

# Russia and the Near Abroad



**The Face of Russia.** One of the major problems facing Russia today is making the transition from a planned economy to a market-driven economy. This has not been an easy process. Corruption, decaying social services, and growing income inequalities continue to pose serious challenges to Russian leaders.

## GEOPOLITICAL OVERVIEW

During the Cold War the region discussed in this chapter lay entirely inside of the Soviet Union. With the dissolution of the Soviet Union, 15 states entered the stage of world politics. One, Russia, was recognized as the legal inheritor of the Soviet Union's seat in the United Nations and other international organizations while the other 14 assumed sovereign status with a clean slate. The other states collectively are known as the **Near Abroad**. They constitute the territory comprised of the former republics of the Soviet Union. The term *Near Abroad* first emerged in Russian accounts of its relations with the other former republics of the Soviet Union and it implied the existence of a special and unequal relationship.

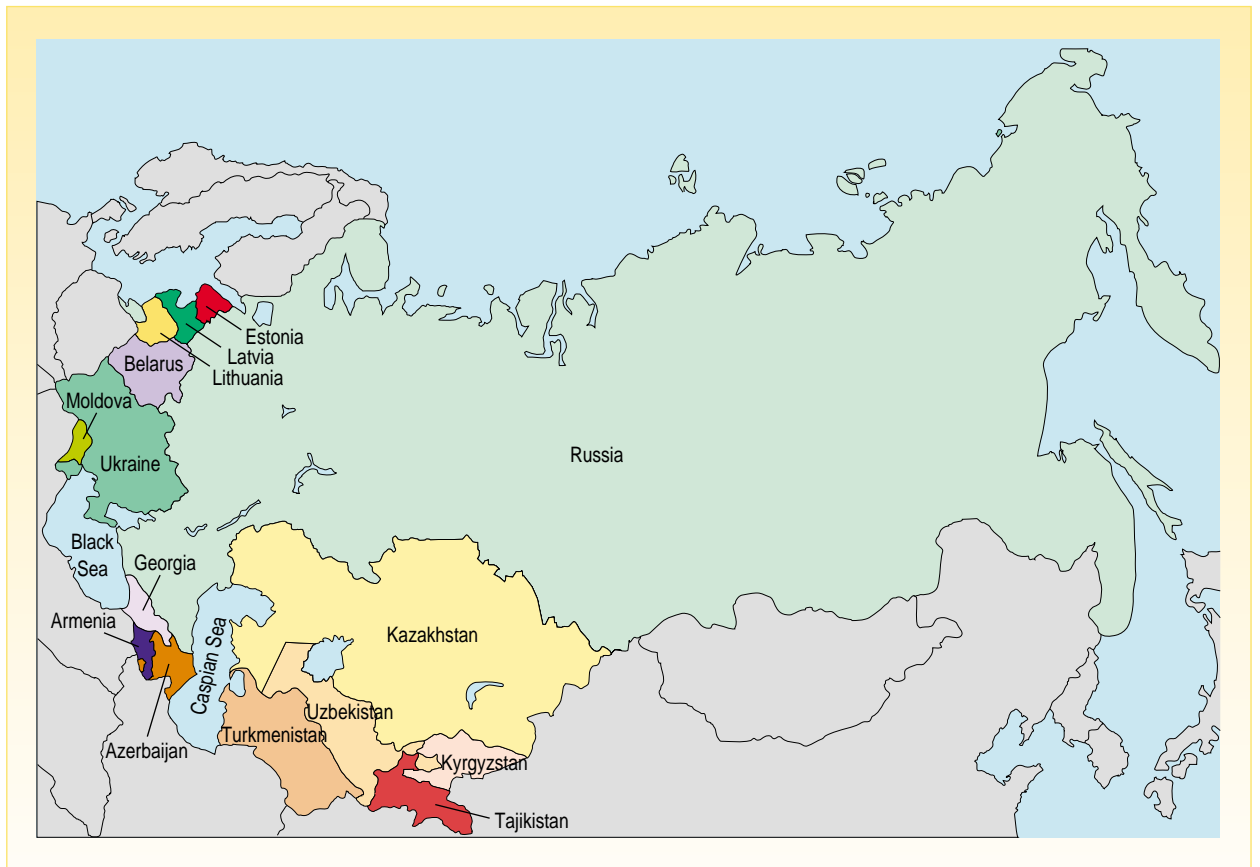
On all measures, Russia dominates the states of the Near Abroad region. Even reduced to borders resembling those of the seventeenth century, Russia is almost twice as large as the United States and has a population of approximately 146 million. In 1999 its gross domestic product (GDP) was estimated to be \$620.3 billion.

### Near Abroad

The territory around Russia composed of former republics of the Soviet Union. Claimed as a special area of interest and responsibility by Russian officials.

Next in size is Ukraine, which is slightly smaller than Texas and has a population of 49.2 million. In 1999 its GDP was estimated to be \$109.5 billion. At the other extreme can be found Moldova, which is about twice the size of Hawaii with a population of less than 5 million and a GDP of approximately \$9.7 billion.

The outcome of regional international politics in Russia and the Near Abroad holds great significance for the international community. At the center of these relations lie two sets of issues: First, will Russia's worldview once again adopt a global perspective or will it be satisfied to remain a regional power? Second, how will Russia go about defining its relations with the states of the Near Abroad? Will the dominant model be rooted in a spirit of integration or imperialism?



**MAP 11.1**  
**Russia and the Near Abroad**

This map depicts Russia and its immediate neighbors, most of which were until recently part of the Soviet Union. The Near Abroad is the term used to identify these states. One of the most pressing issues in Russian foreign policy is how Russia and the Near Abroad will define their future relationship.

## FLASH POINTS

In looking at the geo-political region comprised of Russia and the Near Abroad, several different flash points of potential conflict exist. We discuss the most prominent of these in this section. They are problems posed by nuclear weapons, the challenge of economic growth, human rights violations, and the task of building democracy.

### Nuclear Weapons

Two aspects of Russia's nuclear forces concern policy makers and scholars today. The first is the state of readiness of these forces. The second centers on strategies for their use. Together they suggest the real possibility that Russian officials are embracing a policy of nuclear first use at a time when Russian nuclear forces are becoming increasingly less dependable as instruments of foreign policy.

Weakness was not a term used to describe Soviet nuclear or conventional forces during the Cold War. Beginning in the 1980s, the Pentagon produced an annual volume, *Soviet Military Power*, which compared American and Soviet forces and spending patterns along a broad array of personnel categories and weapons systems. The inescapable impression left by the early annual editions was one of "relentless and almost overwhelming Soviet military power."<sup>1</sup> Even the 1990 edition noted in its preface that the "military might of the Soviet Union is enormous and remains targeted on the United States and its allies. All evidence indicates that this will not change."<sup>2</sup> But it has. The situation is quite different today. By 1995, Stephen Meyer, who was conducting research on Russian military power for the Pentagon, described the Russian military establishment as a "lean, mean, non-functioning machine."<sup>3</sup> Nowhere is this so evident as in the area of nuclear forces. In 1990 the Soviet Union had 10,779 strategic warheads. In 1999 that number had been reduced to 6,000 and the Russian defense minister speculated that for economic reasons Russia might not be able to deploy more than 500 strategic warheads by 2012. More than 58 percent of its ballistic missile force used to deliver these warheads is well past its 10-year-long operational life span. A dispute between ground force generals and those in charge of Russia's nuclear forces in the first year of Vladimir Putin's presidency suggested that even deeper cuts may be in the offing. Compounding matters further is the decrepit state of Russia's early warning system. At the turn of the century Russian officials stated that 70 percent of its early warning satellites were in need of repair or past time to be replaced. In 1995 this situation resulted in the misidentification of a Norwegian scientific rocket as an attack missile and the activation of Yeltsin's nuclear briefcase containing Russia's missile launch codes.

Russian military doctrine for employing its nuclear weapons has been in flux. A starting point for understanding current Russian thinking is the "Basic Provisions of the Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation" published in 1993. A draft released the year before assigned priority to the problem of fighting conventional wars rather than nuclear ones. It was believed that such wars might come about as a result of local wars along Russia's borders or aggression directed at it or a neighboring state. The threat of nuclear war was seen as "significantly reduced" and Russia's no-first-use pledge was reaffirmed. Modifications, however,

were introduced. The use of conventional forces against Russian nuclear facilities would be considered to be equivalent to a nuclear attack and opened up the possibility of a Russian nuclear response.

As announced by President Boris Yeltsin in 1993 the final document departed from the draft in at least two important ways. First, the possibility of global nuclear or conventional war was given even less emphasis than in the original draft. Instead, local wars, efforts to suppress the rights and freedoms of Russian citizens of the Russian Federation in foreign states, and the expansion of military alliances that could harm Russian national interests were singled out for special attention. Second, the revised draft did not contain a nuclear no-first-use pledge.

Further revisions in Russia's national security doctrine have taken place since then. In 1997 Yeltsin announced that nuclear weapons could be used "in case of a threat to the existence of the Russian Federation as a sovereign state." A far less confrontational tone appeared in May 2002 when Presidents Vladimir Putin and George W. Bush signed the Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty that pledged each side to reduce the number of deployed warheads to no more than 2,200 by December 31, 2012. Russia's motivation in pursuing the treaty was economic. It is highly unlikely that Russia's economy will be strong enough in the future to permit it the luxury of a large nuclear arsenal.

