

QUESTIONING POST-SOVIET



Edward C. Holland and
Matthew Derrick, Editors

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Figure A: Location Map

PREFACE

As I write, we commemorate twenty-five years since the collapse of the Soviet Union and the emergence of fifteen sovereign and independent successor states. The same historical events also definitively ended the Cold War, a process which had itself begun thirty years ago or more. The ongoing legacies of both these transformative events have been of central importance to the mission and work of the Kennan Institute. Indeed, it was our cofounder, George F. Kennan, who in his seminal writings shaping U.S. policy for the Cold War, encouraged Americans to look beyond the bluster of superpower political, military, and economic rivalry to the deep historical, psychological, and cultural roots of Moscow's conduct.

Yet rather than clarifying the intellectual dilemmas attendant upon studying the former Soviet Union, the collapse of the Soviet empire and the Cold War's end underscored a host of new problems with which scholars, policymakers, and the general public had to wrestle. On the most basic level, a question emerged from day one whether the space occupied by the various former components of the Soviet Union could ever again be thought of as a coherent whole. This was, of course, a debate about nomenclature—was it the post-Soviet space, Eurasia, the newly independent states, or something else—but also much more. This region, however it was labeled, became the locus of dynamic, interrelated, but also contradictory processes of political and economic restructuring, national identity construction, global and regional integration, and even revolution and armed conflict. Such transformations, with varying energies and straining in practically every direction, continue to this day.

What has not changed is the commitment of the Kennan Institute to pursue the study of these questions in all their complexity. We seek to support deep scholarly inquiry and debate, focused on insights that can help to shape and inform U.S. policy toward the region, and to do so as a public trust, open and accessible to the American people and the wider world. We

have done this consistently for over forty years, through thousands of publications, events, and fellowships. And we have been uniquely positioned to sustain deep scholarly interest and expertise on the region during times of bitter rivalry, promising friendship, and tumultuous transition alike.

The topic of this volume, *Questioning Post-Soviet*, and the diverse dimensions addressed in the chapters herein, fittingly, embody the Kennan Institute's ongoing mission. Leading scholars in each of their respective fields, the contributing authors have gathered here the key concepts that can help us, as observers, understand the region that was once called the Soviet Union. And they have done so, thanks to the vision and stewardship of the editors, such that the whole is clearly more than just the sum of the parts.

The reader may come to this volume with his or her own strongly held views on the question suggested by the title, and yet by the end, those views will have been forced to expand in at least some dimensions. That is because there clearly can be no single definitive answer to the question of what this space is today, much less what it has been over the past quarter century, or what it may be a quarter century from now. There is instead an opportunity, at practically any time, to enhance our collective knowledge and understanding by posing the question, and by inviting diverse and thoughtful answers.

Why have we chosen to raise the question now, with this particular selection of topics and in this particular format? The 25th anniversary, of course, has the advantage of consolidating attention on this region, but it also offers us as observers the chance to pause and take stock, which may in turn yield greater space for reflection. Such time and space is especially precious as dangers to peace, stability, and prosperity once again loom over the region and the wider world, drawing not only policymakers but scholars on all sides into sometimes bitter and destructive conflict. Perhaps we have undertaken to publish this volume, most of all, because it has been, as we knew it would be, a fascinating and rewarding adventure, a chance to solicit big ideas from the leading scholars in our field, and to take a whirlwind tour of a quarter century of change and continuity.

Speaking for myself and my colleagues here at the Kennan Institute and the Wilson Center, it has been a pleasure to work with the editors, Professors Derrick and Holland, and with each of our contributing authors. We are

deeply grateful to each of them for taking the time and energy to add their expert voices to this forum, and we look forward to continuing the discussion long after this volume goes to press. We are likewise grateful to the U.S. State Department and the Congress for their continued support of our field through the Title VIII program, which has helped to make this and so much of the Kennan Institute's most important work possible. Indeed, the majority of the contributors to this volume have been beneficiaries of Title VIII support in the course of their careers. Finally, I want to especially thank my colleagues Liz Malinkin, Kathy Butterfield, and Kerrin Cuisson, as well as our copy editor Joseph Gregory, without whose tireless efforts this publication would never have come together.

To conclude, let me say that for a frequent and enthusiastic American visitor to the region, such as myself, this volume may be as much a travel guide as an analytical tool. Armed with new insights about the religious and communal practices of populations that are often highly mobile, snapshots of places thriving under renaissance as well as those enduring slow motion collapse, and profiles of the thinkers and administrators shaping their respective societies, I am certain to benefit even more from my next journey. And in that I am surely not alone. Whether you are persuaded or provoked by this volume's diverse perspectives on its central question, I can offer this advice: go there, and see the region for yourself.

