

A Viable Russian Federalism

Does American History Hold the Key?

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In thinking about democratization we should avoid a one-dimensional set of categories. Western observers sometimes picture events in the post-Soviet world as a clear-cut battle between the forces of democratic reform on the one side and those of nationalist extremism on the other. While this scenario captures much of the situation, it does not exhaust the field of political possibilities. Several students of Russian politics have recently argued for a more nuanced view, while warning against linking American policy to a set vision of future developments in Russia.¹ Among other things, we need to focus on federalism as a coherent political theory and practice offering useful directions for the resolution and containment of political tensions. The theory of federalism may also shed light on the difficulties posed by conflicts over separatism and ethnic self-determination. The future of Russian politics hinges in large part on efforts to reconcile the interests of the central government with those of the regions and republics.² The American example may be helpful here by suggesting an outline of federal politics that highlights possibilities for escaping a vicious cycle of reform and reaction.

Political analysis too often blurs the distinction between patriotism and nationalism, as if any attempt to articulate the former necessarily means recourse to bigotry and militarism. Recent efforts by Russians such as Vladimir Lukin, Sergei Stankevich, and Valery Zorkin to evoke a responsible patriotism underscore the need for more complex categories.³ Consider also the arguments of Alexander Solzhenitsyn on the subject of Russian patriotism.⁴ The dubious results of the reform program launched in January 1992, admitted by Yegor Gaidar himself to have made for an "exhausted society" beset with a "parasitic bourgeoisie," have highlighted the usefulness of political perspectives besides capitalism and nationalism.⁵ Federalism may promote a civic patriotism that can weather challenges without succumbing to the excesses of ethnically based or imperialist nationalism.

The American example comprises more than democratic national institutions and a market-oriented economic system. In particular, the American political tradition, going back to the framing of the Constitution and earlier, incorporates a strong attachment to local and regional integrity. The institutions and customs inspired by that attachment have served to check the dangers inherent in both liberalism and nationalism. On the one

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hand, a federalist political culture endows persons with a civic role that transcends the bloodless technocratic identities of “consumer” and “human resource.” At the same time, federalism offers a more enduring alternative to the hubris of nationalism than appeals to either individual self-interest or global responsibilities. An overview of American federalism, and in particular of its founding, will outline some strategies for mitigating the difficulties that beset the politics of representative democracy. Those strategies, as we will see, may hold out some hope for specific dilemmas facing the post-Soviet world.

Unlike the more abstract images of free markets and constitutional mechanisms, federalist politics takes into account the traditions and unique features of different peoples and regions.

At the time of its founding as a nation, the United States incorporated several distinctly localist features in its political framework. Consider, for instance, the Founders’ constitutional provisions for decentralized institutions: an upper house elected indirectly by state legislatures with equal representation for all states, a chief executive elected indirectly by state electors, a lower house with members elected in local districts, and a Bill of Rights that limited the national government but not states and localities.⁶ The extra-constitutional development of primary elections and loosely organized political parties has likewise checked the rise of centralized power. Furthermore, advocates of centralization have always had to contend with a deep-seated skepticism about their intentions, a skepticism firmly rooted in the American political tradition. The framers of the Constitution, as exemplified for instance by the authors of *The Federalist*, did indeed desire a central government more powerful and self-sufficient than the hitherto prevailing one. Yet both their aspirations and their handiwork were constrained, and to an extent shaped, by an ingrained localism.

Both constitutional doctrine and the unwritten customs of American politics incorporate major concessions to the objections that led so many Americans to oppose the Constitution that it was barely ratified⁷ (in a rhetorical master stroke, those opponents were saddled with the ironic designation “Antifederalist” because of their suspicion of the central, or “federal,” government). In considering the establishment of representative government over an extended, diverse nation, one could profitably consult the Antifederalist arguments. Those arguments reflect, among other things, three critiques worthy of note. These are, respectively, the critique of the idea of national greatness, the critique of commercial prosperity as the determinant of national policy, and the critique of plebiscitarian politics. Each critique bears directly on different aspects of the Russian situation. Taken together, the arguments in question help to trace the outlines of a responsible patriotism.

The national consolidation effected by the American Constitution drew heavily on the prospect of an increasing American ascendancy at once commercial and geopolitical. In one of the early papers of *The Federalist* Alexander Hamilton warned that European powers were fostering divisions among Americans with a design to “clipping the wings by which we might

soar to a dangerous greatness.”⁸ Advocates of the proposed energetic national government anticipated a nation growing in diplomatic importance, relying on a burgeoning economy bolstered by a strong military. Both economic and military progress were linked to political centralization that would overcome the convulsive and backward effects of autonomy on the part of the several States. In his contribution to *The Federalist*, John Jay argued that only a “strong united nation” would be able to thrive under the harsh logic of war and peace prevailing in world affairs.⁹

Antifederalist reservations about the Constitution, while commonly directed at specific institutional arrangements, extended as well to this nationalist vision of American greatness. The New York pamphleteer “Brutus” warned against basing a constitution on the apparent demands of geopolitical competition, urging his fellow citizens instead to embrace the opportunity of showing the world an example of a people “who in their civil institutions hold chiefly in view, the attainment of virtue, and happiness among ourselves.”¹⁰ Maryland’s “Farmer” likewise sought to disabuse his countrymen of the “wish to make a noise in the world,” arguing that they should instead rest content with political freedom.¹¹ Such reservations reflected a reading of history that linked imperial expansion with political corruption, notably including the breakdown of institutions of self-government. Power on the world stage, it was feared, might well serve as a narcotic for the citizenry and as an undue stimulant for their government.

