azeri military. At the same time, the Russian foreign minister threatened Armenia with "something other than persuasion" if it did not cease its support for the Karabakh forces.³²

Not only did Russia's actions *vis-à-vis* Armenia and Azerbaijan support its strategic objectives in maintaining a CIS security zone, but they also demonstrated that these objectives took precedence over resolving the Azeri-Armenian conflict. Indeed, Russia was willing, in this case as in others, to escalate and prolong the conflict in order to secure its own ends.

COMMONWEALTH OF INDEPENDENT STATES. The involvement of the Commonwealth of Independent States in internal conflicts in the former Soviet Union is controversial. Many critics suspect that it is merely an extension of Russian foreign policy, another instrument of Russia's domination of its neighbors. Is there any reason to consider the CIS, as Russia claims, an international organization that should be officially endorsed as such by the United Nations?³³

31. Hill and Jewett, *Back in the USSR*, pp. 10-12.

32. This quote comes from *ibid.*, pp. 14-17.

33. For background, see Elizabeth Teague, "The CIS: An Unpredictable Future,"

There is no doubt that many Russian political figures consider the territory of the former Soviet Union "a sphere of vital Russian interests," as Yeltsin put it in an address to the UN General Assembly in September 1994. Yeltsin claimed that "the main burden of peacemaking [there] rests on the Russian Federation's shoulders."³⁴ There is also little doubt that senior Russian military leaders see "peacekeeping" deployments in strategic terms. By maintaining bases and troops in states on Russia's periphery, the Russian army can defend the country at the old Soviet borders rather than develop new defensive lines at the Russian Federation's actual international borders. Considerable evidence supports this conclusion, from Yeltsin's description of the Tajik-Afghan border as "in essence the border of Russia" to a Russian Security Council decision to defend the former Soviet borders, at least in Central Asia, but possibly in the Caucasus as well.³⁵

Although Russia is undoubtedly inclined to use the CIS for its own purposes, one can argue that the presence of CIS forces does help to preserve peace and stability in some cases. It is unrealistic to assume that, were Russia not directly involved in peacekeeping in the former Soviet Union, an impartial, multilateral force sponsored by the United Nations would step in to take its place. Many of the conflicts in the former Soviet Union do not meet the UN's criteria for launching a peacekeeping mission — the existence of a cease-fire in place, and the acceptance by all parties of the peacekeeping force, for example. Russian "peacekeepers," as Roy Allison describes, "are ready forcefully to separate the opposing sides before a cease-fire has come into effect." Their duties, according to a Russian military commander, include "the pursuit, apprehension or destruction by fire of groups and individuals who are not following the rules of a given situation."³⁶ This is far more ambitious than anything the

RFE/RL *Research Report*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (January 7, 1994), pp. 9–12; Suzanne Crow, "Russia Promotes the CIS as an International Organization," *RFE/RL Research Report*, Vol. 3, No. 11 (March 18, 1994), pp. 33–38; Vladimir Socor, "Conflict-Resolution Groups Created," *RFE/RL Daily Report*, No. 209 (November 3, 1994); Susan L. Clark, "Russia in a Peacekeeping Role," in Aron and Jensen, *The Emergence of Russian Foreign Policy*, pp. 119–147.

34. Vladimir Socor, "Yeltsin at UN on CIS Affairs," *RFE/RL Daily Report*, No. 184 (September 27, 1994); Vladimir Socor, "'Yeltsin Doctrine,' 'Kozyrev Doctrine,'" *RFE/RL Daily Report*, No. 190 (October 6, 1994).

35. Pavel Felgengauer, "Starye granitsy i 'novye bazy'" [Old borders and "new bases"], *Segodnia* [Today], September 16, 1993, and the discussion in Allison, *Peacekeeping in the Soviet Successor States*, pp. 54–55.

36. This quote comes from Allison, *Peacekeeping in the Soviet Successor States*, pp. 26–27.

United Nations would undertake. In some cases, Russian actions have probably saved lives and brought stability to dangerous situations.

Unfortunately, in too many cases Russia appears to have deliberately provoked, prolonged, or intensified regional conflicts in order to secure "invitations" to intervene. In return for playing the role of peacemaker, Russia has extracted concessions, such as membership in the CIS from republics that had initially resisted (Moldova, Georgia, Azerbaijan), and agreements to long-term basing of Russian forces.

One might have more enthusiasm for the use of CIS peacekeeping forces in the future if they had adhered in the past to the set of principles upon which Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev and his British counterpart, Douglas Hurd, agreed at the end of 1993: "strict respect for the sovereignty of the countries involved; an invitation from the government concerned, and the consent of the parties to the conflict; the use of multinational peacekeeping forces wherever possible; and an exit strategy for the peacekeeping forces."³⁷ There may be emergency situations where these conditions need not be met, but Russia has violated these principles on a regular basis.