Matthew Rojansky
Director, Kennan Institute



INTRODUCTION

Edward C. Holland and Matthew Derrick

The Soviet Union broke up a quarter century ago. In the time since, the fifteen states that gained their independence have pursued different paths. The Baltic states—Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania—have turned to the West, joining institutions such as the European Union and NATO. Belarus is a dictatorship that has aligned with Russia, at times flirting with the idea of reunification. Moldova has oscillated between Western institutions and a return to Communist government. Ukraine's path has been particularly rocky, punctuated by the Orange Revolution, the Euromaidan protests, the annexation of Crimea, and war in the country's east. In the south Caucasus, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia have faced similar challenges to territorial integrity and political stability. In Central Asia, the five states—Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan—have a short history of independence and illiberal political regimes. Russia experienced a period of economic weakness, political instability, and a partial democratic transition in the 1990s; under Vladimir Putin, democratic gains have been reversed in return for resource-led economic growth and an end to the war in Chechnya.

This diversity of experiences suggests that the states that were once part of the Soviet Union now have little in common. Some are democratic, others authoritarian, with still others are practicing democracy in its illiberal form. Economically, natural resources are the driver for a third of the states; the Baltic countries met the criteria for EU membership and are now part of the Eurozone; others export labor and rely on the remittances that migrants send home. Religious practice has increased, but the religions practiced vary across the successor states, and include Orthodoxy, Islam, Protestantism, and Catholicism. Four states—Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine—face continuing challenges to their territorial integrity. These differences and distinctions matter for the successor states.

Yet, so too does the shared experience of the Soviet Union. The USSR was, following Stephen Kotkin, “an entire world.”¹ Its economy discouraged competitiveness, misallocated labor and capital, and entrenched a top-down system of economic planning.² The country’s reliance on oil prolonged but could not prevent collapse. Political institutions were centrally controlled by the Communist Party and readily co-opted at the moment of transition. Across many states, the system reproduced itself, leading to continuities in authority and institutions. Similarly, corruption is a common inheritance. National identities were cultivated by the Soviet state and then became a Pandora’s box that could not be controlled.³ The challenge of nationalism continues to divide the successor states. The collapse of the Soviet system was sudden and unfinished in 1991. It remains unfinished today because of the shared inheritances from that system.

The goal of this volume is to explore how these inheritances continue to affect the fifteen successor states a quarter century after the breakup of the USSR. This shared history contributes to common challenges and divergent experiences across a range of topics: the organization and urban form of cities, human mobility, the allocation of goods and overall economic order, religious practice and belief, challenges to the state and sovereignty, and the intellectual organization of space. We privilege an array of issues whose commonalities are not initially apparent yet whose current form is conditioned by the legacies of the Soviet state. In doing so, we orient the consideration of these topics around the concept *post-Soviet*.

Questioning Post-Soviet

Post-Soviet seems like a simple concept. It previously has been used in the social sciences in two main ways, either to mark a temporal divide or delimit a geographic region—the post-Soviet period or the post-Soviet space. The historical period is easily defined by the events of August to December 1991, and what came after.⁴ As a geographic term, the post-Soviet space is arguably more ambiguous, though its most common use is to denote a region inclusive of the fifteen successor states.⁵ Identities, both political and national, are less easily defined within this space; they are mixed and blurred, acknowledging transnational links and local particularities.⁶

In prior considerations of the post-Soviet states, the focus has been on the political and economic. In part, this is a product of Russia's positioning as the primary successor state to the USSR. About the Soviet Union, President Putin has said: "One who does not regret the passing of the Soviet Union has no heart; one who wants to bring it back has no brain."⁷ In this struggle between the head and the heart, in Putin's Russia the heart is seemingly winning. There has long been nostalgia for the Soviet state, evident in the Russian anthem, memorials to the Great Patriotic War, and the revived popularity of Joseph Stalin.⁸ In Putin's third term this nostalgia has been succeeded by appeals to common cause with economic and political allies. The aim of these projects, at least in part, is to restore the ties that bound the Soviet state. Other projects are more nationalist in orientation, inclusive of ethnic Russians that lived beyond the borders of Russia proper in 1991—a population of 25 million at the moment of transition.

Other Soviet successor states have received these projects in various ways. Five states are now members of the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU)—Belarus, Kazakhstan, Armenia, and Kyrgyzstan, in addition to Russia. Yet even Russia's staunchest ally, Belarus, initially refused to endorse the annexation of Crimea.⁹ Russia's most notable military interventions in the past decade have been in Georgia and Ukraine, post-Soviet states that have pursued membership in Western military and political institutions. And the Baltic states have met Russian revanchism with serious concern, due to the large numbers of ethnic Russians still living there.¹⁰ These reactions—ranging from acceptance to acquiescence to animosity and aversion—are an outcome of the divergent paths taken by the successor states.