Opposition to the Constitution focused especially on the professional military establishments required to safeguard the projected global status of Jay’s “strong united nation.” The “Columbian Patriot” of Boston sounded a recurring theme with the charge that standing armies breathed the spirit of Oriental despotism, conjuring up an image of “the Divan, or the Despot” calling out his dragoons to quash rebellious subjects.¹² In a similar mood, Patrick Henry thundered that, given a standing army, the merest assembly of a few neighbors might find itself looking down the rifles of a “hired soldiery, the engines of despotism.”¹³ Maryland’s “Farmer” invoked the memory of Thermopylae in urging Americans to rely on the sacrifices of citizen militias emulating the handful of Spartan freemen who “defended their country against a million of Persian slaves.”¹⁴ Such fears highlighted an argument to the effect that national power was dangerous precisely because it posed a threat to patriotism properly understood. In this view, the vicarious rewards of what we would today call “superpower status” do not compensate members of the community for the loss of their traditional civic life.

For our purposes, the relevance of this critique transcends the details of eighteenth-century republican thinking about the politics of war and national expansion. Consider the larger point that nationalism can be criticized not only from an internationalist perspective, but also as a rupture with the inner logic of specific political traditions. Far from being an attempt to turn back the hands of time, nationalism arose as a distinctly modern, progressive phenomenon that has spread outward from the Western nations over the past two centuries.¹⁵ Today we are accustomed to seeing the alternative to

nationalism as a form of internationalism, whether conceived in technocratic or juridical terms. Yet we would do well to remember that early opposition to the practice of national consolidation or to the principle of nationality took more conservative forms (in such widely varying manifestations as the agrarian localism of the American Antifederalists or the efforts of Metternich and later Austrian statesmen to preserve a multiethnic dynastic empire). A conservative patriotism may supply a better check on the excesses of nationalism, in particular those of xenophobia and militarism, than the more abstract allure of international cooperation or the global marketplace.

In the Russian context, Solzhenitsyn has sketched the distinctive features of such a patriotism. His argument rests on a denial of the view, promoted during the seven decades of Soviet rule, that equates patriotism with the quest for geopolitical greatness. "The time has come for an uncompromising *choice* between an empire of which we ourselves are the primary victims and the spiritual and physical salvation of our own people" (Solzhenitsyn, writing in the summer of 1990).¹⁶ Of late, his solicitude for Russians living in areas such as eastern Ukraine and northern Kazakhstan has been seen as problematic, but his overall position relies on the recognition that Russian control over the Baltic, Caucasian, and Central Asian republics amounted to a lamentable mistake.¹⁷ In his view, the ideology of national pride served as a cover for Soviet despotism, corruption, and incompetence, and today fails to address the challenges of economic, environmental, and moral reconstruction. Accordingly, the proper task of patriotism is inward rather than outward, the healing of an uprooted society and a tattered polity.

Note, by contrast, the questionable utility of the principle of ethnic self-determination as a check on the reach of powerful nations. This principle continues to shape the lenses through which events in the post-Soviet world are viewed, on the scene as well as in the West. Indeed, current events have done much to confirm the judgment of historian John Lukacs that Woodrow Wilson, not Lenin, is the great revolutionary of the twentieth century.¹⁸ As we have recently been reminded by William Pfaff, the characteristically eastern European equation of nationality with ethnicity is in part a gift of American political science, including the post-World War I boundaries drawn up by a committee consisting of Walter Lippmann and four other American intellectuals.¹⁹ Today the self-determination principle totters under the impact of factors that it cannot contain or explain: arbitrary boundaries, mixed populations, and the regress of ethnic separatism, as former minorities and former provinces flex their new-found sovereignty.²⁰ No aprioristic scheme can do justice to the myriad contingencies accumulated over time in political culture and political geography.

The dissolution of the Soviet empire, initiated from within, seems more an act of national self-renunciation than a defeat imposed by a surging tide of self-determination at the periphery. Lukacs, otherwise critical of absolutist tendencies in the Russian political and religious tradition, remarks of this singular event that "indifference to imperial possessions, indeed to the traditional territorial extent of one's very state, may be a mark—perhaps

even one of the spiritual marks—of a great people, after all”²¹ (it is worth remembering that one strain of Russian traditionalism emphasizes a heightened sense of duty and sacrifice rather than chauvinism and aggrandizement; “Holy Russia demands holy work,” in Vladimir Solovyev’s formula²²). The results of the recent Russian elections suggest that the prospect of “liberal reform” may not be a sufficient antidote to nationalist appeals of a reckless or ruthless character.