## Economic Growth

Under communist rule the Soviet Union had a command economy in which key economic decisions were made by high-ranking party and government leaders who then communicated these decisions to factory managers who were expected to carry them out. The goal of an economic enterprise was not to make a profit or maximize efficiency but to meet the goals set by planning documents. Soviet economic plans were biased in favor of "heavy" industries that produced goods and material needed by the military. Consumer goods were discriminated against in terms of the amount of raw materials, enterprises, and labor allocated to their production.

Centralized economic planning produced significant growth from the 1930s through the 1950s. By the mid-1950s, however, problems began to surface. His inability to correct these problems led to the ouster of Nikita Khrushchev, general secretary of the Communist Party, in 1964. Whatever gains his successors made in economic performance had eroded by the end of the 1980s and the Soviet economy stagnated. Mikhail Gorbachev's initial response to this growing economic crisis was a continuation of the policy of stressing worker discipline to improve performance. That policy failed. The value of goods produced declined by 5 percent in 1990, investment in industry was down 20 percent, and the balance of trade went from a surplus in 1987 to a deficit.

Faced with this situation, Gorbachev broke with the past and introduced *perestroika*, or restructuring. Centralized state control would give way to a market system, joint ventures with foreign firms would be encouraged, small private enterprises would be allowed, agricultural reforms were to take place, and price reform would begin. *Perestroika* failed and conditions continued to worsen. By 1990, the Communist Party had been seriously weakened and by 1991–1992 the economy, along with the Soviet political system, had reached a point of collapse. In June 1991, Boris Yeltsin became the first democratically elected Russian president. In December, the Soviet Union was dissolved and replaced with the Commonwealth

### *Perestroika* (restructuring)

Introduced as part of Gorbachev's reform efforts to streamline Soviet bureaucracy and economy.

of Independent States. In 1992, the Yeltsin government announced a three-stage shock program consisting of price liberalization, macroeconomic stabilization, and privatization. The goal was to create a free-market economy.

Most observers argue that for economic recovery to occur in Russia (as well as in the Near Abroad as a whole) large amounts of foreign aid are necessary. Stanley Fischer argues that economic and political stability in Russia requires three types of foreign aid.<sup>4</sup> The first is humanitarian and largely takes the form of food aid needed to avert the more extreme consequences of market-driven prices during times of high inflation. The second is technical assistance. Often viewed purely in monetary terms, an important aspect of technical assistance here involves people who are stationed in Russia to help government agencies and businesses develop needed skills. Finally, a need exists for general financial aid. This last form of aid has proven to be quite controversial both in Russia and the West.

At the heart of the controversy are the dual questions of how much aid and for what. Disappointment with the quantity of Western aid and the benefits it has produced was a factor in the declining political fortunes of Russian foreign policy liberals. An early aid package highlights these frustrations. Between September 1990 and December 1991 the international community pledged more than \$67 billion in foreign aid. Closer inspection of the numbers involved reveals that much of the aid committed either took the form of ceilings on export credits or payment of existing debts. The actual amount of funds available for distribution in the Soviet Union was approximately \$12 billion.

Western aid efforts were slowed by economic problems that limited the amount of funds available for this purpose. For example, in the United States, balancing the budget and cutting federal spending were higher priority items than foreign aid, and in Germany rebuilding East Germany and integrating it into the Federal Republic commanded the lion's share of foreign aid funds. Western aid to Russia has also been slowed by political disagreements over the wisdom of supporting reform efforts. Although some in the West saw foreign aid as an indispensable element in a strategy of building democracy and a market economy in Russia, others feared that foreign aid would only speed Russia's reemergence as a threatening global power.

## Human Rights

During the Cold War the Soviet Union typically found itself on the defensive in the area of human rights policy. The two most frequent criticisms were directed at its treatment of political dissidents and its refusal to allow Soviet Jews to emigrate to Israel. The establishment of democracy in Russia has not ended international scrutiny or displeasure with its human rights performance. A 1997 report by Amnesty International noted that President Yeltsin had signed a law banning all religions from actively seeking converts. It asserted that torture by law enforcement officials and by the military continued to occur and criticized Russia for providing inadequate protection to refugees and asylum-seekers. Complaints were also raised about conditions in Russian penitentiaries and pretrial detention centers, stating that they amounted to cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment.

The breakup of the Soviet Union has also created a series of human rights problems from Russia's perspective. They stem from the sudden presence of large numbers of ethnic Russians outside of Russia's borders.<sup>5</sup> According to the 1989

Soviet census, 25.3 million ethnic Russians lived in Soviet republics other than Russia. This equaled 17 percent of the total ethnic Russian population of the Soviet Union. Added to these numbers were another 11.2 million Russian-speakers living outside of the Russian Republic. The total number of “Russians” living in what are now independent states is estimated to be in excess of 40 million. These numbers tell only part of the complex policy problem that exists here. Other important dimensions to the problem include the following<sup>6</sup>:

- In many of the new states of the Near Abroad, ethnic Russians make up a high percentage of the total population.
- Between 1979 and 1989 their numbers often grew more rapidly than did the native population and at an uneven rate.
- In most of the newly independent states of the Near Abroad, the Russian population is well established. Often more than one-third of the total ethnic Russian population has lived there for more than 25 years and can thus be considered “natives.”
- Relatively few Russians can speak the native language.
- Most Russians are urban dwellers and employed in the industrial sector in blue-collar or middle-management positions. Beginning in the 1930s, large-scale Russian immigration into these republics was seen as an important ingredient in the industrialization process.

On a day-to-day basis, the most pressing human rights problems center on the denial of political and legal rights to these Russians. The problem is most pronounced in the Baltics. In 1991 the Latvian parliament adopted a resolution restricting citizenship to those who were citizens of Latvia prior to the Russian occupation of June 1940. Those wishing to become naturalized Latvians must take a loyalty oath, renounce their previous citizenship, pass a language proficiency test, and be a resident for 16 years. Those associated with Russian security services or the military would be permanently barred from becoming citizens. Latvian law also guarantees the right to leave and return only to Latvian citizens. Estonia has passed similar legislation. Its new constitution places restrictions on land ownership rights, freedom of speech, and employment opportunities for noncitizens.

Controversy surrounds whether or not these Baltic states are in violation of international human rights law. Russia believes they are, while Latvia and Estonia deny any wrongdoing. International bodies have concluded that there have not been any “gross violations of human rights” but stop short of giving Latvia and Estonia a clean bill of health. A 1992 United Nations mission concluded that “the fear of marginalization by the denial of citizenship and fundamental rights related to it is real and in some cases well-founded”<sup>7</sup> and recommended that the government extend nationality to the majority of its permanent residents.

## Building Democracy

Evidence presented in Chapter 2 showed that war between democracies is rare. Were Russia and the successor states in the Near Abroad to become truly democratic states, it follows that the prospects for peace in the region would be greatly enhanced. The challenges involved in building democracy in this region should not be underestimated. One observer described the process as akin to a “blind leap

from the old order to something new, with few institutional trusses or historical braces to guide the jump.”<sup>8</sup>

It is a jump that has already encountered numerous setbacks. From the outset, Michael McFaul argues that the term “democracy” was a political weapon.<sup>9</sup> It was an ideology of opposition that was divorced from any evaluation of Russian national interests, a point that helps explain the gradual shift away from an initially pro-Western Soviet foreign policy to a more nationalistic one. McFaul notes that for an idea such as democracy to have a lasting political influence it must become institutionalized. In Russia, this is a task made difficult by the dominating role that the Communist Party played in Russian political life. Under communism, a clear division of labor existed between the Communist Party and the state. The Communist Party ruled but it did not govern.

Gorbachev came to power as a political reformer convinced that only by breathing new life into the Communist Party could economic revitalization be brought about. To this end, Gorbachev advanced two ideas: *glasnost* and *demokratizatsiya*. *Glasnost* (openness) was intended to relax bureaucratic controls over the flow of information available to Soviet citizens. *Demokratizatsiya* (democratization) was to be the avenue by which the public registered its support for Gorbachev’s reform agenda. Elections for a new Congress of People’s Deputies failed to give Gorbachev the mandate he sought. Instead, these elections unleashed a flurry of grassroots political activity that highlighted the divisions in Russian society.

#### *Glasnost* (openness)

Introduced as part of Gorbachev’s efforts to reform communism within the Soviet Union.

#### *Demokratizatsiya* (democracy)

Introduced as part of Gorbachev’s efforts to reform communism within the Soviet Union.



#### **Fledgling Democracy**

Here we see Russian President Vladimir Putin. Building democracy in the former Soviet Union is one of the most closely studied efforts at democratization. It is hoped that a democratic Russia will be a peaceful Russia, greatly lessening the danger of future wars in Europe and Central Asia.

Political pressures came to a head in August 1991 when hardline elements within the Communist Party and national security bureaucracies carried out an unsuccessful coup d'état one day before a new Union Treaty was to be signed. This treaty would have given the 15 republics far more power in domestic affairs, and in doing so radically transformed the nature of the Soviet Union. Post-coup politics in Russia continue to have a confrontational character to them.