OTHER REGIONAL POWERS. Russia's neighbors to the west take a great interest in the conflicts in the former Soviet Union, but have so far avoided direct involvement. The Baltic states, in particular, are concerned that Russia's behavior in Chechnya and Tajikistan, for example, could set precedents for actions directed against them. Russian leaders have made no secret of the issue (or pretext) that could lead to military intervention in the Baltic area: protection of Russian speakers living there.

Other states that have manifested interest in the conflicts along Russia's periphery include Turkey, Iran, and Afghanistan. Turkey seems to be motivated primarily by a desire to expand its influence in Central Asia -- a region populated mainly by Turkic-speaking peoples (in Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, and Kyrgyzstan). It is also interested in the economic benefits to be derived by helping to export Azerbaijan's oil.³⁸ Iran and Afghanistan seem to view conflicts along Russia's southern border as opportunities to promote their versions of Islam in regions where there are also people of related ethnic background. Tajiks, for example, are related to the Iranians and speak a Persian language; Azeris live in northern Iran.

37. Joint article published simultaneously in *Izvestiia* and the *Financial Times*, December 14, 1993, quoted in Allison, *Peacekeeping in the Soviet Successor States*, p. 62.

38. Liz Fuller, "Russia, Turkey, Azerbaijan, and Oil," *RFE/RL Daily Report*, No. 209 (November 3, 1994).

All three states are also undoubtedly motivated by concerns for their security — but this does not tell us much about their preferences. Presumably they would feel most secure if they dominated the regions along their borders. Short of that, it is not clear if they would prefer prolonged instability to a Russian-imposed stability. To avoid that choice, they might prefer the more neutral involvement of international organizations. Turkey, in particular, has endorsed international efforts at peaceful resolution of the conflicts in Nagorno-Karabakh and Chechnya, and Iran has sponsored talks between the Tajik government and opposition.³⁹

INTERNATIONAL INVOLVEMENT

Given the importance of traditional power politics in the former Soviet Union — especially evident in Russia's behavior — it is somewhat surprising how little the major powers have become involved in the region's conflicts. Their involvement has taken indirect forms, as reflected in their support for participation by international institutions, such as NATO, the OSCE (formerly CSCE), and the United Nations, in sponsoring negotiations and monitoring cease-fires.

THE UNITED STATES. The United States has had little involvement in conflicts in the former Soviet Union. To the extent that one can identify U.S. interests at stake there, they revolve around concerns that nuclear weapons and fissile material remain secure and under Russian control. There is also a rhetorical commitment to the territorial integrity of the three Baltic states and Ukraine. Kazakhstan also seems to engage U.S. interests because of its size, its vast natural resources, its place in the Soviet nuclear legacy, and its large Russian population.

However, the United States has not sought to invoke, for example, humanitarian concerns as a reason to involve itself in post-Soviet affairs — despite cases of ethnic cleansing (in Tajikistan and North Ossetia-Ingushetia), massive refugee crises (Abkhazia, Tajikistan), and deliberate aerial attacks on civilian homes, hospitals, and orphanages (Chechnya). Nor has the United States upheld the norm of sovereignty when Russia has intervened in its neighbors' civil wars.

EUROPE. The major European powers have tended to involve themselves in the internal conflicts of the Soviet successor states mainly through the

39. Ibid. Also, Liz Fuller, "Dudaev Appeals to Turkey for Help," *RFE/RL Daily Report*, No. 238 (December 19, 1994); Bess Brown, "Tajik Government-Opposition Commission Meets," *RFE/RL Daily Report*, No. 217 (November 15, 1994); Bess Brown, "Tajik Cease-Fire Extended," *RFE/RL Daily Report*, No. 216 (November 14, 1994).

actions of the international organizations of which they are the leading members. Beyond that, Western European political leaders have made public pronouncements about various conflicts in the former Soviet Union, and have occasionally linked economic aid programs to the peaceful resolution of these conflicts — as Alain Juppé, then France's foreign minister and head of the Western European Union, did in reaction to Russia's attack on Chechnya.