In America the vision of national greatness was from the outset linked closely with a commitment to continuous economic development. National consolidation figured as the path to an integrated national market and to increasing dominance in the world market. The framers of the Constitution feared the centrifugal tendency of State policies and regulations that affected economic life and threatened interference with the smooth

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workings of developing markets. In the famous tenth paper of *The Federalist*, James Madison warned that hasty local reactions to perceived hardship might take the form of a “rage for paper money, for an abolition of debts, for an equal division of property, or for any other improper or wicked project.”²³ Supporters of the Con-

stitution cited monitory examples such as that supplied by contemporary Germany, whose *Kleinstaateri* made uniform commercial regulation impossible and created a situation in which every sluice and tollgate betokened the crippling effects of disunion.²⁴ A national commercial policy designed to liberate trade and industry held the key to unlocking America’s vast potential for commercial prosperity.

Few Antifederalists explicitly opposed granting the national government the authority to dictate a uniform commercial policy, yet many opposed the tone of the emphasis on promoting commercial prosperity. Implicit in their concerns was a critique of the priority placed on the nationalist economic vision. Patrick Henry admonished his countrymen that “You are not to inquire how your trade may be increased, nor how you are to become a great and powerful people, but how your liberties can be secured.”²⁵ The liberty that Henry and his allies saw as most endangered was the ability of the people to govern themselves through their state governments. Also at stake was the role of those states as mediators between the people and the central government. Put another way, the difficulty of pressing local interests and viewpoints, seen by its supporters as a major advantage of centralization, struck others as detracting from the practice of self-government. The Massachusetts pamphleteer “Agrippa” argued, for instance, that the diversity of local interests would skew the outcome of any systematic national economic policy. Sacrifices of local interests, he warned, “always originate in folly, and not in generosity.”²⁶ Economic development, pursued as an end in itself, threatened the integrity of local communities by

subordinating them to national economic growth understood in an aggregate sense.

The arguments put forward by American localists during the Constitutional period bear directly on some of the salient aspects of contemporary Russian politics. The results of the latest general election indicate a north-south split roughly along the fifty-fifth parallel, a line dividing regions with relatively strong economies (to the north) from those with relatively weak economies (to the south).²⁷

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Support for the major anti-reform parties (the Liberal Democrats, Communists, and Agrarians) was strongest below that line, where earlier anti-Yeltsin voting was also concentrated. It is also worth noting that the upper house, the Council of the Federation, is heavily dominated by regional interests, with a substantial majority of seats going to nonpartisan representatives relying on bases of power in their respective areas.²⁸ The politics of regional interests looms large for the future. If anything, ethnic conflicts are overshadowed by tensions over economic issues, such as control over the flow of taxes and revenues, or the disposition of natural resources.²⁹ While regional grievances are by their nature likely to be biased, and will quite possibly be articulated in misguided ways, their significance cannot be denied. Such grievances may also dovetail in their effects with more generalized discontent over the course of economic reforms such as privatization, especially where the implementation of reforms brings in its train large-scale behavior whose entrepreneurial quality shades into profiteering and racketeering.

Economic differences between regions clearly complicate the politics of economic policy. The relative difficulty of implementing rapid market-oriented reforms in Russia, compared to the more successful experience of smaller Baltic and central European countries, points among other things to the significance of regional disparities.³⁰ Geographic fault lines in recent Russian politics have in part coincided with differences in regional economic interests. Agricultural areas dependent on a variety of state subsidies have been in the forefront of resistance to market-oriented policies, as have industrial regions with the most hopeless prospects, while other industrial regions (and perhaps the major cities in general) have been much more inclined to bank on the changes.³¹ Such differences highlight the limitations of viewing controversies over reform as a story of ideological struggle. The brokering of regional interests, while distasteful from the perspective of economic theory, is an important and in many ways valuable aspect of democratic *politics*. A federalist system that encourages such brokering helps to defuse the discontent that supplies a major stimulus to political pathologies, including varieties of extreme nationalism.