It is not surprising, then, that judgments about the future of democracy in Russia are mixed. Some see attempts at concentrating political power in the executive branch as an abandonment of democracy in favor of a new *nomenklatura* system based on state power rather than party power. *Nomenklatura* was the appointment system in which certain positions could only be held with the approval of the communist party. Others fear that this “soft authoritarianism” will give way to an even harsher political system. The specter of either a “man on horseback” in which a disgruntled military leader will step forward and seize power or a “Weimar Russia” in which political and economic conditions will deteriorate so badly that a right wing politician will be swept into office are frequently predicted scenarios.<sup>10</sup> Associated with each image are visions of aggressive and nationalistic foreign policies rooted in a rebuilt Russian military establishment. Defenders of democracy can be found. Nina Belyaeva writes that “the democratization process is alive and well. No one should be surprised that it also encounters crises. Democracy can only emerge and develop through a series of crises and their peaceful resolution.”<sup>11</sup>

Vladimir Putin’s March 2000 electoral victory marked a potentially important step forward in building Russian democracy for several reasons. During Yeltsin’s presidency the fault line in Russian electoral politics was between communists and reformers. Electoral results from Putin’s victory suggested that the new fault line was between those who have adapted to the new Russian market economy and those who have not. This shift adds increased urgency to the need to bring about widespread economic growth to Russia. Putin’s victory also signaled a renewed attempt by Moscow to reassert control over the 89 regions that comprise the Russian Federation.

## REGIONAL PERSPECTIVES: RUSSIA

Any discussion of the future of this region must begin with an evaluation of the purposes of Russian foreign policy. The starting point for that discussion is the concept of the Russian national interest. As we observed in Chapter 5, where we first introduced the concept of national interest, it is one without a clear meaning and its content is subject to widespread debate.

### The Russian National Interest

The end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union sparked a wide-ranging debate in Russia over how to define the Russian national interest. During the 70-plus years of communist rule, the concept of national interest was belittled and associated with the foreign policies of capitalist states. **Marxist-Leninism** spoke of class interests as the basis for political action. It is a general framework for

#### *Nomenklatura* (power of appointment)

Refers to the fact that certain positions in the Soviet Union could only be filled with approval of the Communist Party.

#### Marxist-Leninism

General framework for viewing politics. Places economic factors and the exploitative nature of capitalism at the center of political activity and stresses the leading role of the Communist Party in managing political affairs.

viewing politics that stresses economic factors and capitalist exploitation. “To distinguish the national interest from the interests of other nations would have contravened the communist contention of an identity of interests between the struggle for communism in the USSR and the fate of the international working class.”<sup>12</sup> With communist ideology discredited, the concept of national interest reemerged as the central reference point in discussions over how Russian foreign policy ought to be structured. Debated are such questions as these: What is Russia’s overall national purpose? Is Russia still a superpower? Who are Russia’s allies, and who are its enemies? What is Russia’s proper role in the post–Cold War era? What should be the primary instruments of Russian foreign policy?

No uniformly accepted answers have emerged to these questions. We can, however, identify two broad visions of Russia around which different interpretations of the Russian national interest are being put forward.<sup>13</sup> The primordialist perspective sees Russian foreign policy as constant and unchanging because it is rooted in fixed facets of Russia’s basic cultural and historical existence. A former colonel in the Soviet military wrote in 1992: “Political parties are born and die, leaders come and go, but the state, while developing and changing from one form to another, remains. And it is of no importance what the political system in it is today.”<sup>14</sup>

The second approach is modernist in nature and sees the national interest as a malleable concept that changes with the nature of the state. Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev argued in 1993 that “First of all, we have to be aware of what kind of state we have, get our own internal bearings. . . . The concept of the Russian state is now taking shape and is followed, accordingly, by the concept of foreign policy.”<sup>15</sup> This view directs our attention to the give and take of contemporary Russian politics and its implications for Soviet foreign policy.

## The Pull of the Past

Two different historical streams compete with one another in the political debate over how to define the Russian national interest and the purposes of Russian foreign policy. They are the legacy of the Czarist period and that of the Soviet period. We examine each in this section.

### The Historical Legacy: The Czarist Past

From the primordialist perspective the Russian national interest is not written on a clean slate. It has as its reference point the past. For those who emphasize the czarist past, the keys to understanding Russian foreign policy are found in the troika of geography, culture, and autocracy. Geography is a double-edged sword for Russia, serving both as a source of strength and a point of vulnerability. In times of military weakness and political disarray, Russia’s lengthy borders and lack of natural barriers have all but invited invasion. Ken Booth writes:

The invaders of Russia in the last 800 years read like a *Who’s Who* of military aggression: the Mongols between 1240–1380; the Poles 1607–1612; the Swedes 1611–1614 and again in 1709; Napoleon in 1812; Germany and Austria in 1914–1918; Britain, the United States, Japan, France, and Italy, 1918–1919; Poland in 1920; and Germany between 1941 and 1944. . . . Within living memory the Russians lost 45,000 military dead in the Russo-Japanese War, nearly two million military and an uncounted number of civilian casualties in the First World War,

30,000 in clashes with Japan in the 1930s, approximately 50,000 in the Soviet-Finnish War . . . and between fifteen and twenty million in overcoming the gratuitously brutal invasion by Hitler's Germany.<sup>16</sup>

This lengthy record of repeated invasions brought on by geographic location and the absence of defensible frontiers has produced an outlook on world politics that equates control over land with national security. George Kennan, the architect of America's Cold War **containment** policy that was aimed at stopping Soviet expansion, asserts that Russia never experienced truly friendly relations with neighboring states, but only periods of armistice with hostile enemies. As a result its foreign policy has not been concerned with producing compromise positions acceptable to all parties, but with impressing the adversary with the "terrifying strength of Russian power."<sup>17</sup>

Geography has also been a source of strength. Russia's long borders and the absence of natural barriers form an extensive and inviting launching point for foreign conquest and domination. Czar Ivan IV drove the Mongols out of Russia and brought nearly all of Siberia under Russian rule. Under Peter the Great, Russian forces conquered Finland, and under Catherine the Great much of Poland and the Crimea. In the 1800s Russian leaders conquered the Kazakh steppe region, the Caucasus, and Islamic portions of central Asia.

The influence of culture and geography are not easily separated. The Russian steppe, the Siberian taiga, and the peasant villages of the Black Earth region are important parts of Russia's traditional identity. So too is the Russian Orthodox Church.<sup>18</sup> Together, the Orthodox Church and the peasant commune formed the foundation for a worldview that held Russia and Western Europe to be at odds with one another. This worldview was held by Slavophiles. It saw Russian culture as the superior of the two while acknowledging that Western Europe was militarily and technologically stronger. One of the most important political offshoots of this **Slavophile** outlook was **Pan-Slavism**. According to Pan-Slavism, Russia, as the most powerful Slavic state, had a moral responsibility to liberate Western Slavs and advance the teachings of the Orthodox Church. Just as manifest destiny allowed American leaders to justify territorial expansion as something other than imperialism, so too the self-image of Moscow as the protector of other Slavic people has provided a basis for an activist foreign policy and a positive view of expansionism.

An **autocracy** is a political system in which all power is concentrated in the hands of an individual whose claim to power is rooted in religious or dynastic traditions. In the Russian case, this person was the czar. Government ministers were his personal appointees and his personal decrees became law. The primary importance foreign policy observers attach to the prevalence of autocratic rule in Russia's past is a persistent commitment to high levels of military spending, a deep-rooted fear and aversion to internal chaos, and the resulting privileged position of the military and internal security services within Russia's ruling circles.<sup>19</sup> Along with continued autocratic rule, these tendencies were defining features of communist rule and have surfaced on several occasions in post-Soviet Russia.

### The Historical Legacy: The Soviet Past

The czarist past is not the only historical force exerting an influence on contemporary Russian foreign policy. The period of Soviet rule also casts a large shadow over the present. The principles of Marxist-Leninism provided a language within

#### Containment

United States policy toward the Soviet Union and its allies for much of the Cold War. It was based on the assumption that the potential for Soviet aggression was constant but could be held in check by encircling it with alliances and the vigilant application of countering power whenever it sought to expand. Over time, containment was expected to produce a mellowing of the Soviet system.

#### Slavophile

One who rejects the influence of Western European civilization on Russian culture and embraces the Russian past, especially the Russian Orthodox Church and the peasant commune.

#### Pan-Slavism

Belief that a bond exists among Slavic peoples and that Russia has a mission to lead and liberate Slavic people from the influence of Western European civilization.

#### Autocracy

Form of government characterized by absolute rule by one person. In pre-Communist Russia, all power rested with the czar.

which leaders framed foreign policy problems. One of the challenges that faced reformers such as Mikhail Gorbachev was to devise an alternative vocabulary and set of images to use to establish policy and redirect government thinking.

Marxist theory asserts that the structure of relationships in a society is determined by the economic system. Marx's basic tool of analysis is the **dialectic** applied to history. The dialectic refers to a process of historical change in which opposing forces interact to produce a synthesis representing a higher truth. In any society there exists a dominant mode of production that determines property relations (thesis). Because changes in the mode of production occur more quickly than changes in property relations, contradictions arise (antithesis). As these contradictions are resolved, a new mode of production comes to dominate (synthesis). In capitalism, the owners of the means of production, the bourgeoisie, seek to maximize profits or "surplus value." Surplus value is produced by extracting more value from labor than workers receive in wages. Thus, labor, the proletariat, is exploited. Capitalists seek to increase profits by decreasing labor costs. Because workers are paid less money, they cannot purchase goods produced by capitalists and overproduction occurs. As profits fall, weaker capitalists are forced out of business and capital becomes more concentrated. As the gap between the classes widens and the class struggle becomes more pronounced, the proletariat becomes aware of its role in history and seizes the means of production from the capitalist class. Socialism becomes the new mode of production.

Marx believed that capitalists artificially created boundaries to keep people apart. People of the same class living in different countries have more in common than people from different classes in the same country. Consequently, workers of the world would support each other in revolting from capitalist oppression.