NATO. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization has become involved in conflicts on the territory of the former Soviet Union in two ways. First, at a rhetorical level, NATO officials express the views of the alliance's leading members in response to particular developments, such as the indiscriminate killing of civilians during Russia's bombardment of Grozny, the capital of Chechnya. Second, NATO's Partnership for Peace program provides a mechanism for bringing former Soviet republics — including Russia itself — closer to NATO. (Of the fifteen former Soviet republics, only Tajikistan has not joined the Partnership program.) What that means in terms of a NATO, and, therefore, a U.S. commitment to the security of these states is unclear, but it does imply a greater level of involvement and interest. Russia's uneasiness about an eastward expansion of NATO, and the use of NATO forces in Bosnia, has probably made some of the new "partners" in the "near abroad" reluctant to provoke their powerful Russian neighbor by developing close ties with NATO. Armenia, for example, upon signing a Partnership for Peace agreement, explicitly ruled out direct NATO participation in efforts to resolve the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh.⁴⁰

CSCE/OSCE. The CSCE, now the OSCE, has become involved in the resolution of several disputes in the former Soviet Union. In particular, it has worked to reach a settlement of the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh. It has also sent observers to South Ossetia, the Dniester Republic, and Abkhazia. The OSCE maintains a permanent mission in Moldova and has made recommendations, endorsed by the Moldovan president, for resolving the conflict there by granting the Dniester Republic a special administrative status.⁴¹ Finally, it has sought to end the Russian war against Chechnya by sponsoring

40. Liz Fuller, "Armenia Joins Partnership for Peace," *RFE/RL Daily Report*, No. 190 (October 6, 1994).

41. Allison, *Peacekeeping in the Soviet Successor States*, pp. 49–50; Dan Ionescu, "Moldovan President Says Russia Has Special Role in Dniester Region," *OMRI Daily Digest*, No. 110, Part II (June 7, 1995).

negotiations between the Russian government and the forces of Chechen president Dudaev.⁴²

The OSCE's involvement in the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute initially created friction with Russia, which was conducting its own negotiations with Armenia and Azerbaijan. In October 1994, Russia's negotiator charged that "some countries are trying to use the CSCE as a cover for their geopolitical interests, rather than as a conflict resolution mechanism. Some people would like to minimize Russia's role and exclude the CIS from the process." The CSCE's Committee of Senior Officials, in turn, criticized Russia for undermining its mediation efforts.⁴³ Since then relations between the OSCE and Russia have improved. In December 1994, the OSCE decided, with Russia's approval, to dispatch a multinational peacekeeping force to Nagorno-Karabakh.⁴⁴ By June 1995, Russia had fully joined the OSCE effort as co-chair of the mediation effort and appeared to be exerting a positive influence on the parties involved.⁴⁵

UNITED NATIONS. The United Nations has played a fairly active role in several conflicts in the former Soviet Union, although its effectiveness has often been overshadowed by Russian and CIS involvement. The UN's main activities have consisted of sponsoring negotiations to resolve the civil war in Tajikistan and monitoring the conflicts there and in Abkhazia.

In August 1993, the UN Security Council approved the deployment of 88 observers to monitor a cease-fire between Georgia and Abkhazia. When the United Nations failed to get the two sides to agree to deployment of UN peacekeepers, the Russian army stepped in to play that role.⁴⁶ In November 1994, the Abkhaz parliament adopted a new constitution characterizing Abkhazia as an independent country. Arguing that the Abkhaz action threatened to undermine the basis for a negotiated solution to the conflict, Shevardnadze appealed unsuccessfully to the UN

42. Liz Fuller, "OSCE Chechnya Talks Collapse," *OMRI Daily Digest*, No. 102, Part I (May 26, 1995).

43. Vladimir Socor, "Russia Challenges CSCE over Karabakh," *RFE/RL Daily Report*, No. 190 (October 6, 1994).

44. Liz Fuller, "Karabakh Mediation Update," *RFE/RL Daily Report*, No. 216 (November 14, 1994); Liz Fuller, "Reaction to CSCE Karabakh Decision," *RFE/RL Daily Report*, No. 232 (December 9, 1994).

45. Lowell Bezanis, "Armenia to Participate in Talks," *OMRI Daily Digest*, No. 108, Part I (June 5, 1995).

46. Allison, *Peacekeeping in the Soviet Successor States*, pp. 46-47; Clark, "Russia in a Peacekeeping Role."

Security Council to convene an emergency session and discuss the issue.⁴⁷ Nodar Natadze, a leading Georgian opposition politician, asserted that "the UN is incapable of exerting any practical influence on the settlement of the conflict."⁴⁸ Nevertheless, the UN Security Council extended the mandate of its observer force, expanded to 136 members, until January 1996. The CIS followed suit by agreeing to maintain its peacekeeping force in Georgia until 1996 as well.⁴⁹