Controversies surrounding the ethnic republics within Russia likewise highlight the desirability of a federalist political structure and political culture.³² In political terms, the secession of Chechnia may be irreversible, yet the situation in the other republics is both less drastic and more

complex. In most republics, Russians outnumber members of the titular ethnic groups, and in several others, including autonomy-minded Tatarstan, they comprise a roughly comparable portion of the population. Most of the titular ethnic groups are small in absolute numbers and lack a history of independent political existence. The dream of "Siberian Kuwaits" that animates some groups inhabiting resource-rich territories runs up against

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hard political realities. In some cases the rhetoric of self-determination provides a convenient way of asserting local economic interests in the making of national policy.³³ While the central government must decide when and how to defer to the interests of the republics, the titular ethnic groups face the not dissimilar and more sobering

challenge of taking into account the interests of the local ethnic Russians. An ethic of mutual respect would seem to hold out more promise than accentuating the Soviet legacy of linking political jurisdictions with ethnicity. Localism and the brokering of interests may discourage ethnic separatism and its volatile consequences. Within the republics, a multiethnic ethic requires an understanding of local loyalties as more regional than ethnic. Within Russia as a whole, federalist politics requires seeing the republics as regions with distinct and legitimate interests while rejecting the claim that ethnicity implies sovereignty.

In the American case, criticisms of the idea of national greatness and of the attendant emphasis on national economic policy provided the basis for a continuing localist undercurrent in national politics. This impulse has manifested itself in restrictive approaches to Constitutional interpretation ("strict construction"), in the configuration of partisan politics, in periodic bursts of agrarian radicalism, and in the continuing necessity for those pursuing systematic national policies to take into account a host of local interests. The American tradition of federalism represents a hybrid of "Antifederalist" concerns and the national idea pursued by the framers of the Constitution.³⁴ The opponents of Constitutional ratification were numerous and vocal; if a few votes at the ratifying conventions of key states such as Virginia and New York had gone the other way, the Constitution would have been a dead letter. Yet those skeptics were soon completely absorbed into the politics of the new nation, representing interests and dispositions that served to limit and deflect the centripetal potential of the government in Washington. Localists and centralizers have served as complementary voices within a coherent tradition of representative democracy.³⁵ Those looking to America as a model of representative democracy cannot afford to ignore this traditional base.

The institutions and ethos of American representative democracy rest on a firm rejection by its founders of a plebiscitarian understanding of national political institutions. The two sides in the Constitutional ratification

controversy actually agreed on this point, each emphasizing, for its own reasons, different implications of the position. Antifederalist critics of the Constitution warned that, due to its scale, the proposed national government *could not* represent the will of the people in a clear and immediate sense, and saw this as a drawback that necessitated severe limits on central power. Proponents of the Constitution accepted the descriptive analysis, but argued instead that such detachment was an asset that made possible effective statesmanship.

At New York's ratifying convention, Melancton Smith offered perhaps the most cogent Antifederalist analysis of this problem.³⁶ Building on the premise that a "representative must be chosen by the free will of his constituents," Smith doubted that an extended, diverse constituency allowed for the kind of civic discourse that allows one to say that the citizens act, in the deepest sense, from their free will. Smith's argument builds on a judgment that large, complex constituencies by their nature attenuate mutual understanding and civic engagement, thus lessening the ability of citizens to shape or even to grasp the options faced in the making of political decisions. Such constituencies, it was feared, would be much more likely to see well-organized factions engaging in the kind of manipulations that threaten to make a mockery of the franchise.³⁷ From a localist perspective, these considerations would apply *a fortiori* to any scheme of proportional representation. The American reliance on winner-take-all geographic districts reflects an enduring skepticism about the national government's capacity to embody something like a discernible national will (this skepticism must of course be weighed against the recurrently popular "mandate" theory of presidential elections).

The framers of the Constitution pictured national political institutions as instruments for refining, in Madison's phrase, the "cool and deliberate sense of the community" through the work of officeholders who, while mindful of their constituents, would be relatively free to deliberate and bargain among themselves.³⁸ Rather than seeing a nation as a daily plebiscite, to use Ernest Renan's famous phrase, the authors of *The Federalist* saw their nation as a daily exercise in statesmanship. Madison took great pains to deny that representative government over a large, complex nation could resemble the more mechanical representation found in small, homogeneous communities.³⁹ Only a demagogue, it was assumed, would argue otherwise. Between them, the Antifederalist and Madisonian theories of representation describe the role of the national government in the American federal system. The Antifederalist view promotes an understanding of the national government as a forum for the articulation of local interests; the Madisonian view explains the lawmakers' role as that of negotiating with, adjudicating between, and (where necessary) transcending such interests. Neither aspect of the American tradition is compatible with the claim that national political institutions register and express a single, uniform national will.