According to traditional formulations, Soviet foreign policy was peaceful due to its class character. The opposition of capitalist states to socialism was also taken as a given and the international nature of the class struggle meant that victory was only possible on a worldwide scale. The concepts of world revolution and Soviet security were thus one and the same.

The language of Soviet foreign policy tended to be quite rigid at any one point in time because there was an ideologically correct way to interpret events and trends. To challenge this officially sanctioned interpretation would have been to cast doubt on the Communist Party's ability to interpret Marxist-Leninism and its right to rule. Change and movement did, however, take place as new leaders assumed power and conditions inside and outside the Soviet Union changed. Robert Legvold suggests that Gorbachev's **New Thinking** can be seen as the third time the concept of revolution in Soviet foreign policy was fundamentally altered by a Soviet leader.<sup>20</sup> New Thinking is the label given to Gorbachev's ideas about the content and conduct of Soviet foreign policy.

The first time came in 1924 when Joseph Stalin substituted the concept of **socialism in one country** for that of global revolution. Stalin disagreed with Leon Trotsky, his defeated rival to succeed Lenin as head of the Communist Party, who argued that the Soviet Union could not build socialism on its own. Trotsky believed that victory over the bourgeoisie could only be achieved in the context of a permanent revolution. Stalin maintained that, by drawing on its immense resources, the Soviet Union could establish a socialist victory without being part of a simultaneously occurring world revolution. Thus, for Stalin, socialism in one country meant building socialism in the Soviet Union.

### Dialectic

Process of change that views development as occurring through the interaction of opposite forces and the emergence of a synthesis representing a higher truth. Contrasts with a linear reading of history.

### New Thinking

Set of principles introduced by Gorbachev into Soviet foreign policy as part of his effort to alter Soviet relations with the West. Contained a strong arms control element.

### Socialism in one country

Foreign policy adopted by Stalin that stressed development of communism in the Soviet Union as its primary goal. Contrasts with concept of permanent revolution advocated by Trotsky.

**Founding Fathers**

Pictured here are Vladimir Lenin (left) and Joseph Stalin (right). They are the two great founding figures of communism in Russia. Lenin successfully led the Russian Revolution in 1917, and Stalin transformed Russia into a global power.

**Peaceful coexistence**

Foreign policy orientation adopted by Khrushchev. Intended to signal the simultaneous condition of ongoing conflict and competition with the West along with a willingness to accommodate it at certain points.

In 1956, Nikita Khrushchev advanced the idea of **peaceful coexistence** in an effort to bring Soviet foreign policy in line with the realities of the nuclear age. Peaceful coexistence referred to the simultaneous existence of ongoing conflict and competition with the West along with cooperation in selected areas. In doing so he moved away from three key doctrinal elements of Stalin's foreign policy: (1) the inevitability of war and capitalist encirclement of the Soviet Union, (2) the impossibility of establishing socialism through peaceful means, and (3) the presence of "permanently operating factors" that governed the outcome of wars. Khrushchev held that the power of socialist states was now so strong that war was now unthinkable and peaceful coexistence was the new reality of world politics. Conflict with capitalism would, however, continue. One of the most important battlegrounds would be wars of national liberation in developing states, then known as the Third World.

Gorbachev's New Thinking principles on foreign policy were presented most forcefully in a speech to the United Nations in December 1988. In it he asserted that global interdependence and common human problems rather than class conflict were the central driving force behind world politics. Moreover, he rejected notions of capitalist encirclement and definitions of Soviet security based solely on the possession of overwhelming military force. In their place, Gorbachev called for a security policy based on "defensive defense," "mutual security," "reasonable sufficiency," and "comprehensive security." Together these concepts pointed to the ability of cooperative measures to provide for Soviet security and the declining utility of military force in world politics.

## The Pull of the Present

Competing with historical influences in the political struggle to define the goals of Russian foreign policy are contemporary influences. In this section we discuss the more salient ones. They are subsumed under the general heading of the problem of weakness.

### The Problem of Weakness

Once, it was self-evident who made foreign policy in the Soviet Union: the Communist Party. Moreover, within the Communist Party there existed a well-defined decision-making hierarchy. Most important was the **Politburo**. Composed of the leading members of the party, the politburo served as the governing council of the Communist Party. During the Brezhnev era it met once a week for three to six hours and foreign policy matters were often high on the agenda.

Helping the Politburo oversee the day-to-day operation of the Communist Party was the secretariat. Key to its powers was the practice of *nomenklatura*, which gave it the right to approve all appointments to sensitive positions including those in the Foreign Ministry and diplomatic corps. The Secretariat was also able to rely on an extensive network of “back channels” with key foreign policy agencies such as the Foreign Ministry, KGB, and the Ministry of Defense, to resolve policy conflicts and coordinate policy implementation.

Today, the situation is quite different.<sup>21</sup> No institution has emerged to replace the Communist Party as the leading force in the policy-making process. Instead, we find an unruly competition among individuals and institutions for political power. Russian foreign policy has often become a victim or hostage of this political infighting. Within the executive branch, the Foreign Ministry, Federal Security Service, and military pursue often conflicting foreign policy agendas. The Duma, the Russian parliament, and Russian President Boris Yeltsin frequently clashed over foreign policy issues. Throughout the 1990s they were unable to reach a political accommodation so that the START II arms control treaty signed in 1993 by Yeltsin and President George Bush could go into effect. Even the signing of a START III treaty by Yeltsin and President Bill Clinton failed to overcome the Duma’s opposition to the treaty. It only approved the agreement in April 2000. Challenges to the government’s ability to conduct foreign policy also came from outside the government. In the mid-1990s, maverick military commander Alexandr Lebed openly criticized defense ministry officials for their handling of the first war with Chechnya and became an important national political figure.

Economic weakness accompanies political weakness in Russia today. In 1991 when the Soviet Union disbanded, Russia inherited about 60 percent of its GDP. By 1998 its original value had declined by 40 percent. The need for economic reform (*perestroika* or restructuring) was one of the dominant themes of the Gorbachev era. It was at the heart of Yeltsin’s early reform effort when in 1992 he introduced widespread **shock therapy** free-market reforms into the Russian economy. Shock therapy sought to move Russia from a communist command economy into a capitalist economy in a short period of time. Economic growth proved to be elusive or, perhaps more accurately, illusionary. What developed in the 1990s was a virtual economy.<sup>22</sup> It was a system that was based on the pretense of growth rather than its reality. In 1997 Russia’s largest companies conducted 73 percent of

#### Politburo

Collective body that sat at the top of the Communist Party hierarchy. Supreme decision-making force within Communist systems.

#### Shock therapy

Name given to Yeltsin’s package of economic reforms that was designed to transform the Soviet economy from a communist command economy to a capitalist one in a short period of time.

their business in barter. That same year 40 percent of all taxes paid were nonmonetary. A striking example is found in the natural gas industry where the government-owned firm Gazprom is rarely paid in cash. As a consequence, it underinvests in national gas exploration, and its overall level of production has declined.

Economic collapse came in 1998. The immediate causes are clear. Falling international oil prices and unrealistically high tax revenue projections forced the Russian government to cut spending and print more money. Lack of international confidence in Russia's ability to repay its loans drove interest rates higher and further depleted Russian financial reserves. A \$17.1 billion International Monetary Fund bailout did not stem the tide and in August Russia was forced to devalue the ruble by 30 percent and suspend payments on all hard currency loans. Less agreement exists on the underlying causes. Some point to privatization as the enemy. Others argue that the problem is not the creation of a free market but the corruption inherent in excessive state regulations of the economy. Still others cite the availability of easy money (foreign aid) from the West that is repeatedly made available to Russia on the premise that it is "too big and nuclear" to be allowed to fail.

### The Contemporary Foreign Policy Debate

Contemporary views on the proper direction of Russian foreign policy cover a wide spectrum of opinion ranging from liberal to ultraconservative.<sup>23</sup> The most appropriate starting point is the liberal perspective because it provided the intellectual foundation for much of Gorbachev's new thinking and is also associated with Yeltsin's foreign minister, Andrei Kozyrev. As a consequence it became the focal point of attack for those who disagreed with Russia's early post-Cold War foreign policy. Liberals are internationalist and pro-Western in outlook. Their primary foreign policy objective is to integrate Russia into the international community by accepting Western (universal) norms, values, and standards of behavior. This holds true whether the subject is democracy, human rights, arms control, or economic development strategies. Their embrace of the West is so thorough that one observer asserts that Russian liberals much like their Marxist predecessors are "pure ideologues basing their concepts on values and beliefs rather than facts and interests."<sup>24</sup>

Liberals dominated Russian foreign policy making in 1991 and 1992 but since then have seen their influence steadily erode. A fundamental weakness in their position was an inability to formulate a coherent statement of Russian national interests that exist apart from those of the West. Their apparent willingness to sacrifice Russian interests in order to accommodate the West led to charges that they were "selling out" Russia and to disparaging characterizations of their foreign policy as nothing more than a "diplomacy of smiles" or a "policy of yes."

To this conceptual weakness can be added a political one. Liberals failed to build a substantial domestic foreign policy constituency behind their initiatives. The Foreign Ministry was slow in moving to build support for internationalist foreign policy objectives in the parliament or mass media. Instead, it came to rely heavily on foreign support in pursuing its objectives. This became a political liability when the benefits of close cooperation with the West proved to be less than had been hoped for and opened liberals to charges of conspiring with foreigners.

Slightly to the political right of the liberals are foreign policy moderates. They share with liberals identification with Western economic development strategies

and political principles. However, they reject the notion that Western and Russian interests are identical. Its geographic location and its transition from communism cause Russia to have its own foreign policy agenda. Rather than simply accepting the West's position, moderates want Russian diplomats to enter into firm but friendly negotiations to determine the appropriate policy.

