

Russian Democracy: From the Future to the Past

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As Russia lurches from crisis to crisis, it is difficult to be optimistic about its evolution toward democracy. Russia continues to confound our hopes and seems to be the exception to Western economic and political theories about the global triumph of democracy and liberal capitalism.¹ As the *Economist* observed, “false dawn follows false dawn.” But our task is to analyze this evolution, not just lament it.

Although it may be impossible to define Russian democracy in a way that satisfies all analysts and participants, we do know when we see democracy and when it is absent. Among other things, democracy entails free and fair elections, the rule of law, separation of powers, accountability of the executive to the legislative branch, a flourishing judiciary, the freedoms of speech, religion, assembly, dissent, and press, the right to own property and dispose of it freely subject to laws that are legitimately produced and implemented, effective civilian control over the means of violence—the power ministries—freedom from untoward state interference and oppression, and so on.

With this brief and admittedly incomplete list in mind, we see how many of these prerequisites are honored more in the breach than in their observance. Not even the 1996 presidential elections can be called free and fair, even by our own poor recent standards.² And the next election in 2000 is likely to be worse, if only because of President Boris Yeltsin’s example in 1996.³ Despite all of the campaign finance scandals of both American parties, nobody contends that President Clinton bought the support of H. Ross Perot in return for making him head of national security policy, or that the Clinton campaign openly bribed the press. But all of that happened and was publicly admitted in Russia. Nor are U.S. officials ousted by coups d’etat as happened to Aleksandr’ Lebed in October 1996. In Lebed’s ouster, his rival, Interior Minister Anatoly Kulikov, on his own, forged an alliance with the FAPSI (Russia’s NSA), severed inter-city communications

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throughout Russia, and mobilized 2,000–3,000 troops in Moscow, all exemplary acts of a coup d'état.⁴

Privatization, as its beneficiaries admit, was and remains a corrupt process. Indeed, we see that as it was never adequately controlled, its beneficiaries are increasingly tempted to seek the shelter of large financial-industrial groups akin to Japan's Keiretsus or South Korea's Chaebols. Thus they return to cartel-like structures reminiscent of tsarist capitalism. Because these structures are very close to the state and dependent on it for all kinds of open and concealed subsidies, destatization is steadily being undermined.⁵ The idea of a government sequestering a budget that the legislature passed but that it did not like flouts the basic notions of democracy and social contract. As Anders Aslund recently observed, the Russian state as such apparently exists solely to expropriate the national economy by endless rent-seeking.⁶

Russia is a predatory state ruled by rival competing factions who have little or no concept of the public or national interest or the rule of law, but who have successfully privatized the state and who operate in a fashion that is almost indistinguishable from a criminal conspiracy.⁷ The Duma is even more irresponsible and has spawned a super-presidentialism that lies at the root of many of Russia's democratic shortcomings.⁸

How do we make sense of this seeming conceptual monstrosity that apparently eludes characterization and the categories of Western political science and that appears to be in some sense out of control?⁹ To what system can we compare Russia profitably? Obviously, one article does not suffice to give a comprehensive and definitive answer that touches all of the relevant bases (even if we could agree as to what they were) and cannot satisfy all of the critics and observers who contribute to the debate on Russia as it evolves. We can, however, point to some promising frameworks and suggest how they might apply to Russia.

Scholars are coalescing around two broad interpretive "avenues" of historical or political comparison. One of these is a Third World mode of comparison, and the other is a historical one. In the former mode of comparison, the analyst compares Russia and its various problems in state organization, ethnic relations, economic reconstruction, defense, and foreign policy to analogous issues in Third World states. This approach is not merely the well-known "Upper Volta with rockets" approach, but it situates Russia in a comparative framework with states that apparently share similar challenges in an international system where they are under permanent pressure.¹⁰ Moreover, that pressure manifests itself in the constant challenge to build a viable state while confronting a host of forces from the global economy and state system. Not the least of those forces is the widespread belief that the state, as a political phenomenon, is becoming a historical dinosaur that progressive peoples are outgrowing.

This way of looking at Russia places Russia in a comparative context and ties Russian defense and foreign policy together in that framework because they too stem from the conjuncture between the daunting tasks of economic-political reconstruction and constant international pressure. This explanatory mode is of

long standing and can be employed with regard to different Third World states and differing aspects of Russian government and policy.¹¹

The historical approach sees Russia almost as a “frozen culture” to use Levi-Strauss’s term. While revolutionary and evolutionary change are clearly visible, Russia seems unable to break out of deep-rooted sociopolitical and cognitive structures. Hence “we face the return of Russian history.” Numerous phenomena in today’s Russia evoke comparison with either the Soviet or tsarist period. Eugene Huskey has compared the State-Legal Administration and the general development of Yeltsin’s government to tsarist models; Peter Stavrakis has used the term “ministerial feudalism”: and Vladimir Shlapentokh and some Russian observers have gone further, claiming that we see the actual return of feudalism.¹²

Alternatively, in this historical framework we can compare Russia to Weimar Germany. Stephen Hanson and Jeffrey Kopstein have found significant points in common, particularly with regard to the prevalence of unregenerate elites who demand rents from the system and have to be suppressed or bought out by a foreign-based plan after bringing the country to the edge of economic despair. But they discovered significant differences that militate against a Hitler-like denouement to Russia’s present transition. Lest one feel too complacent because of their conclusion, they observe that, in domestic politics, the absence of a coherent, well-structured party system as in Weimar makes that outcome less likely.

Instead of the Weimar stalemate generated by Germany’s well-established party system, broken by a devil’s bargain between well-organized reactionary traditionalists and Nazis, postcommunist Russia simply witnessed continuing general chaos in administration of every sphere of political life. The key problem for Russia’s development after 1996, then, seemed not so much the possibility of takeover by a new totalitarian elite, but the near-total absence of effective state control.¹³

This breakdown of state power and of public finance appears as the privatization of the state by interested bureaucratic, military, media, financial, and industrial factions or clans, which are often linked through common leadership, ownership, or other affinities. The privatization of the state and of the means of public violence resembles prominent trends in failing African states where the military is essentially an instrument for the extraction of rents from the population, not a provider of security.¹⁴

Chief of Staff General Anatoly Kvashnin’s recent call for an annual military budget of 400,000,000 rubles (approximately U.S. \$67 billion) displays the Ministry of Defense’s continuing belief that the state exists only to transfer the population’s surplus resources to its coffers, without any accountability for how the money is spent.¹⁵ This privatization of the state and of the multiple militaries appears, as private, sectoral, or institutional players use the multiple armed forces and instruments of public power for private, as opposed to national, interests, for which they have scant regard. Many elites view public office as an opportunity to advance private interests that are comingled with their public position and responsibilities. For example, former Deputy Prime Minister Anatoly Chubais saw no reason to relinquish office while he sat on the board of Russia’s largest provider of electricity, nor does the Federal Security Bureau (FSB) see anything

amiss in providing market risk analysis, security checks on rival companies, and overall security to foreign investors in Russia.¹⁶

This trend appears not only in battles over the privatization of economic firms, but also in foreign policy, for example, in the Baltic. The weight of private interests in both the Duma and the state and the latter's chronic bureaucratic muddle have already undermined efforts to intimidate the Baltic states. Twenty-eight different state ministries and departments are tackling the problems of the Baltic Russians, while regional governments like Pskov's conduct their own foreign policy and make deals with the Baltic states despite Moscow's tough line toward them. That fact alone testifies to the incoherence of the state and its policies. And regional governments conduct their own policy for sound economic reasons, because Moscow cannot or will not conduct rational economic policy or show any concern for their fate.¹⁷ Even as state officials boast about the economic levers they possess, they are reduced to complaining about "pro-Western lobbies who hinder major transportation projects that do not benefit them" or major economic projects.¹⁸

The Duma's posture toward the 1997 border treaty with Lithuania is a case in point. Although the opposition challenges its legality and cites the unsettled legal resolution of conditions in the Vilnius and Klapieda districts, evidently the real reason is more complicated: Lithuanian political observers note that the deputies are clearly opposed to seeing freight traffic (as regulated by the treaty) move mainly via Kaliningrad once Russia removes privileges on freight shipments via the Baltic states' ports. When deprived of the possibility of servicing some Russian exports and imports, those ports, which are widely known to be controlled by Russian crime groups, may become unprofitable. Therefore, what some Duma deputies try to camouflage as "concern for Russian interests" in fact represents lobbying by mafia groups who realize that with the signing of the treaty, Kaliningrad, not Ventspils or Tallinn, will become the main transshipment point for Russian freight.¹⁹ If Kaliningrad's freight shipments and rates increase, their profits fall by the same amount.