The critique of plebiscitarianism implicit in the American tradition of territorial democracy bears directly on attempts to establish a federalist political structure in a nation such as Russia.⁴⁰ The Antifederalist notion

that power is best rooted in local constituencies, from there to be delegated to more remote levels of government, found an echo in Boris Yeltsin's original proposal of "sovereignty from the ground up," a notion that he

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championed while seeking leverage against the old Soviet regime. More recent circumstances have led Yeltsin to seek the advantages of independent authority for the central government. Yet recent negotiations over relations between center and periphery have reflected the federalist premise that at any

rate *some* authority is rooted in regional jurisdictions.⁴¹ Nor should we forget that, as Peter Reddaway has pointed out, the tendencies toward regionalization and even fragmentation preclude, for the near future at least, the revival of consolidated authoritarian rule.⁴²

Interestingly, Solzhenitsyn's 1990 suggestions for remaking Russian political institutions mirror the Antifederalist emphasis on local constituencies.⁴³ Those suggestions rest on a commitment to the "democracy of small areas," a theory that envisions direct elections on the local level triggering an ascending series of indirect elections that determine the governments of larger jurisdictions. Direct elections over large constituencies (and those based on proportional representation) are likely to be "shrill and frivolous" and to feature opportunism and manipulation by parties and candidates (while it is difficult to generalize on the basis of one election, it is worth noting that the Liberal Democrats fared significantly better in the party list election of the State Duma than in the district elections). Solzhenitsyn follows the Federalists in arguing that elections should be about the choice of capable *persons* and not about the affirmation of platforms and ideologies. The "democracy of small areas," like "sovereignty from the ground up," is only partially realized in today's constitutional and political arrangements. Yet any feasible Russian political structure would appear to include key federalist elements, including both decentralization of political functions and reliance on territorial constituencies in electing the national government.

Federalism offers arguably the only plausible form for representative democracy in an extended, diverse nation. Federalist institutions allow a nation to navigate between the two major (and mutually reinforcing) pathologies of nationalism, imperialism and separatism. On the one hand, a partial devolution of authority to the periphery provides an alternative to the costly and problematic consequences of an imperial policy that unilaterally imposes national authority. At the same time, a measure of decentralization is likely to lessen both the appeal and the legitimacy of separatist movements and policies. A substantial political role for local areas may also help to promote a civic patriotism informed by tangible loyalties and a real comprehension of public affairs. Ideological nationalism of an abstract and symbolic sort is most likely to flourish where the conditions for

such a civic patriotism are absent or in decline (witness the recurring paradox presented by the rootless, ambiguous character of so many of history's prominent nationalists). We can isolate the central features of federalist politics and trace the vitality of civic life to precisely those features. For this purpose, those features can be identified as: (1) recognition of the cost of empire; (2) acknowledgment of the legitimacy of diverse regional interests; and (3) understanding the national government as a forum for statesmanship, in the form of brokering and deliberation, rather than as an instrument of a supposed national will.

In the Russian case, the cost of a revived imperial policy takes several forms. With regard to newly independent areas previously under Soviet control, moves toward Russian expansion risk not only international isolation but also the absorption of economically backward or troubled areas ranging from the Central Asian states to the heavily Russian Donbass region of Ukraine. Attempts to impose

strict national control over regions and republics *within* Russia would still face the less tangible but perhaps ultimately more compelling political (and moral) cost of empire. Recall the argument of American localists that political centralization corrupts and enervates the

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capacity for self-government, a capacity born and nurtured in attention to events close at hand. That argument also reflects the apprehension that governments quickly grow accustomed to achieving their objectives by force. A division of authority between center and periphery encourages the development of a political culture in which power is expected to sustain itself through negotiation. While it limits the centralizing tendencies of the national government, a federal political structure at the same time curbs centrifugal tendencies by giving localities a stake in the wider political society. The arguments for federalism should also weigh heavily for those of Russia's neighbors with significant Russian populations. A multi-ethnic polity, decentralized where appropriate, may help them to resolve some of their pressing problems.⁴⁴

An acceptance of the legitimacy of diverse regional interests supplies the cornerstone of a federal system. For Russia, that diversity actually works as a partial corrective to a deficiency in some of the prerequisites of democratic politics. Especially given the relative absence of a tradition of political parties and other institutions capable of articulating popular interests and grievances, locality operates, albeit in an untidy way, as a school of democracy. The consciousness of belonging to one region among many, and of battling for as good a deal as possible for one's region, goes some way toward encouraging that mixture of self-assertion and self-restraint peculiar to democratic citizenship. Put another way, the variety of local loyalties itself serves as a kind of “civil society,” if we mean by that the realm in which persons learn to experience community and begin to think in terms of

principles of justice precisely through their membership in particular institutions. Regional interests that seem merely "irrational" or backward from an economic perspective, capitalist or socialist, may well have a

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positive political role to play. It is indeed likely, as one analyst has recently argued, that Russia's development of civil institutions (unions, parties, interest groups) will itself help to restrain centrifugal tendencies.⁴⁵ Yet something like the reverse of this may also be true, as the customs and faculties proper to democratic politics develop both through local politics itself

and through the articulation of regional interests within a federal system.

While Russians tend to view existing local governments with the same mistrust they show toward other political institutions, it remains true, as Richard Rose has put it, that the "construction of trustworthy institutions is more likely to happen from the bottom up than from the top down."⁴⁶ Consider, in this regard, Solzhenitsyn's portrayal of a localist tradition in pre-revolutionary Russia compromising the *zemstvo* experiment as well as older practices such as peasant councils, a portrayal intended to show that the "democracy of small areas" would not be an alien graft on Russian life.⁴⁷ Especially for an extended and diverse nation, representative government at the center hinges on the integrity of civic life at the local level.