Since 1993, the debate over the future of Russian foreign policy has moved away from the liberal end of the political continuum to the conservative end. Moving past the moderates, the first group we encounter are the conservative centrists. They remain unreconciled to the collapse of the Soviet Union but are reluctant to use force to reunify the country. Far more suspicious of Western intentions than the two previous groups, conservative centrists see Russia as a powerful and independent actor in world politics with its own special sphere of influence that must be recognized by the West. A strong military base is necessary for Russia to play this role as are contacts with major regional powers such as China, India, and Iran. Rather than plead with the West for more foreign aid, conservative centrists argue that Russia should increase its exports in order to earn badly needed hard currency. At the top of their list of items to be sold abroad are nuclear technology and materials.

To the political right of the conservative centrists are nationalists who advocate neo-imperialist policies designed to restore the Great Russian state. The basis for this revival will not be communism but a combination of Russian nationalism and military force. Vladimir Zhirinovskiy gave expression to this political agenda in his 1993 parliamentary election campaign when he called for cutting all economic ties with the newly independent states on Russia's borders in order to force them back into Russia as separate administrative units. He argued that Ukraine, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Latvia, and others never existed. In place of a Western-oriented diplomacy or one centered on regional powers, the nationalist position advocates a crash military buildup and an alliance with radical states such as Iraq, Libya, North Korea, and Cuba.

Finally, we can identify an isolationist position, which contains both liberal and conservative themes. Conservative isolationists draw their inspiration from a glorification of the Russian past. "Russia does not need either an Anglo-Saxon or an Islamic nucleus, or a Teutonic one either. It must have its own nucleus, determined by God and national history. It should be the nucleus of Russian national culture, one of the most universal in the world."<sup>25</sup> Liberal isolationism draws from a sense of weakness and fear. Weakness is rooted in a post-Afghan syndrome that limits the ability of any Russian government to maintain long-term public support for military involvement beyond its new borders and a sense that neither the Russian military nor diplomatic corps is up to the task of peacekeeping in the Near Abroad. There is also fear that any military involvement abroad can only have negative consequences for attempts to build democracy in Russia.

## The Near Abroad

The *Near Abroad* is a postcommunist term. It refers to those newly independent states on the rim of Russia that were once part of the Soviet Union. Lithuania was the first to leave in March 1990. The other Baltic states soon followed. Ukraine took its first steps toward independence in July 1990 when its legislature declared that the Ukrainian Republic of the USSR had the right to maintain its own armed

forces. Kazakhstan was the last republic to declare its independence and the only one to do so after the collapse of the Soviet Union. For Russia, relations with the Near Abroad occupy a gray zone between foreign policy and domestic policy. Russian relations with most of the regions of the Near Abroad contain a mixture of the flash point issues we introduced at the outset. Here we will present an overview of the Near Abroad and selectively highlight some of them. The following Documenting History box presents a 1991 CIA estimate on future relations between Russia and the states around its new border.

### The Baltics

Three countries, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, comprise the Baltics. From Russia's perspective they represent its natural western frontier. Acquired through conquest by Peter the Great, they became part of the Russian Empire and a gateway to the West. Their independence, achieved in 1991, is seen by most Russians as unnatural. In Russian eyes, they remain an important military and strategic buffer zone between Russia and the rest of Europe. Unwilling to reconcile itself to the true independence of the Baltic states, Russia envisions a region that provides an economic link to the West but is politically and diplomatically subservient to it.

As we have already noted, a particularly thorny issue in Baltic–Russian relations is the status and treatment of ethnic Russians within Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. In the interwar period when these three states briefly succeeded in wresting their independence from the Soviet Union, ethnic Russians comprised no more than 9 percent of their population. In 1989, after some five decades of reimposed Soviet rule, this percentage had risen to as high as 34 percent in Latvia due to a combination of Russian-led industrialization and Stalin's execution or deportation to Siberia of more than 5 percent of the Baltic population. At the turn of the century, after a decade of independence, the percentage of ethnic Russians in the Baltics remains virtually unchanged.

To the three Baltic states these ethnic Russians are an unwanted legacy of Soviet/Russian colonial rule. Consequently, the Baltics have been reluctant to grant full citizenship rights to them. One observer sees the resulting tensions between Russia and the Baltics as so intense that parallels can be drawn to the situation in the Balkans. James Kurth asserts that from the Russian perspective the Estonians and Latvians have engaged in such extensive violations of human rights that military action along the lines of a NATO intervention could be seen as justifiable and necessary.<sup>26</sup>

### The Western Republics

Three states, Ukraine, Belarus, and Moldova, comprise a second part of the Near Abroad. Of the three, Ukraine presents perhaps the most challenging and complex situation because of its place in the balance of power, thinking about the future of Russian–European relations. The problem as some see it is that Ukraine is not yet a viable state. It lacks the economic infrastructure and resources to develop a healthy economy that is not dependent on Russia, boundaries that coincide either with ethnic or historical realities, and a capable government. What it does not lack is military significance.

Geographically Ukraine lies at the political and cultural crossroads of Europe where the Catholic, Byzantine, and Muslim worlds intersect. Larger than Germany



## DOCUMENTING HISTORY

### The Outlook for the Former USSR

Excerpt from CIA Special National Intelligence Estimate 11-18.2-91 from September 1991 entitled *The Republics of the Former USSR: The Outlook for the Next Year*.

This CIA estimate addresses the difficult question of what international relations will look like along the borders of Russia following the collapse of the Soviet Union. The full estimate can be found in *At Cold War's End: US Intelligence on the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, 1989-1991*.

#### Key Judgments

The USSR and its Communist system are dead. What *ultimately* replaces them will not be known within the next year, but several trends are evident:

- Overall, there will be a high level of instability.
- The economy will get much worse, making a bold approach toward economic reform more necessary but politically riskier and harder to do.
- Russia and Ukraine will make credible attempts at applying democratic political principles at all levels of government and shifting to market economics; most other republics probably will not.
- Ethnic turmoil will increase as nationalism grows and ethnic minorities resist the authority of newly dominant ethnic majorities.
- Defense spending and military forces will be reduced, and republics will participate in collective defense decisions and exercise greater authority over defense matters within their own borders.
- Foreign policy will be increasingly fragmented, with the republics conducting their own bilateral relations and to some extent their own diplomacy in multilateral forums.
- Yel'tsin will be the most powerful national leader; Gorbachev will have only limited power to act independently and could not win an election without Yel'tsin's support.
- The West will face increased pleas for economic assistance from individual republics as well as from the central government, giving Western countries increased opportunity to promote economic and political reform, but increasing requirements for close coordination of Western aid effort. . .

Over the next year, we believe that three basic scenarios capture the likely evolution of republic relationships:

- *Confederation*: This scenario is the preferred outcome of Gorbachev and Yel'tsin. There would be a weak central authority but close cooperation among the republics in the political, economic, and military spheres. Russia and Ukraine, at least, would lay the groundwork for democratization and a market economy. Nuclear weapons would be controlled operationally by the center. Lines of authority would be relatively clear, and foreign governments could identify

and deal with the appropriate levels of government on different policy questions. This scenario would provide the West the advantage of greater predictability. It would also provide increased confidence that nuclear weapons would remain under centralized control, arms control would remain on track, economic assistance to the republics could be more effectively managed, and the democratization process would advance.

- *Loose Association*: The process of political and economic reform continues, but several republics, including Ukraine, establish independence and participate in a loose common market. Although Russia and many of the associated states try to coordinate foreign and military policy, the republics basically pursue independent policies in these areas. Ukraine and other non-Russian republics probably would agree to removal or elimination of strategic nuclear weapons on their territory. Some republics would try to obtain some control over the tactical nuclear weapons on their territories. The potential for divergent foreign and national security policies would increase, but all the key republics would pursue pro-Western foreign policies, and armed forces would be scaled back significantly. Follow-on arms control negotiations for even deeper cuts in nuclear and conventional forces would go forward, although perhaps more slowly than in a confederation scenario. Implementation and verification of the START and CFE treaties would be complicated. The West would face competing demands for massive assistance, although some mechanism for coordination would exist.
- *Disintegration*: Cooperation among the republics breaks down at all levels, and the last remnants of a political center disappear. Nationalism becomes more virulent, and economic conditions become increasingly chaotic. As a result, political stability erodes, and conditions are ripe for rightwing coups and authoritarian government in many republics, including Russia and Ukraine. The disposition of nuclear weapons would be contentious, as some republics seek to assert operational control over nuclear weapons on their territory. There would be an increased risk of such weapons falling into terrorist hands and even of their use within the borders of

(continued)

the former USSR. The West probably would be unable to implement and verify arms control agreements. Republics would attempt to involve the West in interrepublic disputes, while demands for Western aid would continue.

Reality is likely to be more complex than any of these scenarios, and elements of all three are likely to be encountered. In our view, it is likely that conditions 12 months from now will most closely resemble the “loose association” scenario. Although the economic situation is grave and the republics are having serious problems in reaching agreement on key economic issues, most understand that they cannot survive on their own. This awareness argues strongly for some kind of economic association that will move, however haltingly, toward a common-market-type system.

We believe the “confederation” scenario is less likely because of the unwillingness of many republics to cede some of their political sovereignty and power to a confederal government. Ukraine will be the key: forces supporting independence with some form of cooperation are currently favored to win the December elections, but their strength is eroding and a vote for those favoring separatism is possible. Even if Ukraine is willing to work toward a new union, difficulties over political and economic approaches and burgeoning nationalism will make it difficult for the republics to agree on a confederal political structure. Potentially the most explosive of these forces is unrest among Russian minorities in non-Russian republics.