A similar situation prevails regarding the construction of oil terminals and shipments of energy products to and from the Baltic ports. The chaos of the Russian energy policy, where private actors usurp state interests, is well established in the Caspian and evidently is equally noticeable in the Baltic region.²⁰ As in so much of Russian economic-political life, privatization of the state, seizure of state power for private ends, corruption, and the pursuit of unilateral private policies have become the norm.²¹

As Sergei Rogov, director of the USA and Canada Institute, observes,

One could say that the state in Russia has attempted to suppress the state, but [in fact] the specific organs of the state have separated themselves in broad terms and started living their own lives, while ignoring the needs that the overall society expects the state to fulfill. Each agency is doing whatever is useful to itself. Rather than deregulating the economy and society, it seems that the state itself has been "deregulated."²²

In other words, the state and its multiple militaries have been privatized. Private interests have fused with the state and use it solely to advance their private,

sectoral, or clan interests.²³ Indeed, without private financial support from the mayor of Moscow, Yuri Luzhkov, or from American financier George Soros, among others, whole sectors of the armed forces and of the state would have collapsed by now.²⁴ In February 1997, Defense Minister Igor Rodionov begged the banks to bail out the armed forces. Instead he was told to pay the ministry's bills (which the government had made impossible because it sequestered the money and the Ministry of Defense habitually overspent its allowances) and stop expropriating contractors!²⁵ The absence of both effective civil-military controls and public sources of state finance are acknowledged hallmarks of a failing state.²⁶

Privatization of the state is equally discernible in Moscow's relations with the

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United States and with international financial institutions (IFIs). It is no coincidence that just as the IFIs and the U.S. Treasury Department, which stands behind them, call for a strengthening of the state to collect taxes, attack corruption, institute further reforms, and so forth. Yeltsin issues a call for a strong state that is engaged in peremptory regulation of the

economy.²⁷ In this matter, Yeltsin only follows the script laid out in 1996 by then Deputy Prime Minister Anatoly Chubais, who has long championed the idea that the state must establish itself as a dictator (his word) over society in order to lead it to democracy.²⁸ This idea of a “democratic dictatorship” has its roots in Lenin and in nineteenth-century radicalism going back to the Jacobins in the French Revolution. But it also harks back to tsarist and Bolshevik bureaucrats who believed in despotism and rule by decree because the people were too unenlightened or disorganized to grasp their own interests.

Only through Chubais's “dictatorship,” which comes about whenever Yeltsin realizes that the price of foreign aid is his retention in power, can Russia qualify for the infusions of foreign aid in the form of International Monetary Fund (IMF) loans (which are granted despite Russia's repeated failures to adhere to IMF conditions, something unheard of in the case of South Korea or Indonesia). When Chubais appears to be falling under the weight of his rivals' ferocious attacks, foreign capital deserts Russia, pushing the entire rickety structure to the brink of collapse. Chubais is then called back to guarantee that foreign aid and loans from the IFIs, which are basically rents for the elite, come into Russia.

It cannot be said that those monies are used productively, as numerous scandals demonstrate. Moreover, the government recently announced its intention to use the newest loans to “restructure” the defense industry, a black hole of the Russian economy and hardly what the IMF, under Washington's guidance, ought to be strengthening.²⁹ Just as the superpowers during the cold war sustained Third World governments on the basis of foreign aid, that is, rents, we are now patron-

izing and supporting Russian authoritarian power, the privatization of the state, and the aspirations of the unregenerate defense industrialists. And Russia's pathologies are quite comparable to those of Third World states.³⁰

Simultaneously, the privatization of the state, as a phenomenon, can be distinguished from the concurrent and overlapping criminalization of the state and society, which itself can cause the state to disintegrate.³¹ As Peter Stavrakis writes,

In essence, the crises of governance and Russian elites' "reform" responses reflect the pattern of development—or maldevelopment—present in many African states. In the absence of normal state building, Russia's political elites, like their African counterparts, undertook to construct a parallel political authority—a shadow state—whose defining characteristics are a corrupt fusion between government and private sector elites, that stunts institutional development, survives through predation on productive processes in society, and compels the majority of the population to withdraw from the sphere of legitimate commerce and political activity.³²

The criminality and venality of the topmost sectors of the state are well known, and Duma members are regularly bribed. Thus the penetration of the state and the regular economy by criminal forces is growing in the face of the virtual defenselessness of the state against this plague.³³ Observers also noted a trend in the 1995 Duma elections toward a fusion of criminal, political, military, and economic elites.³⁴ More recently, Fred Hiatt of the *Washington Post* discovered that a "positive trend in Russian affairs was that private businesses were hiring old KGB or MVD troops to guard them rather than criminal gangs." This is an improvement because the police supposedly do not try to muscle in on the businesses like the Mafia.³⁵ Yet at the same time these private security forces are moonlighting from their jobs for the state or are often actually guarding known criminals.³⁶ Thus we cannot say that the public sector is truly protecting the private sector under the law. Rather it is contracting out its forces to the private elements most able to hire them. This privatization of the means of public violence and of public power illustrates the failure of Russian state building, for the monopoly of legitimate public violence is the hallmark of the state. The absence of that monopoly signifies an extreme crisis.

Criminality could also become a factor that undermines the sovereignty of the state among Russia's neighbors. Russia could, in effect, export crime abroad as a weapon of subversion and destabilization. This could take place in Moldova where the breakaway Russian regime in Transdnistria is about to reassociate with Moldova under a peace treaty. Because that government, like many other provincial governments in Russia and perhaps even the central government, is in many respects essentially a criminal enterprise, it will battle it out with Moldovan gangs for control of the turf. And the Russian gangs are better armed, trained, and financed from Moscow.³⁷ Russia's criminality or "shadow state" could then become a weapon of regional destabilization or of Russian hegemony in Eastern Europe.

Elite privatization and criminalization erode the legitimacy and authority of the laws and of all branches of government. They also provide opportunities or

pretexts to concentrate very large military or paramilitary and police forces under one authority allegedly to fight crime. Thus the ongoing buildup of the MVD's troops, now totaling over 250,000, continues, especially in Moscow.³⁸ This buildup is widely believed to be the precursor to a coup or counter-coup against the government or against the plotters. Kulikov favored reopening the war with Chechnya because of his belief in the domino theory of threat to Russia from Chechnya.³⁹ Russia must plan for a big war because foreign governments support separatist movements such as that of Chechnya. Therefore, Russia must prepare for "the war for Russia."⁴⁰ Such happenings evoke African strongmen and their states, not a "democratic partner" of the United States.