In a federalist political system, the national government can scarcely function as the agent of a unitary national will. Instead, it serves two related purposes, both of which keenly interested the framers of American federalism: the aggregation and balancing of partial interests ("interest group politics"), and deliberation resulting in a considered vision of the public interest (Madison's "cool and deliberate sense of the community"). Federalism encourages a sober view of elections as the legitimate means of choosing officeholders. The bulk of political life takes place elsewhere, as citizens and statesmen articulate concerns and deliberate over policy. Outside of the notional precincts of a sufficiently small and homogeneous community, elections cannot work as a mechanism enabling "the people" to direct politics in a comprehensive and magisterial way. To maintain otherwise is to invite tyranny through demagogy, the American founders insisted. A nation as complex as Russia surely warrants a careful understanding of elections and their place in democratic politics. A federalist division of political authority helps to reinforce such an understanding by exposing the pretense that diversified nations are unitary entities with a single will.

The outline of federalist politics suggests some concluding reflections on how federalism promotes a responsible patriotism that avoids the quagmires of ethno-cultural purification and border warfare. A decentralized political structure can encompass loyalties and identities that seem backward and

irrational from the perspective of contemporary liberal democratic theory. We have little reason to assume that ethnic and national passions will be eliminated by the power of global altruism or even of economic growth. One of the singular advantages of federalism is that it makes room for particular and exclusive loyalties at the same time that it checks their potential for excess.

On the vexed question of nationality, federalism avoids the characteristic excesses of both liberalism and nationalism taken to their logical conclusions. Liberalism cannot account for the inescapably contingent foundations of political identity, though communities with relatively settled identities may permit their members the luxury of not being conscious of those foundations. Liberal principles cannot, for instance, supply logical criteria that determine the boundaries of political units.⁴⁸ Nor do those principles hold much promise for adjudicating the clashes of rival ethnic groups contending over the same portion of territory or over political dominance. Nationalism goes to the opposite extreme. Instead of a universal perspective in whose light any contingent identity is irrational, nationalism elevates an irrational, contingent identity to universal significance. In the recent formulation of the Hungarian philosopher G.M. Tamás, nationalism can be seen as a “religion without God” in which a people worships itself, a phenomenon in which “contingency constitutes divinity.”⁴⁹ For the extreme nationalist, the accident of national identity supplies a self-evident logic for policy that replaces the actual substance of civic life, negotiation and deliberation of the sort encouraged by federalism.

In his classic paper on “Nationality,” Lord Acton portrayed federalism as the only way of ensuring the compatibility of national spirit with limited government and free political institutions.⁵⁰ In his judgment the equation of nationality and statehood left no obstacles to the unchecked centralization of political power, whether monarchical or democratic. Acton argued that the “liberty of different nationalities as members of one sovereign community” was actually in the long-term interest of those nationalities, as the best way of avoiding a cycle in which political consolidation by one people sets off nationalist reaction in others. The spread of nationalism, so dangerous in itself, would have the ironic consequence of vindicating the only political form that curbed the growth of political absolutism. Acton’s presentation of federalism as combining the best features of liberalism and nationalism inverts the Wilsonian formula of self-determination. The latter arguably accentuates the most problematic tendencies of both theories by clothing the hubris of nationalism in the rhetoric and symbols of natural rights. Federalism provides a way of giving the principle of nationality its due without inflaming it.

In the case of Russia, federalism promises to accommodate both the diversity of cultures and the diversity of regional interests. There can be no set formula; specific features of the division of authority can only be negotiated on the spot, as over-all circumstances and local contexts dictate. Whatever its exact shape, a genuine division of authority tends to promote civic patriotism, a national ethos schooled in the experience of regional

politics and tempered by the pull of intermediary loyalties. The unique challenges posed by Russia's tradition and historical situation can only be solved from within. The contribution of federalism, as shown by the American example, consists of a durable framework for representative government over a vast, diverse nation. That framework encourages the political education of citizens and absorbs the energies of ethnic and local collectivities into the political life of the nation. A federal polity does justice to the complexity of Russian politics and society. Such a structure works to check all ideologies and movements that seek to impose upon civic life a tidy simplicity. Federalism serves as a reminder that democracy is not so much a goal, near or distant, as it is a living engagement, constantly renewed through practicing the art of politics.

Notes

¹ See, for example, Philip Zelikow, "Beyond Boris Yeltsin," *Foreign Affairs*, Volume 73 (January/February 1994), pp. 44-55; Dimitri Simes, "The Return of Russian History," *ibid.*, pp. 67-82; and Stephen Sestanovich, "Russia Turns the Corner," *ibid.*, pp. 83-98. Zelikow and Simes explicitly make the connection to American policy.