The least likely scenario within the time frame of this Estimate is “disintegration.” Beyond the year, however, this scenario becomes more likely if elected governments fail to stem the deterioration of economic conditions. . . .

### Looking Back/Looking Forward

During the Cold War the continued existence of the Soviet Union was taken as a given. The danger was not its break-up but the hostile expansion of its sphere of influence. The CIA was widely criticized for failing to anticipate its disintegration and the collapse of communism. Today, as this intelligence estimate points out, the concern is with instability and tension along the borders of the former Soviet Union. In the early 1990s most of the attention was directed at those states along its European borders. With the discovery of large oil reserves in the Caspian Sea and the anti-terrorist war in Afghanistan, attention has shifted to its Asiatic borders. How well does this intelligence estimate hold up over time? What needs to be revised? If you were writing such an estimate today what scenarios do you believe need to be studied?

but far less powerful than its neighbors, Ukraine has suffered through prolonged periods of conquest and domination. Its pivotal position remains unchanged. Without Ukraine, Russia's future is that of a power on the fringes of Europe. Reunited with Ukraine, Russia is a great power at the heart of Europe. Ukrainian officials have sought to escape from their precarious position through proclamations of neutrality, a position they say is different from isolationism. They have resisted Russian pressure that they join the Commonwealth of Independent States and have been willing to cooperate with the European Union, NATO, and other European organizations whose policies are consistent with those of Ukraine.

Beyond geography, Ukraine's military significance lies in two areas. The first is its nuclear potential. Prior to 1994 when it agreed to give up its nuclear forces, Ukraine ranked as the world's third largest nuclear power behind the United States and Russia with more than 1,500 nuclear warheads and 176 intercontinental ballistic missiles in its arsenal. An intense domestic debate surrounded Ukraine's decision to forgo its nuclear capability and many see an independent nuclear force as the only effective deterrent of Russia's presumed hegemonic ambitions.

The second area of military significance lies in the simmering Russian-Ukrainian contest for control over the Black Sea fleet. The Black Sea is Russia's warm water opening to Europe and the Mediterranean. Strategic domination of the Black Sea hinges on control of the Crimea, a peninsula in the southern Ukraine that is heavily populated by ethnic Russians and was home to the Soviet Union's

Black Sea fleet. Control over the fleet became an issue shortly after Ukrainian independence. The fleet is aged and its operational capabilities are limited. In many ways what is being contested is regional status. Can Russia treat the Black Sea as if it were Russian territorial waters or must it treat Ukraine as an equal?

### The Transcaucasus

Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan comprise the Transcaucasus region of the Near Abroad. Along with Chechnya, which lies within Russia just north of these states, politics in the Transcaucasus have been ethnically charged and unstable. As we shall discuss in detail later, Russian military intervention into Chechnya has been militarily and politically controversial with “success” having come at a great price. Georgia and Armenia have both turned to Russia for military help in pursuing their ethnic claims. The targets in Georgia are Abkhaz separatists. For Armenia the goal has been to weaken the Azerbaijan government’s control over the Armenian-populated Nagorno-Karabakh region.

Ethnic conflict is not the only issue drawing Russia’s attention to the Transcaucasus. A second major issue is oil. The Transcaucasus region sits astride the Caspian Sea whose oil reserves are projected to be larger than that of the North Sea oil fields. Some estimates have placed these reserves to be as high as 200 billion barrels or enough to meet the energy needs of the United States for more than 30 years. The initial round of competition for drilling rights has been completed. In 1994 Azerbaijan signed the “contract of the century” with a consortium of 10 oil companies for \$7.4 billion. Kazakhstan, which is part of Central Asia and sits on the opposite side of the Caspian Sea, signed a contract for \$1.1 billion with Mobil. The year 2000 brought reports of new oil discovery in the Caspian Sea off the coast of Kazakhstan that was projected at between 8 and 50 billion barrels of oil.

What is being contested now is the pipeline route. As one oil expert stated: “If you can’t get the oil out, it’s no good to anyone.”<sup>27</sup> This decision will have long-lasting political and economic effects. It will provide the states whose territory the pipeline passes through with steady income from transit fees and political leverage over both oil-producing and -consuming states. Among the most frequently discussed routes are ones passing through Chechnya in Russia, and through Azerbaijan and Georgia. Armenia and Turkmenistan have also been mentioned as areas where a pipeline could be built. Each is fraught with risks due to the explosive ethnic politics of the region. Risks also exist for the newly independent oil-producing states along the Caspian Sea. Great expectations surround their newfound wealth. Yet, as more than one analyst has pointed out, OPEC’s experience is anything but encouraging. Wealth, power, and prestige have proven to be elusive for the first generation of oil-producing states. Windfall profits do not automatically translate into political and economic development. Corruption, internal strife, poor planning, and the unpredictability of the international marketplace make economic stagnation and not economic growth a real possibility for the region.

### Central Asia

The five independent states of Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan) came into existence in 1924 as artificial creations

**Black Gold**

Pictured here is a scene from the Baku oil fields. Along with oil from the Caspian Sea, these oil reserves make Russia a potentially important player in future international resource politics. In the past Russia has used its oil and natural gas as a means of obtaining technology from abroad.



of the Soviet Union. In the process of creating these boundaries new ethnic identities were forged. “Closely related nomadic families who had differed from one another primarily in the manner of their migrations suddenly received passports identifying themselves as Kazakhs or Kyrgyz.”<sup>28</sup> The boundaries also reflected a Stalinist desire to divide local peoples into different political units in order to control them so that today large Uzbek minorities can be found in Kyrgyzstan and large Kyrgyz and Uzbek populations reside in Tajikistan. Further complicating the ethnic mix are the presence of large numbers of Russians and other non-native groups who arrived as part of Stalin’s forced internal deportations or the Soviet Union’s effort to develop the region economically.

Few serious foreign policy challenges to Russia have emanated from Central Asia since the breakup of the Soviet Union. For the most part local elites have strong ties to the old system and recognize their continued economic and military dependence on Russia. It is this region’s location that attracts great speculation about its future. Much, though not all, of it is energy rich. Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan possess large oil resources while Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan are rich in natural gas. Sitting atop the Middle East, the Central Asian states serve as a potential entry point for more distant Asian states and terrorist groups to influence events along Russia’s southern border. Post–September 11, 2001, events in the region, however, have heightened Russian concerns about foreign influences here. The United States actively sought out the assistance of Uzbekistan and others for help in fighting the Taliban in Afghanistan and in the broader war against terrorism. For their part, states in this region and elsewhere in the Near Abroad, led by Georgia, Uzbekistan, Ukraine, and Moldova, have formed a loose alliance that has sought help from the United States in putting down terrorism within their own countries and in financial aid to offset Russia’s influence.

## REGIONAL ARCHITECTURE

In the not-so-distant past the international architecture of this region consisted of two institutions. The first was the federal political structure of the Soviet Union. Unlike Great Britain, France, or other colonial powers, the colonies of the Soviet Union were on its borders and became incorporated into its political structure. The second piece of international architecture was the Communist Party. While the Soviet Union was organized around federal principles, the Communist Party was a unitary and hierarchically structured institution. The first secretary of the party was the most powerful political figure in a region. He represented Moscow's interests while government officials typically had strong local ties. Four of the first presidents of the newly independent states of Central Asia were career Communist Party officials.

### The Commonwealth of Independent States

The collapse of the Communist Party and the demise of the Soviet Union left this region without any overarching structures. Steps to provide Russia and the Near Abroad with a new architecture were taken following Ukraine's declaration of independence. On December 8, 1991, the presidents of Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus created the **Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)**. This initial grouping of CIS states left out the Central Asian Republics. Kazakhstan immediately pressed for membership in the CIS and on December 21, 1991, a second meeting was held that recast the CIS as a collection of sovereign states open to all former republics of the Soviet Union. Ten of the 15 republics joined. Only the three Baltic states and Georgia declined to participate. Azerbaijan joined as a conditional member.

The current condition of the CIS and its potential as an international actor are the subject of much debate. Martha Brill Olcott describes it as a "virtual phantom of the international stage."<sup>29</sup> CIS supporters often compare it to the European Union: an association of sovereign states moving together peacefully toward economic integration and prosperity. The similarities implied in this comparison strike most observers as overstated. Movement toward European integration began with a core of prosperous and well-established states that did not see each other as immediate military threats. Standing in sharp contrast to the view of the CIS as an integrative organization is one that holds that the CIS is (or will be) nothing more than a veil for renewed Russian imperialism in the region. Many scholars reject the possibility of a renewed drive for empire. They do see signs of Russian humiliation and shame for having lost their empire, and rhetoric calling for its resurrection. They also see Russia as standing in a position to dominate the others and force them into militarily and economically dependent relationships with little effort.<sup>30</sup>

#### Military Relations

The most pressing military issue facing the CIS at the outset was establishing a mechanism for controlling the Soviet Union's nuclear arsenal that was controlled by Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan. Control was achieved initially by creating a unified strategic command under Russian leadership. Problems soon surfaced as Belarus, Ukraine, and Kazakhstan expressed varying degrees of reluc-

#### Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)

Initial attempt by Russia and some of former republics to create a loose association of states that would promote common efforts in political, economic, and security matters.

tance to sign existing arms control agreements such as START I without receiving “proper” compensation for reverting to the status of non-nuclear states.