The privatization and erosion of the state also appears in the relationship between business, media, the various armed forces, official and paramilitary, and the government. The media exemplify this fusion of public and private interests, relating to the structure of armed power as well. The media are increasingly concentrated in the hands of a few well-connected bankers and financiers, some of whom also enjoy high office. This concentration of power even includes the State Television Network (ORT), leading newspapers, and numerous uncounted private militaries. An unholy conglomeration of rival clans linking media, business, mafia, military, or paramilitary interests is developing. And atop each of these rival clans,

sits a business mogul and a political ally, such as the mayor [of Moscow], prime minister, or governor. Each clan has a bank at its core, surrounded by a commercial or industrial empire. The clan also has its defenses—media outlets, extensive private security forces, corporate intelligence, and espionage.⁴¹

Real policy arises from the activities of uncoordinated private, factional, or institutional groups pursuing private aims, not Russian national interests.

All Russian mysteries can be easily explained by: (a) thinking in terms of specific social groups and their particular interests; (b) examine the relative socio-economic positions of these groups with respect to both one another and the state; and (c) analyzing the specific means at the groups disposal that can be used in the continuing struggle for redistribution of the national economic pie.⁴²

The linkages among sectors of this fragmented elite also show that the crisis transcends civil-military relations. Therefore, Russia displays processes that have caused other states to disintegrate: privatization of public violence, failures in state-building, and elite fragmentation.

The linkage of these media groups with independent or state sources of violence could provide a unique example of information warfare in Russian conditions. Russian writers define information warfare much more broadly than do American writers. They include warfare targeted against the minds and physiques of the enemy and even whole societies. They see information warfare as ushering in a new series of weapons or technologies that can strike enemies in new ways, including biological or psychotropic weapons.⁴³

Many civilian commentators and military officials, for example, former Chief of Staff Colonel General Viktor Samsonov, argue that information warfare pro-

ceeds during peacetime. Some writers therefore demand a new definition of war to include this kind of bloodless, peacetime campaign against key political and informational strategic targets. Allegedly, Russia has long been in an information war with the United States and the West, which it is losing or has lost. Russia's domestic anomie and loss of values reflect the West's successful targeting of the Russian media, which have then betrayed Russia as servants of the West.⁴⁴ Echoes of this doctrine appear in the new 1997 security doctrine that stresses internal threats, including threats to Russia's spirituality, morale, and moral integrity.⁴⁵ Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov and many other high officials cite threats to Russia's moral, intellectual, communications, or information space.⁴⁶ The discussion about an intellectual or ideological threat is pervasive, even if assessments of its nature vary. While this discourse of informational threat reflects Russia's profound disenchantment, it does not necessarily entail the sense of being presently in an information or psychological war.

Meanwhile, the competing power centers are each building up their own bases of financial, informational, and military power. But those disaffected elites who believe that an information war is occurring are choosing a somewhat different model by which they see modern information technology and the media in their strategic context. They are updating Lenin's notion of constant political or ideological warfare with the West and openly raising the Leninist notion of internal enemies. Political opposition equates with sabotage and opens the way to a domestic war. War at home and war abroad could become a seamless web. The ties of office, political power, access to military, paramilitary, and/or private armed forces, and media outlets on the part of almost all of the key players make it clear that any major political initiative, even merely a personnel reshuffle, means a bitter struggle among both the possessors of armed force and the media barons.⁴⁷ Often they are the same persons or factions. Internal wars and purges could easily take place if the fragile political system collapses due to elite fragmentation or falls into the opposition's hands. Many oppositionists are particularly attracted to this notion of contemporary politics and warfare.

If the trend toward bitter elite fragmentation combines with the privatization of violence, the consequences are unpredictable. The ongoing struggle between the rival forces of Boris Berezovsky, former deputy secretary of the Security Council, and Deputy Prime Ministers Anatoly Chubais and Boris Nemtsov, is rightly called an information war.⁴⁸ Things could easily degenerate further before improving, leading to the real thing, not only a media war. As Russia's power struggle remains unconsummated and perhaps enters a new and dangerous phase, one or more groups may try to use the media and other channels of information to exploit the alleged external danger or threat for purely domestic purposes connected with taking power. Information technology could tremendously expand the scope for political and military conflict beyond anything we can envision, targeting whole sectors of societies through what used to be called "the hidden persuaders."

Not surprisingly, many fear for the security and integrity of the state and regard it, like its tsarist predecessor, as an essentially undergoverned, incompletely legitimated, and undefined state, even though it now has more bureaucrats than were

on the payroll in 1991 with a hundred million more people and a GNP 50 percent higher than (a trend that should make those who extol privatization think more deeply). Richard Sakwa notes that a central feature of Russian development “is that the invasive state is marked, paradoxically, by the extraordinary underdevelopment of modern forms of institutionalization of state power.” Likewise, S. Frederick Starr observes that despite the enormous expansion of Russian bureaucracy to the point where its numbers eclipse those of Gorbachev’s Soviet bureaucracy, Russia remains undergoverned.⁴⁹

At the same time, we see a return of the old tsarist phenomenon in which the trend toward autocratic government reproduces itself from the center to the localities. Local undemocratic regimes are the direct consequence of both the vacuum at the top and the center’s direct support. Consider Moscow. As Timothy Colton writes,

The arrangements foisted on the city in 1993 formalize the executive power that Popov [Luzhkov’s predecessor as Mayor Gavril Popov] had heretofore asserted mostly by fiat. In the same way as the Yeltsin constitution for Russia is “hyper-presidential” these local structures are “hypermayoral.” Despite discussion going back to the 1980s of American-style separation of powers and checks and balances, they are premised on fusion of governmental powers.⁵⁰

Hence Luzhkov, like Yeltsin, can effectively govern by decree. Colton also discerns the dependence of this smaller boss on the bigger boss:

When all is said and done, post-Soviet Moscow remains painfully reliant on the guidance, munificence, and bureaucracy of the center. While released from blatant subserviency, it is far from being in charge of its own destiny. The boldest gambits in Moscow government since March, 1990 were made possible only by politically motivated backing from the Russian level.⁵¹

As Colton also notes, “Dependency has been no less noticeable in public finance.” Moscow could not survive the early years of reform without massive central subsidies given the massive inflation and loss of revenues attendant on the inflation of 1992–97.⁵² This undergovernment at the center encourages a host of regional authoritarians to enter the vacuum or to desperately try to make up the shortfalls between demands and capabilities. The struggle leads to a system of government finances replete with off-the-budget spending, concealed subsidies, and the simultaneous expropriation of regions and industries by means of withholding salaries and budgeted funds through sequestration of funds. In many ways, such politics not only evokes late tsarism, but is all too familiar throughout the Third World.

Toward the African Model

As is the case in Third World governments, Russia’s main challenge is building an effective state under enormous internal and external pressures, Russia’s civil-military relations also resemble those of the Third World. In states such as Nigeria, “there are no civil-military relations—in the sense of discrete military and civilian institutions with a structured relationship.” That pathology expresses a deeper malignancy, the system of political economy that makes power and wealth coterminous.⁵³ That equivalence is, of course, the hallmark of feudalism. Both

Shlapentokh and Stavrakis have rightly described Russia's regime as feudal, for in Russia, too, power and wealth are coterminous.

Furthermore, where states have broken down and warlordism has taken over, that may not necessarily be only a regression to chaos, although it certainly can be. Warlordism can also represent the emergence of an alternative system in response to a failed state. Accordingly, in Sudan, "the state had not so much collapsed as attempted to compensate for its economic weakness by dividing and manipulating civil society."⁵⁴ This effect fairly describes the socioeconomic results of the vast expropriation of wealth that Russian state policy has crafted over the years in response to the demands of the IMF and the international community, as happened in Sudan and across Africa.