During 1994 and 1995, the United Nations sponsored a series of negotiations between the Tajik government and opposition forces in an effort to secure a cease-fire and work out a longer-term settlement. The fourth round of talks, held in Kazakhstan in May 1995, produced a three-month extension of the cease-fire, but efforts to establish a coalition government and revise the constitution to meet the concerns of the opposition were adamantly resisted by the Tajik government.⁵⁰

In the meantime, Russia had convinced the other members of the CIS to send a Russian-dominated peacekeeping force to Tajikistan. Russia's 201st Motorized Rifle Division has maintained an uneasy truce between the communist government and the opposition, although it is generally understood to favor the former. It has been particularly preoccupied with securing the Tajik-Afghan border, where nine Russian border guards were killed in January 1995.⁵¹ The United Nations sent a six-person mission to Tajikistan to monitor the CIS peacekeepers, but most observers have been disappointed with the UN mission's performance.⁵²

International organizations have achieved their greatest successes when they have worked with Russia rather than against it — a truism that reflects the importance of Russian power in resolving disputes in the region. Despite the primacy of Russia's role, however, international organizations bring to the conflicts qualities that the Russians often lack — impartiality, prestige, and good offices. Moreover, they are sources of new

47. Liz Fuller, "Abkhaz-UN Talks Deadlocked," *RFE/RL Daily Report*, No. 219 (November 18, 1994); Liz Fuller, "Georgia Calls for UN Security Council Meeting on Abkhazia," *RFE/RL Daily Report*, No. 227 (December 2, 1994).

48. Nodar Natadze is quoted in Liz Fuller, "Boutros-Ghali on Abkhaz Refugees," *RFE/RL Daily Report*, No. 209 (November 3, 1994).

49. Liz Fuller, "CIS Peacekeeping Force to Remain in Abkhazia?" *OMRI Daily Digest*, No. 94, Part I (May 16, 1995).

50. Bruce Pannier, "Tajik Talks Yield Results," *OMRI Daily Digest*, No. 105, Part I (May 31, 1995).

51. Liz Fuller, "Tajik Opposition Will Not Attend Next Round of Peace Talks," *OMRI Daily Digest*, Vol. 1, No. 5 (January 6, 1995).

52. Clark, "Russia in a Peacekeeping Role," p. 135.

ideas and proposals for conflict resolution. Even if Russia must ultimately endorse international proposals for them to be implemented, the fact that they are put forward adds a new element to the internal Russian debates over policies towards the "near abroad." International engagement opens up possibilities for Moscow to adopt a less self-interested approach than it might have done, left to its own devices.

Conclusions

The economic and political legacy of the Soviet period has sown the seeds of future conflicts, much as it contributed to the breakup of the union itself. Such conflicts are likely to stem from unresolved irredentist claims and problems of diaspora populations, combined with economic discontent and inflamed by opportunistic politicians. The result in many regions will be violent conflict, including the possibility of civil war among Russians. The role for outside powers and international organizations in preventing or resolving such conflicts will not be a large one, especially given the preponderance of Russian power in the region. External actors will exert a positive influence, however, if they can bolster the position of internal proponents of moderation and undercut extremists. Such efforts promise better results than ceding the region to a Russian sphere of influence.

THE OUTLOOK FOR CONFLICT

Because violent conflict on the territory of the former Soviet Union is a recent phenomenon, it is impossible to make confident assessments of which situations are likely to turn violent, and which are likely to engage other states and international organizations. Situations which have not yet turned violent or involved regional powers may yet do so.

PROBLEMS OF ECONOMIC TRANSITION. The fundamental political and economic transformations that have been taking place in the former Soviet Union have set the stage for free-for-all competitions for control of economic resources. The collapse of central planning and state ownership has left property rights up for grabs. As Shenfield describes, "the prospect of privatization greatly raises the stakes in struggles for power and makes it much more urgent to win. If the coming to power of some group is delayed by a few years, privatization may have been completed already in a fashion detrimental to the interests of that group."⁵³

53. Shenfield, "Armed Conflict in Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union," p. 35.

Many regions within Russia have appealed to the Soviet legacy of "autonomies" to assert control over local resources, thereby creating potential conflict situations.⁵⁴ In 1993, for example, Russia's Constitutional Court recognized as legal the separation of the autonomous area of Chukotka (*okrug*) from Magadan (*oblast'*). The Chukchi people represented only 7.3 percent of the population, whereas Russians and Ukrainians made up 83 percent (according to the 1989 census). The motives were clearly not "ethnic," but rather economic. Separation from Magadan would give Chukotka control over its valuable mineral resources (mainly tin and coal).⁵⁵ With the same goal in mind, the autonomous areas of Khanty-Mansi and Iamalo-Nenets sought to secede from Tiumen *oblast'*. In doing so, they would have taken most of the region's oil wealth with them.⁵⁶ In the Komi Republic of Siberia, some local activists have sought to "put the natural resources exclusively to the use of the indigenes," even though only 290,000 of the republic's 1.3 million residents are ethnic Komi. Their proposals have provoked residents of the Russian-dominated energy-producing towns, such as Vorkuta, to threaten to declare themselves free economic zones.⁵⁷