An additional measure of military cooperation among several CIS states was achieved in 1992 when Russia, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgystan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan signed the Treaty on Collective Security. The mutual security provisions in the treaty are modeled on those contained in the NATO charter and the Warsaw Pact treaty: “an act of aggression committed . . . against any of the participating states will be regarded as aggression against every participating state.” Ukraine, Moldova, and Azerbaijan all refused to become parties to the treaty. The agreement is characteristic of the path that Russia has been forced to follow in dealing with the former republics of the Soviet Union. Instead of a single overarching agreement, Russia has had to negotiate a series of bilateral or multilateral agreements on such subjects as the stationing of Russian troops in their territory, who had jurisdiction over the troops, and control over borders with Russia.

The dominant military issue facing the CIS today involves the ability to carry out peacekeeping operations in the region.<sup>31</sup> In 1992 peacekeeping was identified as a legitimate activity that could be carried out by parties to the Treaty on Collective Security and in 1993 Russia began asking the United Nations for approval (and financial assistance) for its peacekeeping operations. Peacekeeping operations largely have taken the form of bilateral and regional agreements between Russia and the affected states rather than CIS-wide operations.

The first deployment of troops took place in 1992 when a Russian–Georgian–Acetin peacekeeping force was sent to South Acedia in Georgia to occupy a 14-kilometer buffer zone between Georgian troops and Acetin rebels seeking to reunite their homeland with Russia. Next, Russian troops were sent to Moldova in an attempt to restore order in the breakaway Dniestr Republic. This operation began only after a Russian-organized multilateral effort collapsed when Belarus, Romania, and Bulgaria backed out and when the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) turned down a Moldovan request for peacekeepers.

Several important issues are involved in the conduct of peacekeeping operations in the Near Abroad, not the least of which center on the structure of these forces and Russian neutrality. Traditionally, peacekeeping forces are expected to be neutral. But, as we have seen, Russia does not see itself as a neutral force in the region. Russian leaders believe they have special security responsibilities in the Near Abroad and that Russia’s vital national interests require stability there. A second problem (as with other international peacekeeping efforts) is that troops are able to restore order but they leave untouched the fundamental grievances that gave rise to the violence. Finally, there is the problem of cost. By mid-February 1994 more than 150,000 Russian troops were engaged in peacekeeping operations. Over a 10-month period covering 1993 and 1994 these operations cost an estimated 26 billion rubles.

### Economic Relations

Economic interdependence among the republics of the Soviet Union was a reality that independence could not change. In the last years of the Soviet Union, most republics exported approximately 50 percent of their goods to other republics and imported about 40 percent. Independence severed these ties and threatened to bring economic chaos if a coordinating mechanism were not found. For example, Russian textile plants relied heavily on Uzbek cotton, its automobile industry obtained tires from Armenia, and its oil industry used equipment made in Azerbaijan.

The initial expectation was that CIS members would form a single economic sphere with open borders, a shared currency, and a uniform system for clearing debts between firms now located in different countries. This view of the CIS as a smoothly functioning economic union soon came under stress from two directions. First, Russia began to use its position of relative economic dominance as an instrument of political leverage against the states of the Near Abroad. Georgia was threatened with economic sanctions if it did not agree to a cease-fire in its civil war with the Abkhaz separatists and Armenia was warned that means “other than persuasion” would be used against it if it did not reduce its aid to Nagorno-Karabakh. Ukraine gave up its rights to the Black Sea fleet in return for Russia’s willingness to forgive its energy debts. It has also proposed “debt-for-equity” swaps to most of the Near Abroad where their energy debts would be forgiven in return for ownership of energy pipelines and refineries outside Russia.

Second, barriers to trade emerged as the leaders of the newly independent states sought to protect their own economic interests and domestic political standing. The most divisive issue was the use of the Russian ruble as CIS currency. In Russia, the central bank and government were locked in battle over the pace and direction of economic reform. One of the tactics employed by the central bank was to print more rubles. This led to a dramatic rise in the inflation rate with the value of the ruble falling from approximately 60 rubles to one dollar in December 1991 to more than 1,000 rubles to one dollar in June 1993. Unable to print money of their own, the newly independent CIS states found themselves selling natural resources to Russia at preinflation prices and forced to buy goods and services at current prices.

They responded with a variety of tactics. Turkmenistan used revenues from its oil and natural gas sales to the West to raise government subsidies high enough to offset the rate of ruble inflation. Uzbekistan imposed stricter custom controls to limit the inflow of rubles and outflow of goods. The most dramatic move came in May 1993, when Kyrgyzstan announced plans to leave the ruble zone and introduce its own currency. Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan quickly followed suit. The principal result of this move to national currency has been to greatly complicate the process of economic integration in the CIS due to the need to establish mechanisms for currency exchange and the international transfer of funds.

## NATO and OSCE

Two other international organizations are also part of the regional architecture. The first is the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). It is an unlikely candidate to be part of Russia’s regional architecture since throughout the Cold War its primary task was to contain Soviet expansion. With the Cold War over no issue has been more controversial on both sides of the old iron curtain than possible Russian membership. NATO has already expanded to include old Russian allies Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic. Late 2002 is expected to bring NATO to Russia’s borders with another round of expansion. Many in Russia see this as threatening Russia’s national security and demeaning its stature as a great power. To lessen these fears in May 2002 NATO welcomed Russia as a type of junior partner with the announcement of a NATO-Russia Council. It is envisioned that the NATO-Russia Council will meet regularly and that decisions will be binding. Topics for discussion will be restricted to such items as crisis management, peace-keeping, and joint military exercises.

This is not the first attempt at joining the West and Russia together in an alliance. Russia had earlier sought to establish a special relationship with NATO through the NATO-Russia Permanent Joint Council. Set up in 1997, it failed because in Russia's view the negotiations were nineteen (NATO) against one (Russia) rather than nineteen plus one. NATO's bombing campaign in Kosovo proved to be a particularly divisive issue in this body's deliberations. Putin had hoped for either full membership in NATO or the creation of an entirely new organization that was not linked to the Cold War. The United States, however, was not prepared for either of these bold moves.

The other international organization that is part of the regional architecture is the **Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)**. The OSCE was established as part of the Helsinki process, which sought to enhance respect for human rights in Europe, stimulate economic interaction between East and West, and gain acceptance for post-World War II borders throughout Europe. In 1990 the OSCE made the transition from a forum for discussion to an operating institution.

Two aspects of its work are particularly visible in the Near Abroad. First, the OSCE regularly sends election observers to witness and comment on the fairness of elections. The OSCE Election Observation Mission to the 1999 Ukrainian presidential election stated that in the November run-off election there was a concerted effort to force state employees to vote for those already in power. The OSCE observer mission to the 1999 Georgian parliamentary elections stated that the election was a "step toward" compliance with OSCE commitments. Second, the OSCE has become active in the areas of peacekeeping, crisis management, and early warning. This has brought it into close contact with NATO. For example, in Kosovo it was agreed that the OSCE would establish a verification mission on the ground and that NATO planes would provide aerial surveillance.

NATO and OSCE constitute two very different pieces of the regional architecture than does the CIS. Russia is the dominant state in the CIS. This is not the case for the other two organizations. Moreover, the CIS is an instrument by which Russia seeks to control the Near Abroad while NATO and OSCE are potential challengers to its domination of the region.

### Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)

Consultative body established to discuss European security concerns. Produced Helsinki Accords, which is the functional equivalent to the World War II peace treaty and also promoted human rights in the Soviet Union.

## CASE STUDY

### Postcommunist Communal Wars—Chechnya

The breakup of the Soviet Union provided an opportunity for many republics to obtain their independence and statehood. Not all areas desiring independence, however, were able to realize this goal. This incomplete dismemberment of the Soviet Union left a situation in which Russia is confronted with ongoing separatist demands. In Chechnya the result has been intermittent violence and terrorism. Chechnya is important not only for the specific problem it presents to Russia but because it represents a broader class of international conflict situations, ones rooted in ethnic or communal violence, that are found in many regions of the world.

#### Overview

War has not disappeared with the passing of communism and the Cold War. It remains an all too troubling feature of the international geopolitical landscape. In some re-



**MAP 11.2**  
**Chechnya**

Chechnya lies within Russia. It did not gain its independence when the Soviet Union collapsed. Russia and Chechnya have engaged in terrorism and others forms of combat as Russia has sought to prevent this from happening. Chechnya is important because it is an example of a new breed of conflict, communal wars, which are dominating the agenda of international politics.

spects, however, it is undergoing a transformation. Great Power rivalries and competing ideologies are not the underlying driving force behind today's wars. Regional ambitions, hegemonic aspirations, and balance of power considerations continue to influence conflict patterns but do so on a lesser scale. Their influence is most keenly felt in the Persian Gulf, South Asia, and in China's relations with Taiwan. Elsewhere we are witnessing a surge in communal wars rooted in conflicts over competing identities, political institutions, and territorial claims.

Where external factors commonly are identified as the sources of Great Power wars and regional conflicts, domestic politics and values typically lie at the heart of communal wars. Particularly prone to communal wars are states undergoing a legitimacy crisis and "failed states," those where central governments no longer possess the ability to maintain order. Under these circumstances violence becomes an accepted means of settling disputes due to the failure of legal and political processes. Communal identities also become alternative foundations on which to build new claims to political power.