If we look at the way in which the Russian army has come to depend on regional authorities for its sustenance and observe that the current military reform makes the commander-in-chief of the military district a virtual tsar who answers to nobody and controls immense resources

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and power, we can see some preconditions for warlordism.⁵⁵ Alternatively, we can see in Yeltsin's effort to force out the criminal gang of Yevgeny Nazdratenko in Primorskii Krai and replace it with an FSB official the center's perception of the danger of regional warlordism and the typical Russian and Third World response of more police controls. In that case, however, the Federation Council blocked Yeltsin in the name of federalism and forced a retreat, underscoring the weakness of the regime vis-à-vis the regions, at least in relative terms.⁵⁶ Meanwhile, Nazdratenko continues his criminal rule and tries to create his own local forces that are insubordinate to Moscow.⁵⁷ This weakness of the center in a multiethnic and pseudo-federal state is itself a time bomb that requires urgent defusing.

In Chechnya, the collaboration of Russian forces with the Chechens resembles situations in Cambodia, Peru, and Sierra Leone where the regular soldiers and the rebels seem to cooperate to depopulate resource-rich areas, divide the spoils between them, and terrorize the civilians.⁵⁸ War in much of Africa and the Third World is now privatized, a struggle by warlords and assorted *Condotierre* for loot and personal power. This also occurred in the Transcaucasian and Yugoslavian wars of 1991–95.⁵⁹ States that cannot protect their population forfeit the monopoly of legitimate force. That is happening in Russia, as private security forces and the mafia-type forces grow out of state control, and regular military formations like the Northern and Black Sea Fleets must live off the Russian public's, or municipal authorities' charity.⁶⁰ Analysts raise the fear of a remilitarization of Russian politics, not so much by armed forces as by would-be political leaders using them for private purposes. This danger stems directly from the

state's lack of legitimacy and its undergoverned and desinstitutionalized quality that flow out of Yeltsin's style of rule.

The government's attempts in 1997 to incite the Cossacks against the Chechens and to threaten another war on the Afghan-Tajik frontier exemplify Moscow's strategic rashness in flirting with reigniting protracted ethnic conflicts to maintain order and its own integrity. Undoubtedly, such a conflict would further politicize the official armed forces and local paramilitary forces throughout the North Caucasus or Central Asia with devastating results. Indeed, we can already see from Dagestan's increasing destabilization where that denouement would lead.

Therefore, if state building under internal and external pressure, as expressed in the 1997 national security blueprint, is Russia's main challenge, the response is typically African or Third World in character. On one hand, private elites, even in government service, use that power to plunder the state and deprive it of the means of exercising its power.⁶¹ And on the other hand, we find the state emphasizing the internal threat above all.⁶² Hence, large police forces are created next to the formal army, and receive more funding and better equipment, as threats to the state are as much internal as external, if not more so.⁶³ Michael Bratton's observations about African armies easily apply to Russia's armed forces and its state:

However the development of military institutions in Africa has taken distinctive neopatrimonial forms. African armies rarely resembled an idealized bureaucracy, molded into organizational force by professional training, nationalistic sentiments and shared esprit de corps. Instead, these institutions were riven by political factionalism based on the personal ambition of would-be leaders among the officer corps and on ethnic solidarities within the ranks. Because African armies "incorporate tensions characteristic of civilian elite society as a whole," their interventions in politics constantly reflected the ambitions of particular leaders and factions. Certainly none of the armies under review acted as a unified force. For example, the Nigerian army was splintered into cabals and cliques—Most distinctively, the behavior of military actors, including forays into transition politics, was propelled by struggles over coveted offices, rents, and grafts.⁶⁴

These actions invariably bred internal tensions within and among militaries and reflected military leaders' strong predisposition against transferring power over the government or the armed forces to civilians, a trend uniformly perceived as signifying a loss of power by the top brass.⁶⁵ Inasmuch as this trend seems to be widespread in transition governments, the interpenetration of these military trends with the same kinds of phenomena in government denote a broader and more universal crisis in state building.

As Alice Hills concludes in a study of warlords and private militias in Africa, these phenomena arise when the state fragments as power devolves from the center to the peripheries, and when the police and armed forces stop providing security and act on their own "private" behalf.⁶⁶ She concludes,

The implications of the trends represented by warlords and militia are fourfold. First, they emphasize that the redefinition of national security undertaken since the end of the Cold War is incomplete because it has concentrated on military and environmental threats at the expense of civil order and policing, even though many con-

temporary conflicts have no conventional armies, front lines, or rules of war acceptable to international bodies. Second, the phenomena highlight limitations inherent in the concept of civil society because they emphasize the relationship of survival strategies to the mafia-capitalism resulting from state fragmentation. Third, although the phenomena represent an adaptive process, the activities of the various groups so labeled do not have significant implications for the function or role of existing regular armies or the police.

Finally, in the short term, warlords and militia represent the greatest obstacle to the establishment of legitimate security forces in conflict-ridden states. In the long-term, however, their impact on civil order is significantly less than that of corruption and existing social divisions.⁶⁷

In other Third World states, for example, Pakistan, the many criminal groups heavily armed with light arms can outgun the police and destabilize the state and the security forces. Or, as often happens in Russia, they fuse with the police in many areas, thus eroding the state's claim to legitimacy and authority.⁶⁸ Neither the government nor the many armed forces can effectively defend Russia's territorial integrity or often their own organizational integrity and self-interest. Nor are many eager to test whether they can defend the government against an internal threat.

This diminution of the state's effective capacity is hardly confined to the problems of internal security. It appears in economics as well. A state that cannot collect taxes or that ruptures the social contract with its own employees can hardly be described as a strong or successful one. Even if the economy is turning around, it remains clear that both today's crises and state policies inhibit economic growth, recovery, and reform. In all domains, the state's capabilities are far beneath the demands it has placed on itself, not to speak of those placed by society, including the armed forces. Although Yeltsin now talks of a strong state, it has yet to appear. Since 1985 we have supposedly witnessed a self-proclaimed transitional period, but the transition has become the status quo and cannot consolidate itself into a stable form enjoying popular legitimacy or real capability. Consequently, every aspect of policy must be transformed for the army, Russian democracy, and even the state as such to survive. Defense reform, for instance, to be meaningful and lasting, entails a comprehensive reform of the state. Meanwhile, multiple possibilities or scenarios for military and state breakdown exist. And without reform they will probably materialize sooner rather than later.

For instance, one precondition of state failure in the international arena is a legacy of vengeance-seeking groups or group paranoia. Chechnya is only the most visible of many examples, not excluding paramilitary organizations such as the various Cossack hosts, the new ethnic militias in Dagestan and Ingushetia, or the Black Sea Fleet in Ukraine, or Russian parliamentary claims on Ukrainian territory or on North Kazakhstan if Russians there get into trouble. If Russia commits itself against the Taliban should they conquer Afghanistan, it could be another example of accepting an unnecessary provocation for protracted war. The subtext for accepting that risk would be the hegemonic drive to bind Central Asia more firmly to Russia.

In conjunction with this last possibility, the rise of identification along ethnic lines is a particular threat in a multiethnic state that is constituted as is Russia. First, where the state increasingly cannot serve the people's basic needs, the identification of people with their ethnic groups grows. Second, in an economy such as Russia's, where rent-seeking is the main occupation of the elites, the rent seeking denotes a redistributive rather than a growth-oriented economy whose inertial tendency is toward stagnation.⁶⁹ Thus ethnic elites seeking to maximize their own quest for rents, and already inspired by a "we versus they" mentality, find ample justification to carve out regional, ethnic enclaves of the economy that are equally prone to rent seeking and demands for political power. They then add competitive and nonproductive economic structures and attitudes to other sources of ethnic animosity.

This trend, already visible in regional "baronies" in the Russian economy and in Chechnya, is particularly dangerous because statistics point to a rising identification of all ethnic groups with those groups and a growing trend toward residential segregation among nationalities in the Russian Federation, where non-Russians are moving out of largely Russian areas and Russians out of minority areas.⁷⁰ Conditions associated with impending ethnopolitical conflict are already visible across the Russian scene. And here we have not even talked of the intersecting economic crises afflicting the system.