Do these kinds of potential conflicts have any international repercussions? Two possibilities come to mind. First, the divisive tendencies inherent in the "battle of the autonomies" could cause Russia to break apart, with uncertain but potentially destabilizing consequences for the international system. Second, international interests could become directly involved in the struggle for economic resources. As investors negotiate joint ventures with localities, they could come into conflict with Moscow; then the host countries of the foreign firms would have to decide whether and how to support their companies against the Russian government.

There are already worrisome precedents. When Azerbaijan negotiated a deal with foreign firms and countries (Iran and Turkey) for development of oil in the Caspian Sea, Russia strongly objected and was ultimately cut in; Azerbaijan's objectives were patently political rather than economic.⁵⁸

54. Andrei Neshchadin, "Russia's Regions Oppose the Government on Economic Reforms," *Moscow News*, No. 26 (June 28, 1992), p. 9; Valery Lavsky, "Russian Regions Use the Threat of Self-Isolation," *Moscow News*, No. 41 (October 8, 1993), p. 8.

55. Ann Sheehy, "Chukotka's Separation from Magadan Oblast Legal," *RFE/RL Daily Report*, No. 91 (May 13, 1993); Dorian and Borisovich, "Energy and Minerals in the Former Soviet Republics," pp. 218-219.

56. Sheehy, "Chukotka's Separation."

57. Dmitrii Ukhlin, "Road toward Vorkuta's Freedom," *Moscow News*, No. 15 (April 9, 1993), p. 1.

58. Vladimir Socor, "Russia Insists on Sharing Other Caspian States' Resources,"

It stands to reason that if Russia is willing to assert its *droit de regard* over the resources of a nominally independent neighboring country, it would do so with even greater energy with respect to its own regions. One cannot be confident that regional leaders will be willing or able to make the political compromises that the Azeri leadership made or that foreign investors and their host countries will tolerate Moscow's interference in their business transactions. Conflict cannot be ruled out in such situations.

PROBLEMS OF IRREDENTA AND DIASPORA. There are several outstanding problems left over from the breakup of the Soviet Union that could erupt into violence and involve international actors. Ukraine and Russia have not yet resolved the status of Crimea or the disposition of the Black Sea fleet. Failure to do so could lead to violent conflict between troops of the Crimean militia and the Ukrainian army, or between units of the fleet. The dispute between Ukraine and Russia over the former's nuclear status seems closer to resolution. In return for signing the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, Ukraine received assurances that the United States, Britain, and Russia would "respect Ukraine's independence, sovereignty, and integrity within its existing borders." Belarus and Kazakhstan, the other two former Soviet republics "born nuclear" but committed to denuclearization, have apparently been given similar guarantees.⁵⁹

These assurances could involve Western powers in conflicts between Russia and its three neighbors. Ukraine and Kazakhstan both have large populations of Russians living in border regions. That in itself is not enough to provoke violence, but combined with factors that have operated in other post-Soviet conflicts, differences between Russia and its neighbors could turn violent. Economic disparities between Ukraine and Russia could come into play. Russia's economic reforms, a failure by most standards, are a model of success compared to those of Ukraine. The continuing decline of the Ukrainian economy has led many Russian citizens of Ukraine, especially in Crimea, to seek closer affiliation with Russia. Separatist movements in Ukraine and Kazakhstan, combined with annexationist impulses on the part of Russian politicians, could ignite conflicts fueled largely by economic discontent.

The potential for conflict between Russia and the Baltic states also merits serious concern. Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia all have border

RFE/RL Daily Report, No. 213 (November 9, 1994); Vladimir Socor, "Russia Seeks World Bank Oil Credits," *RFE/RL Daily Report*, No. 181 (September 22, 1994); Liz Fuller, "Russia and the Caspian," *RFE/RL Daily Report*, No. 211 (November 7, 1994); Liz Fuller, "Russia, Turkey, Azerbaijan, and Oil."