² This is among the conclusions in such analyses as those of Leon Aron, "Boris Yeltsin and Russia's Four Crises," *Journal of Democracy*, Volume 4 (April 1993), pp. 4-16; Ariel Cohen, "Comparing Russia's Constitutional Drafts," *Eurasian Reports*, Volume 3 (Winter 1993), pp. 27-38; and Edward D. Walker, "Moscow and the Provinces: Economic and Political Dimensions of Russian Regionalism," *Eurasian Reports*, Volume 3 (Winter 1993), pp. 47-64.

³ See Vladimir Lukin, "Our Security Predicament," *Foreign Policy*, Number 88 (Fall 1992), pp. 57-75; Sergei B. Stankevich, "Toward a New 'National Idea,'" in Stephen Sestanovich, ed., *Rethinking Russia's National Interests* (Washington: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 1994), pp. 24-32; and Valery Zorkin, "Russia: To Be or Not To Be," *Demokratizatsiya*, Volume 2 (Spring 1994), pp. 195-204.

⁴ See especially Alexander Solzhenitsyn, *Rebuilding Russia: Reflections and Tentative Proposals* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux: 1991), in particular pp. 9-14; this essay was first published in the Soviet Union in September 1990 in *Komsomolskaya Pravda*. The current challenge of arriving at a responsible patriotism is discussed in Sestanovich, "Russia Turns the Corner," pp. 93-98.

⁵ Gaidar's comments were made in *Izvestiya* and are quoted in Mark Hopkins, "After Yeltsin's Failed Experiment: The Challenge Facing Chernomyrdin," *The New Leader*, Volume 77 (February 14-28, 1994), p. 5.

⁶ Clearly, some of these features have been altered over time in ways that have bolstered the national government at the expense of state and local governments. Note the *de jure* change in the mode of electing Senators, or the largely *de facto* innovations in presidential elections. The twentieth-century application of the Bill of Rights to states and localities has obviously weakened their position relative to the national government, in particular the judiciary. Yet much of the central focus of localist politics remains. The states are still represented equally in the Senate, the Electoral College still channels presidential elections into races within the states, and Americans remain suspicious of distant political power.

⁷ For an analysis of the politics of Constitutional ratification, see Forrest McDonald, *We the People: The Economic Origins of the Constitution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), and *E Pluribus Unum: The Formation of the American Republic 1776-1790* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965); Gordon S. Wood *The Creation of the American Republic 1776-1787* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1969); and Herbert J. Storing *The Complete Anti-Federalist* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981).

⁸ Jacob E. Cooke, ed., *The Federalist* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1961), p. 66; the quotation is from paper # 11.

⁹ See especially Cooke, ed., *Federalist*, pp. 13-47; this comprises papers # 3-5.

¹⁰ Storing, ed., *Complete Anti-Federalist*, vol. 2, p. 401.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, vol. 5, pp. 29-30.

¹² *Ibid.*, vol. 4, p. 277.

¹³ *Ibid.*, vol. 5, p. 217.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. 5, p. 27.

¹⁵ For thoughtful recent treatments of nationalism, see Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), and William Pfaff, *The Wrath of Nations: Civilization and the Furies of Nationalism* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993). My approach is closer to Pfaff's.

¹⁶ Solzhenitsyn, *Rebuilding Russia*, p. 11.

¹⁷ Solzhenitsyn updates his views in an interview in *Forbes*, Volume 153 (May 9, 1994), pp. 118-122.

¹⁸ John Lukacs, *The End of the Twentieth Century and the End of the Modern Age* (New York: Ticknor & Fields, 1993), pp. 4-9. See also John Lukacs, *Outgrowing Democracy: A History of the United States in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Doubleday, 1984).

¹⁹ See Pfaff, *Wrath of Nations*, esp. pp. 105-107.

²⁰ Some of the pitfalls of self-determination are discussed in Amitai Etzioni, "The Evils of Self-Determination," *Foreign Policy*, Number 89 (Winter 1992-93), pp. 21-35.

²¹ Lukacs, *End of the Twentieth Century*, p. 78.

²² See the discussion of Vladimir Solovyev in Alexander V. Soloviev, *Holy Russia: The History of a Religious-Social Idea* (The Hague: Mouton, 1959). See also Vladimir Solovyev, *Russia and the Universal Church*, translated by Herbert Rees (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1948).

²³ Cooke, ed., *Federalist*, p. 65.

²⁴ See *Ibid.*, pp. 117-123 (paper # 19), and p. 137 (in paper # 22).

²⁵ Storing, ed., *Complete Anti-Federalist*, vol. 5, p. 212.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, vol. 4, pp. 75-83, quotation at p. 82.

²⁷ "The 55th Parallel," *The Economist*, 25 December 1993, p. 62.

²⁸ See Terry D. Clark, "The Russian Elections: Back to Square One?" *PS: Political Science & Politics*, Volume 27 (September 1994), pp. 520-524.