Although none of the foregoing means an inevitable breakdown, it does suggest a high potential for either breakdown or long-term disorder and stagnation. The absence of reliable governing institutions compounds these conditions' effect and heightens their overall impact on Russia. Given the high potential for state stagnation or even breakdown, there will almost surely be a protracted crisis or stagnation of the state and economy. Yet stagnation is not a viable answer, as it puts Russia farther behind its peers and rivals and intensifies unfulfilled and volatile pressures for reform and great power competition.

Excessive stress on more than one of the many vulnerable points in Russian economic and political life, including a possible collapse of the armed forces, could be the triggering factor. Historically, protracted war has always strained the Russian state to its utmost and even in victory triggered massive sociopolitical unrest. Defeat, economic stagnation, domestic coups led by politicians commanding essentially private armed forces, and the inability to construct viable and representative governing institutions are all traditional signs of the collapse of state order in Russia.

Another very possible stress fracture is the breakaway, either *de facto* or *de jure*, of outlying regions from a central government that cannot fulfill its responsibilities toward them. Those provinces could then seize the attributes of state power, for example, issuing money and conducting foreign relations. Or they could come under the effective sway of Russia's neighbors, who may then be tempted to seek their own *de facto* or *de jure* sphere of influence in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and Russia.⁷¹ Should these scenarios come to pass, the unreformed army would be hard pressed to counter them.

The Rentier State

The dominance of Russia's energy products in its economy and politics lets us focus on another way of comparing Russia to Third World countries. Oil and gas exports provide rents that are essential to Russia's stability. Hence the term "rentier state," a term that illuminates both domestic politics and economics and a large and vital segment of foreign policy.

For all the CIS energy producers, including Russia, control over all aspects of their local energy economy is the only way they can obtain capital and foreign investment and compete in the world economy. Without that control, their economic and political independence is severely constrained and they remain neo-colonial states in the global economy, dependent on the production of raw materials whose world market prices are subject to great fluctuation. As it is, they face severe competition from other producers and are at a serious disadvantage relative to them because they lack the capital to explore their holdings and build up the pipeline, port, and transport infrastructure to market them. Without rents these states would remain extractive sites, backwaters in the global economy, dependent on outside forces.

Energy issues also reflect deeper political-economic challenges. The stability of rentier states in the CIS depends on a continuing flow of energy revenues. To the degree that those revenues are interrupted or interdicted, the states' stability becomes questionable. Since all of them are rentier states, they compete with Russia for, and are oriented to, the same export markets for energy. This shared orientation will probably mean the common relative neglect or deterioration of their industrial base and manufacturing sector and the stagnation of their domestic investment markets, which are the only true basis for overcoming that deterioration. Hence a direct connection exists between Russia's being a rentier state and its ongoing economic stagnation.

Energy rents will also accrue to limited elites who will use them to co-opt opposition or suppress it and to strengthen their ties to the political elite. Such distributions of economic and political power only reinforce stratification patterns of extreme wealth and power and inhibit true prosperity and democratization. Because none of these countries can truly overcome their obstacles to growth, they will remain colonial economies, and rentier states, for a long time. Therefore, Russia's aspiration to control them through integration entails a heavy burden of subsidies from Moscow to local elites and forces of repression. Those expenses are beyond Moscow, even as it pushes the policy of reunion.⁷²

Hence Russia's goal of CIS economic integration from above is utterly unrealistic, and pursuing it defies both economic logic and political capacity. Yet Moscow persists in this delusion because it cannot repudiate its colonialist mentality or its need to suppress competitors in the energy industry.⁷³ From Russia's perspective, the real issue in the CIS energy sweepstakes is oil and natural gas, which constitute the very foundations of Russia's economy and account for most of its export earnings. As a leading producer and exporter of hydrocarbons, Russia cannot ignore pleas for Central Asia and Azerbaijan to increase the extraction and export of oil and natural gas. The advent of major new producers could recon-

figure the entire global energy market and profoundly affect price dynamics, with direct consequences for Russia's economy. Although Russia has issued no official statement on the subject, it is clear that the coordination of its own energy strategy with plans to increase the production and export of Russian hydrocarbons in the CIS constitutes a primary national interest. That explains Russia's negative reaction to external meddling in CIS energy issues.⁷⁴ It could also explain why Moscow, apart from ties between former Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin and Gazprom, is so solicitous of those companies' interests.

Russia's efforts to take over the Caspian energy economy became visible in 1994, but its most recent formal strategy appeared in 1996 when the Security Council and the Ministry of Fuel and Energy proclaimed energy a major factor in safeguarding Russia's security. The fuel economy faces internal threats from Russia's low level of energy efficiency, the nonpayments crisis, in which debtors do not pay their bills for goods and services, and the lack of foreign investments. The solution to the internal economic failure is economic imperialism, that is, "access to internal markets of neighboring countries," preserving and expanding "reliable external marketing outlets, and thus ensuring the transit through Russia energy carriers."⁷⁵

Russia's "fuel diplomacy" should focus on establishing a common CIS system of energy security, including shared property, common development, integrated production companies, and free access to markets and resources. CIS states should see that Russia is their major partner and that collaboration with other states is "economically inexpedient." Russia would encourage its oil and gas giants to move into Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan to preserve dominance over those states' economies and perpetuate a closed, exclusive sphere of influence there.⁷⁶

Russia has compelling reasons for so acting. Russia remains the largest exporter and refiner of oil and gas and controls the shipment of all petroleum products through its "steel umbilical cord" throughout the CIS. On economic grounds alone, it has every reason to oppose any expansion of its rivals' market share if they can sell freely abroad. Therefore, it wages economic warfare against them and demands a cut from all of their projects, either in the exploration or in the transshipment of the product. Russia has repeatedly blackmailed Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Azerbaijan to force them to admit Russia, often on concessionary terms, to their energy projects.⁷⁷

At the same time, Russia's own productive capacity steadily declined during 1991-97 in both oil and gas, and its energy industries are entangled in numerous dysfunctional economic and political relationships, for all their apparent riches and profitability. Serious competition for Russia's current markets, especially from modernized producers using foreign capital, technology, and infrastructure and enjoying Western political support, would undermine Russia's domestic and foreign economic position. Moreover, the new economic crisis ignited by the Asian crisis in late 1997 will oblige Russia to export more oil to obtain scarce foreign capital and possibly to squeeze domestic producers who will be under more domestic pressure to pay taxes. So energy producers, too, will be driven for internal reasons to export more and restrict competition.

Because Russia's main source of foreign exchange derives from its energy exports, if those exports were to fall substantially, Russia's ability to earn foreign exchange and meet its large and growing international debts would greatly decline, as would its ability to sustain itself at home through access to foreign capital markets and international economic agencies. Indeed, the threat of being consigned for years to come to a semi-peripheral status in the world economy, as an exporter of raw materials such as oil and gas, and being blocked from attaining modern levels and forms of economic, industrial, and technological development haunts Russian policymakers. They fear a lasting economic-technological, and hence military, backwardness, leaving Russia at the mercy of the United States or other foreign coalitions.⁷⁸

Unhappily for them, there seems to be no way out unless Russia can convert its foreign earnings into development and internal investment capital. Until that happens, Russia must rely excessively on energy for foreign exchange and seek to oust the competition as befits a true aspiring monopolist.

But Russia's political economy promotes rent seeking, not investment, and recycles economic-political pathologies throughout the system. So the efficiency of those energy rents as a source of investment is quite limited.