59. Doug Clarke and Ustina Markus, "Ukraine Accedes to NPT," *RFE/RL Daily Report*, No. 218 (November 17, 1994).

disputes with Russia; Estonia's is probably the most serious, owing to the large concentration of Russians in the northeastern part of the country. The anomalous situation of Russia's Kaliningrad *oblast'* has also led to friction and could worsen. The region around the former Königsberg was absorbed into the Soviet Union after World War II as a discontinuous province of the Russian Federation. It became a key western outpost of Soviet military power during the Cold War. With the breakup of the Soviet Union, Russia has come into conflict with Lithuania over transit rights for military personnel and equipment.⁶⁰ All three Baltic states and Poland have expressed concern about the high level of Russian military deployments in the Kaliningrad region. Russia has responded mainly with intemperate statements and threats.⁶¹ The situation could become worse if NATO proceeds with its plans to expand to include countries such as Poland. The NATO alliance would then share a border with one of the most heavily armed regions of Russia.

Arbitrary borders could contribute to conflicts with Russia's other neighbors as well. One particularly worrisome case concerns the Lezgis, "a North Caucasian people divided by the interstate border between the multiethnic Republic of Dagestan of the Russian Federation and the contiguous area of Azerbaijan."⁶² Since every ethnic group in the former Soviet Union has easy access to weapons, the Lezgis have had no trouble forming an armed movement dedicated to the unification of "Lezgistan." Its efforts could destabilize the already tense interethnic balance in Dagestan and contribute to conflict within and between Russia and Azerbaijan.

Within the Russian Federation itself, problems of irredenta and diaspora could combine with economic discontent and political opportunism to produce violent conflicts. As with many potential problems in the former Soviet Union, these owe much to the country's Stalinist legacy. In 1937, for example, Stalin divided the former Mongolian Buriat Autonomous Republic into three separate entities: the republic of Buriatia; the

60. Saulius Girnius, "Military Transit through Lithuania," *RFE/RL Daily Report*, No. 220 (November 21, 1994).

61. Vladimir Gubarev, "Kaliningrad: Living without Moscow Supervision," *Moscow News*, No. 6 (February 4, 1993), p. 11; Dzintra Bungs, "Moscow Blasts Baltic Statement on Kaliningrad," *RFE/RL Daily Report*, No. 218 (November 17, 1994); Victor Yasmann, "Baltic Resolution on Kaliningrad Criticized," *RFE/RL Daily Report*, No. 219 (November 18, 1994); Dzintra Bungs, "More Russian Criticism of Baltic Resolution on Kaliningrad," *RFE/RL Daily Report*, No. 220 (November 21, 1994).

62. Shenfield, "Armed Conflict in Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union," p. 34.

Aga Buriat area within Chita *oblast'*; and the Ust' Orda area within Irkutsk *oblast'*. The economic resources of the former Mongolian Buriat republic were likewise divided up, with rich farms and cattle lands ceded to Chita and valuable lead mines controlled by Irkutsk. The Buriat people consequently have serious economic grievances that opportunistic politicians could use to foster ethnic conflict in order to promote their personal positions. With these possibilities in mind, one Russian official called the situation in the Buriat regions as explosive as Nagorno-Karabakh.⁶³ Unfortunately, this is not a rare situation in contemporary Russia.

CIVIL WAR AMONG RUSSIANS. Violent conflict in the former Soviet Union has frequently included an ethnic dimension. As we have seen, however, many disputes are more fundamentally about political power and control over economic resources. The ethnic dimensions of conflict should not, therefore, distract our attention from the possibility of violence among Russians. The Russian political spectrum is as wide as any, with violent extremists at both ends and a government demonstrably willing to use force to achieve domestic political objectives. In October 1993, Yeltsin called out the army to settle his conflict with the Russian parliament by bombing the parliament building. In December 1994, Yeltsin ordered an attack on Grozny, the Chechen capital, that resulted in indiscriminate killing of Russian as well as Chechen residents — not to mention the needless sacrifice of hundreds of Russian soldiers.

Disputes over control of resources could also pit Russian regions against the central government. Some regions may well have renegade armed forces of their own. Not surprisingly, separatist sentiments are strongest in areas rich in resources, such as Krasnoïarsk territory (*krai*), whereas heavily subsidized regions such as the Altai territory are more loyal to Moscow. Leaders of many parts of the Russian Federation have sought control of local economic resources by declaring that their own laws take precedence over federal laws. At least eleven republics have staked such claims: Bashkortostan, Buratia, Chechnya, Ingushetia, Kalmykia, Karelia, Mordova, Sakha, Tatarstan, Tuva, and Udmurtia.⁶⁴

Struggles for control of major economic assets could lead to the breakup of the federation itself. Jessica Stern has called attention to the possibility that an independent "Volga-Urals Federation," encompassing six of Russia's republics, could be formed with Tatarstan and Bashkortostan at its core. Such an entity would clearly be viable. As Stern points