This diversity of experience further suggests a reconsideration of the question of regional definition. Attempts at such definition commonly center on Russia—for example, the "near abroad" is a Russian-centric concept—and are framed against evolving trends in U.S.-Russia relations—the "reset," strategic rivalry, selective partnership, and the new cold war. This focus on Russia as the primary successor state is explicable in part thanks to the country's Soviet inheritances, including a seat on the UN Security Council and the world's largest nuclear stockpile. And the events of 2014, specifically the annexation of Crimea and war in eastern Ukraine, have further centered Russia in terms of regional definition, particularly from the American point of view. As Robert Legvold writes: "[T]he interaction

between the United States and Russia has been the most fraught... [in] the countries that once comprised the Soviet Union.”¹¹ In this framing, post-Soviet denotes a space where the contest between the United States and Russia continues to play out.

This renewed focus on Russia pushes back against some of the concerns about the utility of post-Soviet, which other academics have previously articulated. Some authors make the case for its increasing irrelevance. One line of argument is that as a term, post-Soviet is too limiting. It positions the study of the region “too narrowly in the experience of a single country” and forecloses the connections between the Soviet Union and other parts of the world as they existed under Communism.¹² “Post-Communist” is arguably preferable thanks to its balance of the comparative and the specific, while others opt for “postcolonial” or “Eurasia.” For others still, the post-Soviet period is already over; as a descriptive term, post-Soviet has lost its “dominance in the social construction of historical process and social identity.”¹³ In this approach, December 1991 was less a point of rupture than a moment from which various historical continuities eventually emerged, a sentiment shared by many in the region. Public opinion polling conducted in Kazakhstan indicates that there is “a great deal of agitation against the ‘post-Soviet’ label, which people increasingly find as irrelevant at best, and stigmatizing at worst.”¹⁴

We engage with these points of critique—one the product of policy and the other academic—in two ways. First, post-Soviet is not shorthand for Russia; rather the term seeks to identify the commonalities shared across all fifteen successor states. It is an inclusive rather than exclusive concept, one that acknowledges the shared experience and divergent paths across this region. It is tied to larger issues of relevance, issues that have gained outsized attention in considering the paths of the fifteen successor states: hard power, Russian revanchism, the reaction to liberalism, and notions of history’s end with the curtain drawing on the Cold War. If the breakup of the Soviet state was initially interpreted as a time when Communist institutions would be either abruptly or gradually replaced by capitalism or democracy, the course of events has been quite different in actuality.

Post-Soviet, as a concept, challenges the ways of organizing the world that replaced the Cold War binary—specifically globalization, neoliberalism, and

culture wars. Each of the successor states is post-Soviet, but they are so to varying degrees and in different ways. Some have actively positioned themselves against the Soviet legacy, a political act that itself requires the Soviet Union—or Russia as its primary successor state—as a foil. Others have embraced the Soviet legacy as a basis for contemporary identity. For some, including the Baltic states and Ukraine, this categorization as post-Soviet is provocative. It risks endorsing a revanchist politics and a nostalgia for the state that underpins any such project. This approach implies no endorsement of the reformation of the Soviet state in form, if not name. Yet the aversion to post-Soviet is itself a product of the shared experience with the Soviet state. And the position of these countries is uncertain; writing about one of the Baltic states, Eiki Berg and Saima Oras suggest that “the contours of land and their meanings as well as Estonia’s relative geographical location all remain fragile and easily contested.”¹⁵

Second, we consciously avoid the definite article; our interest is in post-Soviet as descriptor rather than the post-Soviet as noun. Post-Soviet remains a salient idea—a relevance demonstrated in its continued use—because of the shared legacies across this geographic space as experienced over the past quarter century.¹⁶ This shared inheritance is political and economic, cultural and intellectual. It leads, in turn, to a set of common challenges that have been handled differently across the successor states. In referring collectively to these countries, however, it is as post-Soviet space rather than *the* post-Soviet space, post-Soviet history rather than the history of the post-Soviet period. This ambiguity helps us to answer the question of regional definition that continues to be asked.

How Did We Get Here?