Complicating matters for Russia is its declining capacity to produce energy products. Its infrastructure is dilapidated and worsening. Its new sources of energy face formidable costs to explore and ship because of their location in the inhospitable Siberian north and east and because there has been precious little investment from abroad or internally for over a decade. Russia's present climate obstructs foreign and domestic energy investment and foreign firms are leaving in frustration and disgust.⁷⁹ If anything, the climate will worsen because Yeltsin recently terminated efforts to legislate a new tax code that would have attracted foreign investors. Because the entire economy depends on foreign investment, this is a devastating, long-term blow to the Russian economy. Even recent decrees allowing foreigners to own as much as 100 percent of Russian energy industries will not overcome this obstacle. Nor is that decree likely to stick, given the hostility to foreign investment among wide sectors of the economic and political elites and the absence of corresponding tax benefits for foreign owners.

Meanwhile, Russia and the CIS states remain extremely wasteful consumers of energy, dependent on subsidies for consumption at below-market prices and on the big oil and gas firms' subsidization of housing, social welfare functions, and so forth. Without foreign income, because CIS and Russian purchases are way down since 1991, this whole rickety structure could come apart.

“Complicating matters for Russia is its declining capacity to produce energy products. Its infrastructure is dilapidated and worsening.”

Gazprom's situation exemplifies the precariousness of this house of cards. Gazprom receives only 15 percent (5 percent in 1995 and 12 percent in 1996) of its receipts for goods and services in cash. Its exports must subsidize its domestic operations, which are endangered as the infrastructure declines. It exploits the situation to justify its monopoly position and enormous tax arrears, citing its willingness to continue subsidizing non-cash paying customers—a category that includes most of Russia's city governments—using its foreign income to cover the shortfall. Gazprom effectively replaces the failing state and takes its payment for services rendered in the taxes that it does not pay. Yet its profits from exports, and those of other energy companies, are not plowed back into the economy as either taxes or investments or even to cover current costs.⁸⁰

If Gazprom's exports decline, while other states provide cheaper and more gas through better pipelines and with foreign backing, its ability to subsidize the collapsing domestic economy and avoid taxes declines with it. But worse, much of the municipal sector's economy declines with Gazprom for lack of gas, and with that sector, banks, housing, and others are all severely endangered. The dependence of key sectors of Russia's economy on the fortunes of a single protected and privileged sector, energy and Gazprom, exemplifies the pathology of the rentier state. And the skewed dependence on state protection, tax breaks, and non-cash payments underscores the extent to which Russia has failed to make the economic transition to a genuine market economy. Such dangers, and the benefits of state protection that accrue to firms like Gazprom, can explain the purely economic motives of Russia's energy barons and government when facing the prospect of enhanced rivalry from former satrapies whose independence Moscow still cannot accept.

This explains why Gazprom obstructs any Turkmen penetration of the Russian market, pipelines, or access to customers outside Russia. However, Gazprom's energy war against Turkmenistan, abetted by Moscow, drove Ashkhabad to Iran, Turkey, Germany, and the United States for financial, economic, and political support and weakened Moscow's future ability to leverage the situation in Turkmenistan. Neither Russian consumers, nor the economy, nor Russian national interests benefit from such policies, but Gazprom does, and its unassailable connections display how privatization of Russian foreign policy undermines stability and development.

Therefore, if we consider only the economic side of the Russo-CIS equation we find that the prospect of large-scale foreign capital coming into Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, and Kazakhstan, or the redirection of their trade routes around and outside of Russia, will trigger severe economic and political dislocations inside Russia's energy industry. Those dislocations then translate into profound shocks to the already stagnant and vulnerable Russian economy and state that could put them under unbearable pressure. On purely economic grounds, economic warfare to prevent the emergence of other producers makes sense for Russia, leaving it with two basic options. Either it uses its current monopoly power to shut down competing sources and force itself into a powerful, even dominant, position inside rival pro-

ducers' projects, or it faces determined and stronger foreign economic competition in the CIS from the West. Both of those options have undesirable consequences.

If we follow the rentier state analogy to its logical conclusion, we find a state whose policies are privatized by, and tied to, one or two industries, that is obliged for economic-political and internal reasons to follow a hegemonic, if not imperial, policy abroad that it cannot sustain, and that creates an unbalanced economy and social structure around its corrupt and quasi-authoritarian political system.⁸¹ Nigeria's recent hegemonic activities, ostensibly under a UN mandate or under the guise of peace operations, also suggest a comparison to Russia based on their both being rentier states. The hegemonic and regressive policies support the interests of the economic sector that produces the rents, without which the stability and even integrity of the state may come into question. However things play out, there already exists a sizable domestic elite that believes that unless Russia is seen to be a strong state and a hegemonic player, if not an empire, it will fall apart.⁸²

Such a state remains essentially stagnant and uncompetitive and perpetually vulnerable to the vagaries of the international energy economy. Its economy exhibits strong internal pressures to protect inefficient industries, beginning with energy, and a strong bias toward autarky, and mercantilist economics soon emerges as a result. Thus it consigns itself to low rates of development even as it tries to colonize and suppress nearby rivals. Imperialism, economic stagnation, autarky, backwardness, and a hostile attitude toward outside forces in this sense characterize not only regressive Third World states, but also Russia's tsarist and Soviet history.

The dependence of the "grande bourgeoisie" and leaders of major financial-industrial groups such as the energy giants on the state that they also seek to privatize also borrows a leaf from the past. Just as tsarist and Soviet Russian industry exhibited trends toward "gigantism" and a relative lack of small entrepreneurs, we could easily see a revival of this trend under the analogy of the rentier or rent-seeking and predatory state. Russia is not alone in this tendency toward the rentier state. The original Arab states have also been so characterized, as have other Third World states, such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Nigeria, which have tied their fates to a single "cash crop" and weakened prospects for democratic reform as a result.⁸³ In this connection, the question of whether Russia will follow Nigeria or Norway is critical. Unhappily, the answers that are coming in tend toward Nigeria and other such states.

The Historical Dimension

Finally, Russia's crises of the state, in many, though not all, respects, resemble pre-Soviet epochs and structures. Russian analysts such as the venerable Fedor Burlatsky, as well as Huskey, Shlapentokh, and Stavrakis, have noted this. Deputy Prime Minister Boris Nemtsov explicitly and approvingly draws an analogy to tsarist Russia after the 1905 revolution.⁸⁴ Similarly, Moscow is Luzhkov's patrimony, his Votchina. He owns a share in every business in the city, or else his allies and subordinates do, and they control everything that occurs there. This is directly comparable to the notion of patrimonial rule that was the hallmark of tsarist rule from its inception. We should also compare current realities to Baron A. P.

Izvol'skii's remarks on the eve of his appointment as foreign minister to France. He stated that "despotism" always bore the same fruits—"incoherence if not contradiction in the conduct of affairs which are treated simultaneously by various departments which ignore each other — and which obtain from the supreme leader detailed decisions which are irreconcilable in fact: the Russo-Japanese war came from this."⁸⁵ This insight accurately captures the rivalries among the policymakers that render effective, civilian, democratic control of a purely professional and politically impartial armed force and police forces or a regular state in general, the ideal of tsarist reformers, an impossible dream for a long time to come.