63. Stern, "Moscow Meltdown," p. 53.

64. *Ibid.*, pp. 45, 57.

out, Tatarstan's gross national product exceeds that of many of the former Soviet republics that became independent states: Armenia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan. Bashkortostan alone possesses more oil reserves than Kuwait. Not only would a Volga-Urals Federation control much of Russia's automobile manufacturing, oil refining, and machine building, it would contain major facilities for the production of aircraft and missiles, as well as nuclear weapons research and manufacturing centers.⁶⁵ Clearly, Moscow would not give up such assets without a fight. The violence that such a struggle would provoke almost defies the imagination.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The main policy advice for fostering the peaceful resolution of conflicts in the former Soviet Union is, unfortunately, the same as that offered to the proverbial lost traveler: "I wouldn't start from here if I were you." The Soviet legacy of arbitrary ethnic divisions, sharp economic disparities, and political tension has made violent conflict in the region highly likely in the future.

Outside powers and international institutions interested in preventing or resolving internal conflicts in the former Soviet Union must recognize that their ability to operate effectively in the Soviet successor states will be heavily influenced by the dominant role that Russia plays in the region. Even if its army is corrupt and inept and its economy is a shambles, Russia remains a powerful country. It would be naive to think that any international organization or state could exert a great deal of influence, against Russia's interests, in matters that Russian leaders consider vital to national security.

One might think, therefore, that the most reliable way to keep conflicts in the former Soviet Union from spilling over or drawing in other states would be to cede the region to Russia as a sphere of influence. Then, presumably, one would only have to worry about the moral implications of endorsing Russian domination over millions of non-Russians, or perhaps the long-term international consequences of giving Russia an opportunity to regain superpower status. The recent tragedy in Chechnya suggests, however, that Russian leaders are not capable of maintaining stability, let alone peace, in their own federation, let alone in the "near abroad." Rather than containing conflict, they have provoked it by antagonizing peoples throughout the Caucasus and inspiring calls for the formation of a regional alliance "from the Caspian to the Black Sea" to

65. *Ibid.*, pp. 62-63.

resist Russian military intervention,⁶⁶ by spreading exaggerated claims of outside interference (especially from Islamic countries) and thereby creating self-fulfilling prophecies,⁶⁷ and by fostering unrest and opposition in Russia,⁶⁸ including within the military itself.⁶⁹ It is difficult not to wonder about the competence of Russia's leaders.

One should also recognize that the Russian leadership is hardly united in its views. Even during the Soviet era, political figures disagreed about how best to pursue security or what constitutes the national interest. Outside actors could occasionally affect internal debates.⁷⁰ The behavior of other states or international organizations could influence Russian policy in the future, at least at the margins and possibly even more fundamentally, by strengthening the position of one side or another in Russian debates over security policy. Fundamental disagreements over national interests, security policy, even national identity are rife in Russia today.⁷¹ No one argues that international institutions influence foreign

66. Socor, "Spillover Effect in Caucasus"; Socor, "Ingushetia, Dagestan: Resistance to Russian Advance Reported"; Fuller, "Abkhaz, North Caucasians, Crimean Tatars Support Dudaev"; Socor, "More from the Region"; Brown, "Reaction in Kazakhstan to Situation in Chechnya"; Socor, "Resistance in Ingushetia . . . and in Dagestan"; Socor, "Regional Reverberations."

67. Liz Fuller, "Chechnya Considers Playing the Islamic Card," *RFE/RL Daily Report*, No. 221 (November 22, 1994). Several Russian leaders, including the prime minister, claimed that "thousands" of fighters from Afghanistan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Azerbaijan, Ukraine, and the Baltic States had joined the Chechen forces. See Vladimir Socor, "Russian Government Broadens Warnings Beyond Chechnya," *RFE/RL Daily Report*, No. 236 (December 15, 1994); Liz Fuller, "Dudaev Appeals to Turkey for Help," *RFE/RL Daily Report*, No. 238 (December 19, 1994); Lowell Bezanis, "Turkish Spy Spills Beans?" *OMRI Daily Digest*, No. 107, Part I (June 2, 1995).

68. Vladimir Socor, "Critical Voices," *RFE/RL Daily Report*, No. 236 (December 15, 1994); Julia Wishnevsky, "Invasion of Chechnya Unpopular in Russia," *RFE/RL Daily Report*, No. 233 (December 12, 1994); Julia Wishnevsky, "Polls on Russian-Chechen Conflict," *RFE/RL Daily Report*, No. 236 (December 15, 1994).