Communal conflicts rarely are fought by "the rules." Instead of highly disciplined and organized armies led by a professional officer corps fighting in the service of the state, we tend to find militias and mercenaries—loose associations of armed men led by charismatic personalities fighting for a combination of ill-defined and shifting personal and group goals. The result is disorganized warfare that is characterized by military improvisation and great firepower but little control.<sup>32</sup>

Communal wars carry within them a twofold risk of escalation. Horizontal escalation where fighting spreads to neighboring provinces, regions, or states is a constant possibility brought on by such factors as large-scale refugee flows, the creation of staging areas for military attacks, and their use as areas for transporting weapons to combatants. Just as worrisome is vertical escalation where violence spreads downward through society and turns low-level conflicts into wars that consume society. Finally, we need to note that communal wars present great challenges to the international community. International and regional organizations such as the United Nations and NATO are far better equipped to deter or play peacemaker in interstate wars fought between armies than they are to intervene in conflicts where the political-military lines of control and accountability are weak and blurred.

Communal wars have become especially prevalent in the Near Abroad. Within the first decade of its postcommunist existence Russian forces were placed into combat at several points along the Russian periphery.<sup>33</sup> In Moldova 8,000 troops in the Russian 14th Army have occupied the easternmost part of Moldova since 1991 and declared it to be the "Trans-Dniestr Republic." Neither Russia nor any other state has recognized it as an independent country, yet officials there operate as a semi-sovereign state complete with their own passports and postal system. Russia has opened negotiations with Moldova over the status of the region and has sent in 2,000 troops, which now operate there along with an 8,000-person force of ethnic Russians that make up an independent Trans-Dniestr army. In Georgia the Russian military is described as having engaged in political blackmail in order to force Georgia to join the CIS and sign a Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation that allows Russia to have three military bases there. The heart of the problem centers on secessionist movements in the northwest province of Abkhazia and in the southwest. Independence brought political instability and ethnic conflict to Tajikistan. Russian troops found themselves in the center of the fighting, reportedly selling weapons to all sides. They did little to aid the government and their inaction was seen as contributing to the downfall of a coalition government and the ascension to power of a communist who promptly requested assistance from Russia and the CIS. In 1993, rebel forces aided by Afghan Mujaheddin crossed into Russian territory and killed 25 Russian soldiers. In response, Russia has increased the number of forces stationed in Tajikistan, taken over primary military responsibility for the campaign against the rebels, and has indicated a willingness to attack Afghanistan if needed.

### **Chechnya**

The most notable communal war has taken place within Russian territory, in Chechnya.<sup>34</sup> Chechnya is part of the Caucasus, a 900-mile mountainous region along Russia's southern border that has served as a focal point for Russian imperial ambitions since the 1800s. The Caucasus can be divided into three regions. Historically, the eastern and western Caucasus have viewed Russia as an enemy, identifying either with the Ottoman Empire or the Arab world. Only the center, which suffered from attacks by Tartar forces in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, traditionally has viewed Russia as an ally. The Chechens are part of the east Caucasus and were conquered by Russian forces in the mid-1800s. Periodically they revolted against Russia and in 1944 they were one of the targets of Stalin's massive internal deportations to Siberia and Kazakhstan.

We can begin our overview of the most recent Chechen revolt against Russian rule on November 1, 1991, when leaders in the province of Chechen-Ingushetia declared it

to be independent of the Soviet Union. Later that month the Ingush voted not to secede. Yeltsin, in his role as president of the Russian Federation, quickly moved to declare a state of emergency in Chechnya and ordered an invasion to put down the revolt. Chechens lined the runways at the Grozny airport and threatened to set the planes containing Russian troops on fire if they tried to disembark. The Russians were defeated.

The conflict erupted again in 1994 following a period of negotiations that made little headway in resolving the breakaway status of Chechnya. In November 1994 Russian troops entered Grozny expecting to inspire a popular uprising. The effort failed and in December there followed a real invasion of Chechnya. Russian troops tried but failed to take Grozny in street-to-street fighting. They then began a massive bombing campaign against the city. Grozny fell in January, but the fighting did not end. Rather it moved to the countryside where the Chechens fought a guerrilla campaign with the aid of Afghan and Algerian radicals, and the Russian forces indiscriminately attacked civilians. In June 1995 Chechen rebels secretly moved some 200 miles into Russia and attacked the city of Budyonnovsk. Sixty Russians were killed and about 2,000 were taken as hostages to a local hospital.

The following month a cease-fire agreement was reached that brought a temporary halt to the fighting. Chechnya remained a foreign policy problem for Yeltsin. As the June 1996 presidential election approached he flew to Chechnya and met with Russian troops declaring that “you have finally won.” He acknowledged that mistakes had been made but stood by his argument that the war was necessary because Chechnya had become a magnet for criminals and terrorists from around the world. Yeltsin also announced that he was going ahead with a March 1996 proposal to give Chechnya maximum autonomy but not independence.



#### **A Russian Colony?**

Here we see a scene resulting from fighting in Chechnya. Some have described Chechnya as a Russian colony, noting that while Britain and France went to Africa and Asia in search of colonies, the Soviet Union simply colonized territory along its borders. The breakup of the Soviet Union allowed many, but not all, nationalities along its borders to obtain their independence.

The lessons Russia learned from the First Chechen War (1994–1996) were fully evident in the conduct of the Second Chechen War (1999–2000). Instead of leading with a disastrous frontal attack on Chechen forces, Russia instituted massive airstrikes as a prelude to its invasion. The spark that ignited the next round of fighting took place in August 1999 when Chechen guerrillas and local militants launched attacks in Dagestan in hopes of creating an Islamic state. Russia responded by bombing rebel locations in Chechnya. In the midst of this, terrorist bombings in Moscow and elsewhere killed almost 300 civilians. Russia countered by sending troops to Chechnya's borders and unleashing the first bombing raids on Grozny in three years. The purpose of this offensive was to create a security corridor between Chechnya and Russia.

Fighting quickly intensified. Russian forces captured the northern one-third of Chechnya and declared it to be a "liberation zone." Putin described it as a type of Maginot Line inside Chechnya that would keep guerrillas from operating inside Russia. Rocket attacks on Grozny killed more than 100 civilians, prompting the United States to accuse Russia of violating the Geneva Convention. By late November an estimated 220,000 Chechen refugees had fled to the neighboring Russian republic of Ingushetia. Grozny fell to advancing Russian forces that numbered some 100,000 in early February 2000. The conflict, however, did not end. It entered into yet another quagmire in which Chechen terrorist attacks continued to take their toll on Russian military personnel and civilians and in which a final resolution seems beyond Russia's reach.

In June 2002 Putin spoke out on Chechnya. He acknowledged that not all those in Chechnya were being fairly labeled as terrorists. Many, he said, were victims of a weak Russian state that allowed the terrorists to gain an upper hand in the fighting. He also pledged to end Russian military "mop up" operations in Chechnya by the end of the year. International human rights observers have charged them with killing 1,000 Chechens in three years.

### *Implications*

From Russia's perspective much rides on how the Chechnyan crisis is resolved. If a mutually satisfactory and stable resolution cannot be reached, Russian leaders risk encountering rising public opposition and strained civil-military relations. Russia has already encountered international opposition and paid the price in terms of denied G7 loans needed to speed its economic recovery. Failure to resolve the situation in Chechnya heightens the possibility that communal violence will spread to other regions of the Near Abroad or within Russia. It also raises the possibility that nationalist Russian leaders concerned with shoring up their domestic standing may embark on conflicting policies outside the region in an attempt to create a "rally-around-the-flag" feeling among the Russian people. The end result need not be a new Cold War, but it would diminish the size of the zone of peace in world politics.

## CONCLUSION

In this chapter we surveyed the international politics of Russia and the Near Abroad, an area that once was equivalent to the Soviet Union. We began by examining several key regional flash points. They were economic growth, nuclear

weapons, and building democracy. We then examined the Russian perspective on world politics, tracing its historical roots through Czarist and Soviet Russia and outlining the contemporary foreign policy debate. We then looked at the international architecture of this region. Our focus was on the Commonwealth of Independent States, NATO, and the OSCE. We concluded by examining the struggle over Chechnya. Not only is it of great significance to Russia and the other states in the Near Abroad, but Chechnya is important because it is representative of a new type of conflict situation, communal conflicts, which have become prominent features of international politics today.

## Challenge Questions

1. Define the Russian national interest. To what extent is it similar to the Soviet national interest?
2. Create a ranking of flash points in terms of their near-term (5 years into the future) and long-term (10+ years into the future) significance for Russian foreign policy. Justify your rankings.
3. Evaluate the relative importance of ideology and history in shaping Russia's world view.
4. If you were a Russian leader how important would you rate the Near Abroad in constructing a foreign policy? Would you place it ahead of relations with Europe, China, or the United States?
5. Construct a regional architecture for managing relations with states around Russia.

## Suggested Websites

### Central Europe Today

[www.centraleurope.com](http://www.centraleurope.com)

Provides current information on economics and trade as well as news.

### Russia Today

[www.russiatoday.com](http://www.russiatoday.com)

Provides current news and information on politics and current issues.

### William R. Nelson Institute for Public Affairs

[www.jmu.edu/orgs/wrni/](http://www.jmu.edu/orgs/wrni/)

Provides current research on issues affecting this region, especially those in the North Caucasus.

## Key Terms

Near Abroad 000

*Perestroika* 000

*Glasnost* 000

*Demokratizatsiya* 000

*Nomenklatura* 000

Marxist-Leninism 000

Containment 000

Slavophile 000

Pan-Slavism 000

Autocracy 000

Dialectic 000

New Thinking 000

Socialism in one country 000

Peaceful coexistence 000

Politburo 000

Shock therapy 000

Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) 000

Organization of Security

and Co-operation in

Europe 000

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