Huskey's analysis of the State-Legal Administration fastened on certain specific points of resemblance to the tsarist administration. Specifically, he cited the tendency toward institutional redundancy, the duplication of offices, and institutions with similar functions and overlapping jurisdictions. He notes that high officials have approvingly cited the tendency, dating back at least to Peter the Great, if not to Ivan Groznyi's Oprichnina, to follow the model of creating state institutions to struggle against each other. He attributes this tendency, *inter alia*, to the absence of professional personnel and of a "rational-legal" structure of authority.⁸⁶ Huskey also notes that Yeltsin rules very much like a later tsar. Rather than initiating decrees himself and ruling like an absolute despot, he presides as an umpire over his rival bureaucracies. Not surprisingly, the competition for access to the tsar for each office's draft resembles what happened under Alexander II and after. Thus draft proposals issue "from all corners of the executive." And often, as in the case of current military reform proposals regarding force structures, the last man to see Yeltsin gets his wish.⁸⁷ Thus the "intervention of officials who have the confidence of the President can break the resistance of the GPU (Gosudatsvenno-Pravovoe Upravlenie—State-Legal Administration) or even remove the GPU from the policy loop altogether."⁸⁸ In other words, there is no regular government or procedure. All of the executive branch's institutions are in collision with one another, Yeltsin can pick and choose what he wants, and they, too, need not subscribe to any rational-legal executive process of creating laws. Thus the GPU can be a powerful player in the bureaucratic whirl, or it can be defeated, as when it tried to encroach on the power ministries and military affairs.⁸⁹

These phenomena are, as Huskey notes, explainable in terms of various models of analysis, such as that of the Third World state or the presidentialist model of current comparative transition studies.⁹⁰ However, as Huskey rightly observes, such models do not explain why a president would create a rival parallel government, as Yeltsin did from the start of his tenure. Indeed, the number of bureaucrats rose from 1 million to 1.7 million from 1989 to 1994, a 70 percent increase that reflects the bloated state structure, but the country remains undergoverned.⁹¹ Huskey locates this in the bureaucracy's creation of family circles as a weapon to avert the threat of mass purges (but which also means that many fall when one falls), the despotic tendency to create a large retinue as a visible symbol of power, or in terms of evading responsibility for disagreeable policy choices.⁹²

Unquestionably, we need to delineate more precisely the elements of continuity and innovation in Russia's system. But we cannot overlook the profound

resemblances to the premodern and archaic tsarist state and to the Communist state. These resemblances are not accidental and must be explained, for they are ubiquitous and apply across the governmental spectrum.

Consider that the effort to create a viable mechanism for civilian and legal control over the various armed forces has totally failed. Describing the mechanism for control over the armed forces, Rogov cited four distinct structures for the formulation of defense policy. And sadly, they replicate late tsarist structures. First, there is the Council of Ministers. The second structure or set of structures is the power ministries. They are a component of the council but do not report directly to it, and the council is therefore no stronger an institution than it was under tsarism, when tsars freely overrode it, as does Yeltsin. They both subverted any hope of cabinet, accountable, or regular government. The ministers are merely a random collection of officials who are servants of the tsar or president, routinely set against each other, and who serve at the whim of the president.⁹³ And that is how it was under tsarism.

But neither ministries nor Yeltsin really accounts to the public or parliament. Because the power ministries are directly subordinate to Yeltsin, the Council of Ministers plays no real role in policy formulation and implementation. The Security Council, the State Defense Inspectorate (GVI), and the Defense Council, the third set of structures in the government, are purely advisory bodies by statute or by decree. But they also function merely as Yeltsin, or other strong personalities acting in his place, desire. Hence they can substitute for the Council of Ministers or individual ministers, be a block between Yeltsin and the ministers, or be merely one more collection of officials designated by him, while real power and authority lie somewhere else, often in an unregulated institution.⁹⁴ Precisely because these two councils have flexible status and composition, their missions are fundamentally unstable, irregular, and subject to personalities, not rules.

Thus Yeltsin can rearrange these “modular” agencies as he sees fit. In 1997–98, he placed Andrei Kokoshin atop the Defense Council and the GVI, giving him the power to oversee virtually all aspects of defense policy, just as earlier Chernomyrdin and Chubais had received comparable assignments but without the portfolios. In 1998, Yeltsin then created a new division of the government under Chernomyrdin, the fourth since 1997, though only the first to be announced. And then he merged Kokoshin’s Inspectorate and the Security Council and Defense Council together under Kokoshin. Chernomyrdin and Kokoshin sat atop various structures and commissions that oversaw the power ministries as a whole, with Kulikov as Chernomyrdin’s deputy before they were fired. Nicholas II’s “ministerial leapfrog” is alive and well today.

Finally, the fourth structure is Yeltsin’s presidential administration and staff, who are utterly unaccountable to anything or anyone except Yeltsin. They are distinct from the Security and Defense Council. Before becoming head of the Defense Council, Yeltsin’s former presidential advisor on national security, Yuri Baturin, had nothing to do organizationally or formally with national security or the Security Council but afterward used his position to screen Rodionov out from Yeltsin. Thus any of these presidential staffs, ministries, or administration groups

can usurp each other's power. Any agency, armed with Yeltsin's approval, can make or unmake policy, and they all do so constantly. Thus, for instance, the FSK (predecessor of the FSB) simply took hold of army divisions before Chechnya without notifying defense minister Marshal Pavel Grachev.

This form of administration embraces the entire government. In 1998, Yeltsin laid out twelve domestic policy goals for the ministries and then appointed one member from the presidential administration to each of the ministries involved to supervise them.⁹⁵ And like the tsars, he has created a Praetorian guard, the 25,000 man strong GUO. The GUO is free from all legislative controls, and increasingly so are the other police forces. The GUO even has its own currency, a sure sign

“The liberation of the secret police agencies from legal controls replicates tsarist or Soviet practices, analogies that should give those proclaiming successful democratization some pause.”

of the breakdown of the state's powers, the “bureaucratic privatization of the state,” and the breakdown of the monopoly over armed force. Yeltsin has also created a comparable Presidential Security Service.⁹⁶ Thus whether one looks at the international standard embodied in the Office of Security and Cooperation in Europe's 1994 Code of Con-

duct for civil-military relations, or the accumulated wisdom of comparative political science concerning the requirements for effective and democratic civilian control, Russia fails woefully to measure up.⁹⁷ And this proliferation of personal and special police and armed forces engaged in “mutual tattling” is particularly reminiscent of what Aleksandr' Herzen called the “romance of the police.”

Nor is reform moving forward. Instead, it is meeting strong internal and increasingly public opposition at every step on the road. Moreover, the government will neither fund defense reform nor undo Yeltsin's bizarre system of command. The liberation of the secret police agencies from legal controls replicates tsarist or Soviet practices, analogies that should give those proclaiming successful democratization some pause.⁹⁸ Likewise, Yeltsin's renewed promises of personal supervision over the entire government means that he will supervise nothing effectively and have to delegate to Chubais, Nemtsov, Chernomyrdin, et al. and whomever they appoint. In other words, a failed autocracy once again yields to despotic oligarchy masquerading as bureaucracy. In the end, these new creatures of Yeltsin will have to go, so that he can pretend to escape blame once again for failed policies.

Since Lebed's firing in October 1996, we see no systematic effort to alleviate these shortcomings in state building but rather continuing efforts to pit men, factions, and so forth against each other. By November 1997, Yeltsin had fired Defense Minister Rodionov, Baturin, Boris Berezovsky, and other officials in the economic administration. Although there have been major decrees of military reform, it is doubtful that much has actually changed or that the crisis of the mil-

itary has dissipated. Rather, it has probably deepened. All appointments and policies remain essentially a struggle for personal, private, factional, or sectoral interest, not national interest. Nobody knows who is responsible for what or the degree to which any interagency coordination should proceed. Worse yet, this confusion also afflicts state and military spending.

Even as far as the federal budget is concerned there is a certain confusion—the government sends one appropriations request for military expenditures, the Ministry of Defense lobbies for a distinctly different amount [invariably much higher than the government asks for or could afford] while the Ministry of Finance appropriates money having still another vision of the situation.⁹⁹

And then, at least through 1997, if not now, neither the Ministry of Defense nor the government knows how many men are under arms or what happens to the monies that are allocated, although Yeltsin now says an inventory has been made.¹⁰⁰ But underscoring the utter irresponsibility and delusional quality of Russian defense policy is Kvashnin's call for 400 billion rubles in annual defense spending, five times this year's budgeted amount for the military.¹⁰¹ Likewise, since 1992, none of the hundreds of laws, ordinances, and so forth promulgated to protect soldiers' and officers' rights, have been enforced.