69. Vladimir Socor, "Russian General: Law and Humanity above Orders," *RFE/RL Daily Report*, No. 238 (December 19, 1994); Doug Clarke, "Commander of Elite Unit Resigns over Covert Operations," *RFE/RL Daily Report*, No. 228 (December 5, 1994); Vladimir Socor, "Hardline Generals Soft on Chechnya," *RFE/RL Daily Report*, No. 235 (December 14, 1994); Vladimir Socor, "Army Demoralized," *RFE/RL Daily Report*, No. 239 (December 20, 1994).

70. See Jack Snyder, "International Leverage on Soviet Domestic Change," *World Politics*, Vol. 42, No. 1 (October 1989), pp. 1-30; Matthew Evangelista, "Internal and External Constraints on Grand Strategy: The Soviet Case," in Richard Rosecrance and Arthur Stein, eds., *The Domestic Bases of Grand Strategy* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1993), pp. 154-178.

71. For an outline of general debates on security policy, see Alexei G. Arbatov,

policies independently of politics and power, but their activities could lend support to certain domestic actors and produce comparatively benign outcomes.

There is some evidence that international organizations have successfully supported the position of some domestic Russian actors over others. Consider, for example, the case of Russian "peacekeeping" efforts in Tajikistan. Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev proposed that United Nations observers be stationed on the Tajik border and that they supervise the disarmament of government and opposition forces — an operation that would nominally be carried out under the auspices of the CIS but mainly by the Russian army. Russian military leaders opposed any introduction of UN observers. The foreign ministry, with UN support, nevertheless carried the day. Although no wide-scale disarmament took place, a UN mission was established, a ten-member commission of government and opposition representatives was set up, and a cease-fire went into effect in November 1994 and was extended several times. The UN observer mission and the Russian/CIS peacekeeping forces were subsequently successful in coordinating their efforts effectively. When the balance of internal power in Russia's foreign policy debates is close, external actors can make a difference in shifting the agenda and broadening the scope of possible policy options.

Intervention by international institutions can play an important role in relieving the suffering of innocent civilians caught in violent conflicts in the former Soviet Union, but again the domestic balance of power in Russia will determine how such humanitarian efforts will fare. During Russia's war against Chechnya, for example, the Russian government invited the International Committee of the Red Cross to aid civilians in distress, but the Russian military blocked the relief convoys' access to the area.⁷² The same fate befell relief efforts organized by the United Nations, prompting one UN official to wonder "Why, when we were invited in at the highest level, are we not allowed to do our task?"⁷³ The answer lies in the delicate balance between Russian proponents and opponents of international involvement. A strong statement condemning such actions from the U.S. president or the UN secretary-general could have shifted the balance in favor of those who would allow international organizations

"Russia's Foreign Policy Alternatives," *International Security*, Vol. 18, No. 2 (Fall 1993), pp. 5-43; for debates specifically about peacekeeping, see Allison, *Peacekeeping in the Soviet Successor States*.

72. Report on National Public Radio, January 13, 1995.

73. Quoted in "UN Official Says Russia Blocking Aid to Refugees," *Boston Globe*, January 15, 1995, p. 16.

to operate. By contrast, statements to the effect that Russia's attack on Chechnya is an "internal matter" (U.S. President Bill Clinton), that Yeltsin is in full control of his military, that "Russia is operating in a democratic context" and therefore the United States should "not rush to judgment" (U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher) could cost lives by undermining those policymakers in Russia who appeal to international demands for adherence to humanitarian norms.⁷⁴

Another way of trying to moderate Russia's behavior towards its neighbors would be, as Shenfield suggests, "to take the CIS seriously as a multilateral institution." In other words, international support for greater participation by the other CIS members — especially Ukraine and Kazakhstan — in CIS peacekeeping and mediation efforts might help keep in check Russia's hegemonic ambitions.⁷⁵

The wisest approach to the former Soviet Union must be founded on a realistic assessment of Russia's aims — that many influential leaders do harbor desires to reconstitute the Soviet empire in some form, if only because their conceptions of reliable security dictate it, but that other political figures have more modest views of the requirements of security. At least some of the neo-imperialists within the Russian foreign policy community recognize a role for international institutions, even if that role is mainly to legitimize Russia's "peacekeeping" operations along its periphery. That grudging acceptance of international organizations gives international actors an opening to monitor Russian behavior and perhaps to influence internal debates in support of moderate leaders. The brief record of international operations in the former Soviet Union is mixed so far. They nevertheless offer more hopeful prospects for containing conflicts in that part of the world than Russia's unconstrained pursuit of a neo-imperialist agenda.

74. Elaine Sciolino, "Administration Sees No Choice but to Support Yeltsin."

75. Shenfield, "Armed Conflict in Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union," p. 45.