²⁹ For a full discussion of the economic aspects of center-periphery tension, see Walker, "Moscow and the Provinces."

³⁰ For comparative analysis of the success of economic reform programs, see Ben Slay, "Rapid versus Gradual Economic Transition," *RFE/RL Research Report*, vol. 3 (August 12, 1994), pp. 31-42.

³¹ See, for instance, Walker, "Moscow and the Provinces," pp. 59-61.

³² For an overview of those controversies, see Robert Sharlet, "Russia's 'Ethnic' Republics and Constitutional Politics," *Eurasian Reports*, Volume 3 (Winter 1993), pp. 39-46.

³³ See Walker, "Moscow and the Provinces," p. 57.

³⁴ See Storing, *Complete Anti-Federalist*, vol. 1.; Martin Diamond, "What the Framers Meant by Federalism," in Robert A. Goldwin, ed., *A Nation of States* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1974), pp. 43-66; and Martin Diamond, "The Ends of Federalism," *Publius: The Journal of Federalism*, Volume 3 (1974), pp. 129-152. Diamond points out that American federalism alters the pre-modern meaning of federalism, that of an alliance between sovereign states, into the mixed concept of one nation that nevertheless incorporates elements of such an alliance into its structure.

³⁵ For an insightful account of the genesis of that tradition see Willmoore Kendall and George Carey, *The Basic Symbols of the American Political Tradition* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1972).

³⁶ Storing, ed., *Complete Anti-Federalist*, vol. 6, pp. 152-155.

³⁷ For a recent analysis of such forms of manipulation in contemporary American politics, see Benjamin Ginsberg, *The Captive Public: How Mass Opinion Promotes State Power* (New York: Basic Books, 1986).

³⁸ Cooke, ed., *Federalist*, p. 425 (in paper # 63). For a full discussion of this theory of representation, see Kendall and Carey, *Basic Symbols*, pp. 96-118, and George W. Carey, *The Federalist: Design for a Constitutional Republic* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1989).

³⁹ See Cooke, ed., *Federalist*, pp. 83-89 (paper # 14).

⁴⁰ For a discussion of "territorial democracy" see Russell Kirk, "The Prospects for Territorial Democracy in America," in Goldwin, ed., *A Nation of States*, pp. 43-66.

⁴¹ See Cohen, "Comparing Russia's Constitutional Drafts," and Walker, "Moscow and the Provinces."

⁴² See Peter Reddaway, "Instability and Fragmentation," *Journal of Democracy*, Volume 5 (April 1994), pp. 13-19.

⁴³ See Solzhenitsyn, *Rebuilding Russia*, pp. 65-99. Solzhenitsyn bases his critique of plebiscitarian democracy on both the American example and on the writings of earlier Russian thinkers such as Boris Chicherin, Vasily Rozanov, and Semyon Frank.

⁴⁴ See the argument of Martin Klatt, "Russians in the 'Near Abroad,'" *RFE/RL Research Report*, Volume 3 (August 19, 1994), pp. 33-44.

⁴⁵ See M. Steven Fish, "Russia's Fourth Transition," *Journal of Democracy*, Volume 5 (July 1994), pp. 30-42. In the same issue of this journal the concept of "civil society" is treated thematically in Larry Diamond, "Toward Democratic Consolidation," pp. 4-17.

⁴⁶ Richard Rose, "Postcommunism and the Politics of Trust," *Journal of Democracy*, Volume 5 (July 1994), pp. 18-30, quotation at p. 29.

⁴⁷ Solzhenitsyn, *Rebuilding Russia*, pp. 85-95.

⁴⁸ Georgian scholar Ghia Nodia elaborates on this point in his "Nationalism and Democracy," *Journal of Democracy*, Volume 3 (October 1992), pp. 3-22; see especially pp. 7-9. Nodia argues that nationalism is an indispensable force in a people's initial struggle for political freedom, and that a responsible nationalism can be distinguished from its despotic cousin. On another matter, Nodia argues that a "nonimperial concept of Russian statehood has yet to be created" (p. 20); whether he is right or not in this, such a concept would have to be federal in nature.

⁴⁹ See G.M. Tamás, "Old Enemies and New: A Philosophic Postscript to Nationalism," *Studies in East European Thought*, Volume 46 (1994), pp. 129-147, esp. p. 135. Elsewhere Tamás writes that Eastern Europe is caught between backward nationalists and hapless Westernizers. He laments: "Civic patriotism is absent, advocated only by lonely humanists in ineffective essays." See G.M. Tamás, "Socialism, Capitalism, and Modernity," *Journal of Democracy* Volume 3 (July 1992), pp. 60-74, quotation at p. 72.

⁵⁰ See J. Rufus Fears, ed., *Selected Writings of Lord Acton*, vol. 1 (Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1985), pp. 409-433. The paper was first published in the *Home and Foreign Review* in July 1862. Acton goes so far as to argue that multiethnic States are in principle preferable to monoethnic ones even where the latter are feasible.