Therefore, the following system has developed in the defense sector. There are fifteen to twenty-four formally chartered organizations of armed forces, not counting the many private security or government guards hired out to protect big banks, businesses, and even major criminals. The various organizations comprise an estimated 3–4.5 million men, indicating the government's ignorance of how many men are under arms in any of them. Russia cannot afford to maintain or demobilize them and professionalize the army. Since the state cannot raise the taxes needed to support these men, it does not pay them. But the Ministry of Defense habitually spends money it does not have and runs up enormous arrears and debts to the men and to contractors who are thereby expropriated. Therefore, it is not surprising that the state's share of GDP in 1995 was 20 percent higher than in 1989 or that one cannot begin to compute the military burden on the ruined economy.

In like manner, for example, decree number 940 of September 1995, calling reunification of the CIS in all aspects of state life under Russian auspices the priority task of all ministries, and stating that this imperial policy was needed, *inter alia*, to counter separatist tendencies at home, also evokes late tsarist policy.¹⁰² There, too, we find adventurist foreign policies undertaken to divert attention from domestic unrest and to certify to doubting audiences Russia's greatness in world affairs. Certainly, the state's isolation from society continues an ancient Russian tradition. And just as reform depended on peace and stability to attract foreign capital, the same linkage holds between domestic and international policy. To gain the confidence of foreign investors and institutions Russia must cut military spending, stabilize itself, and conduct a limited foreign policy. But if it does that, Moscow loses out in the imperial sweepstakes and cannot reunify the CIS—the alpha and omega of state policy and a goal that already looks to be unreachable. The upshot is the continuing effort “to punch above its weight,” exactly the trap that Alexander II and his successors repeatedly fell into.¹⁰³

Conclusion

These modes of explaining Russian policy are not offered in the belief that they are uniquely explanatory above all others. Indeed, all models need further explanation and analysis. Rather, they offer to those who seek to comprehend Russia alternative ways of comparing it to other present and past structures. And the examples I have given here are hardly exhaustive. The failure to reform the Soviet KGB structures and oust them from their role as one of the major roots of the new business and financial elite certainly bears scrutiny, as does the privatization of force in the new private security agencies.¹⁰⁴ The purpose of this analysis is to stimulate further reflection and debate, not to lay down the law. Other modes may explain Russian political trends more powerfully.

But several things are clear. Russia is far from democracy and in crucial ways is evolving away from it, contrary to the received, conventional wisdom. Whole areas of the country, such as the North Caucasus and Primorskii Krai, are effectively beyond Moscow's ability to govern and are slipping either into permanent poverty or permanent violence. The lack of control over the means of violence and the inability to build forces commensurate with a real appreciation of resources and interests opens up terrifying prospects in defense policy. The rickety economic structure, which lurches from crisis to crisis and is already shackled to a wasteful and slow-growth system, even if it is somehow "capitalistic," constitutes a permanent crisis, as does the collapse of a sense of national responsibility on the part of any political elites. And the Duma is, if anything, probably more irresponsible than the government.¹⁰⁵

Apart from the usual harbingers of state collapse—protracted war of almost any kind, economic depression or crisis, repeated disasters like famine, or a general loss of legitimacy, to cite a few—two others are staring Russia in the face. One is stagnation of the current political economic situation or even a crash. And the other is the galloping privatization or deregulation of the state and the means of war.

In the first instance, stagnation means no exit, or a very slow and uneven one, from the current economic crisis. Further economic polarization by class and region will occur in a no- or slow-growth economy that remains technologically backward, beholden to foreign institutions, and bereft of the means of collecting taxes or more broadly devising coherent economic policies for recovery. Crime and corruption will remain at high levels, if not actually increase, and state capacity will continue to stagnate if not decline further.

The second, galloping privatization and deregulation of the means of war, is now taking place, because the state's inability to fund military reform or perform its other duties stimulates desperate efforts to find alternatives such as the banks to pay for the armed forces. Continuing privatization of the state, its assets, ministries, and levers of power, if not arrested, will accelerate the present stagnation and convert Russia into a situation of domestic rivalry and warlordism, if not civil war. The African examples cited above are harbingers of something more terrible, the privatization of warfare outside anyone's effective control, like a virus whose nature and manifestations mutate along uncontrollable and ever-changing

lines.¹⁰⁶ This is the alternative that will surely eventuate if stagnation is not reversed. But this government and its supporters at home and abroad are not the men for this job.

As in past instances of state collapse in Russia, the consequences are unpredictable, and the international order cannot remain aloof. By virtue of the world community's and the United States' investment in Russia and because of its nuclear capability, once again, as in 1918, the United States would have to intervene somehow, if not necessarily with forces. But it is hardly clear that in the second act of post-communism we will better understand what we are doing and with whom than we did in the first act of the drama.

NOTES

1. For example, see Silvana Malle, "Russia After Five Years," *The International Spectator* 32 (January-March 1997): 5.

2. Stephen J. Blank and Jacob W. Kipp, "Yeltsin's Latest Coup," *Demokratizatsiya* 4 (Fall 1996): 454-74.

3. *Ibid.*; *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Newswire*, 30 January 1998.

4. Blank and Kipp, "Yeltsin's Latest Coup," 454-74.

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9. Thus we find Guillermo O'Donnell's "Delegative Democracy," Larry Diamond's "Electoral Democracy," Fareed Zakaria's term, "Illiberal Democracy," and a host of other designations being used to describe Russia. But all of these terms suffer from the defect that they yoke democracy to a concept that either circumscribes it or negates it. The result is a paradox that may be strikingly descriptive but not fully explanatory.

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11. *Ibid.*

12. Stavrakis, *Shadow Politics*, 8-9; Vladimir Shlapentokh, "Early Feudalism: The Best Parallel for Contemporary Russia," *Europe-Asia Studies* 48 (1996): 393-411; Yegor Kuznetsov, "Onwards to Feudalism?" in *The Former Soviet Union and European Securi-*

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14. Blank, “Who’s Minding the State?” 3–12; Pauline Baker and John A. Ausink, “State Violence: Toward a Predictive Model,” *Parameters* 26 (Fall 1996): 19–31; Robert Dorff, “Democratization and Failed States: The Challenge of Ungovernability,” *Parameters* 26 (Summer 1996): 20–23.

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21. Stephen Blank, *Toward the Failing State: The Structure of Russian Security Policy*, Conflict Studies Research Centre, Camberley, Surrey, Royal Military Academy Sandhurst, 1997.

22. Sergei M. Rogov, *Civil-Military Relations in a Democratic Society* (Moscow: Institute of USA and Canada Studies, Center for National Security and International Relations, 1996), 9–10.

23. This view is not only the author’s, indeed it is obtaining general approval by other authors, for example, McFaul, “When Capitalism and Democracy Collide in Transition,” 4, 16–23.

24. E-mail transmission by Peter Heinlein for the Voice of America, 14 October 1996; Chrystia Freeland, “Russia: Banker Offers to Pay Civil Servants,” *Financial Times*, 4 September 1997, 2; *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 11 December 1997.

25. “Rodionov Plays the Banker,” *Kommersant-Daily*, 28 February 1997, from Johnson’s Russia List, davidjohnson@erols.com, 1 March 1997; *Kommersant-Daily*, 1 March 1997, in *FBIS SOV*, 4 March 1997.

26. Pauline Baker and John A. Ausink, “State Violence: Toward a Predictive Model,” *Parameters* 26 (Fall 1996): 19–31; Robert Dorff, “Democratization and Failed States: The Challenge of Ungovernability,” *Parameters* 26 (Summer 1996): 20–23.

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58. Keen, "Organised Chaos," 15–16.
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89. *Ibid.*, 132–35.
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