Over the past quarter century, scholars have evaluated the nature of systemic change in the former Soviet Union. Political scientists have considered how post-Communist states fit within the transition paradigm, which frames the move away from authoritarianism as indicative of progress toward democracy and capitalism.¹⁷ These changes are better described as transformation, with no preordained endpoint or goal; revolution, institutional collapse, and decolonization each serve as theoretical-empirical alternatives to the transition paradigm.¹⁸ This case for transformation rather than transition has been most forcefully articulated by anthropologists who

emphasize how cultural differences across post-Communist countries accentuate the “contradictions, discrepancies, and competing realities” that persist from Communism.¹⁹ From this perspective, change in post-Communist states is about a transition from Communism rather than a transition to democracy and capitalism. Put another way, there was—and, arguably, still is—a lack of consensus as to what should replace Communism. Work by historians has sought to contextualize political change and regional redefinition within the *longue durée*. In one example of this work, “Eurasia” as a way of thinking about the region spans the divide between West and East.²⁰ Despite different methods and points of focus, this array of scholarship can be summarized as follows: The fifteen Soviet successor states have experienced—and continue to experience—a set of transformations of world historical importance that have reshaped and redefined political, economic, and social relations in both domestic and international terms.

Any work on the former Soviet Union has to wrestle with both the Communist legacy and the ways in which the area was studied during the Cold War. The West is weighed down by the legacies of Sovietology, which is further complicated by the failure of prediction, the contested time period that such work covers, and geographic limitations. The region as an object of study was initially lost after 1991. The arguments used by comparativists against transition theory were founded on the exceptional nature of politics and society in the post-Communist states; post-Soviet presented—and continues to present—a similar challenge for comparison.

Examination of post-Soviet as a region necessitates a consideration of *the* region as a geographic concept. For much of the Cold War period regions were treated by scholars and policymakers alike as obvious, even self-evident, blocks of space defined by perceived homogeneity in cultural or physical features. This static approach to the region served to naturalize the extant array of nation-states, fueled geographic schemes dividing the globe into First, Second, and Third Worlds, and contributed to Sovietology’s inability to predict the dissolution of the USSR. By the *perestroika* era, the concept of “new regionalism” arose in academic geography to challenge realist notions of objectivity and naturalness, instead conceptualizing the region as a social construct produced through institutions, discourses, practices, and symbols.²¹ In place of regions as discrete entities, the “new” thinking approached them as products of multiple processes occurring at a variety

of spatial scales. The state-centrism of the “old” regionalism gave way to a focus on substate and suprastate regionalism. With the demise of the Communist order in Europe, popular and scholarly treatises envisioned the accelerated powers of globalization leading to the ultimate disappearance of the region as an organizing category—post-Soviet as part of a universal condition characterized by fast-fading borders, the free flow of humans and capital, and transnational networks.²²

Where Do We Go From Here?

We suggest a framework for bringing the regional back in, an approach that recognizes pattern and process while acknowledging the ambiguity of these regional categories. Despite the importance of geography in articulating post-Soviet, geographers have been notably absent from many of the debates summarized in this section’s opening paragraph. Orthodox understandings of political and economic change in the former Soviet Union have broadly discounted “social, historical, and institutional (local) contexts.”²³ The revised approach emphasizes social interaction through a focus on the local, with place as a site for social activity and regions as settings for socially determined human action. We pursue our argument about post-Soviet by addressing the persistent similarities and continuities across geographic space. The notion of similarity is important to our specific case and to the drawing of regional boundaries in a more general sense. These boundaries are dependent on the relationships that occur within the region as geographic space; as Michael Bradshaw argued in making a prior case for the “new” regional geography: “a complete regional geography... is one which leads to a better understanding of the one region, its unique qualities and its contribution to broader structures.”²⁴

In recent years overstated claims of a borderless world have been critiqued with increasing frequency by geographers and other spatially attuned scholars who argue for a reinvigorated examination of the region—in questioning post-Soviet, we join them. Drawing on insights from new regionalism, we approach the concept as constituting an amalgam of both material and nonmaterial elements that can be traced back to a shared experience with the USSR. Comprising elements may be unevenly distributed, meaning that post-Soviet as a framework may be applicable to one subregion but not another, depending on the phenomenon or event being examined. As a corollary, discourses

and practices may vary considerably among subregions yet still be considered through the post-Soviet lens. Separate memories of the Soviet experience, to take one example, likely condition starkly diverging attitudes toward NATO's eastward expansion between Muscovites and residents of Tallinn.

For scholars studying Russia and the neighboring states, the search for regional definition continues. Increasingly, "Eurasia" as an organizing idea has superseded designations such as "former" (i.e. the former Soviet Union) and "newly" (i.e. the newly independent states) in aggregating these states. Eurasia suggests a liminal status, between Europe and Asia, distinct from and only partially belonging to either; following Mark Von Hagen, "the boundaries of Eurasia remain ill-defined and dynamic."²⁵ Eurasia as a regional definition appeals to attempts to de-center Euro-centric historical narratives that privilege the Russian Empire or Soviet Union as political constructs. It also serves to question the practice of methodological nationalism, or the assumption of the nation-state as the unit of analysis in both history and the social sciences. Eurasia's geography blurs at its margins; like post-Communist and postcolonial, its definition is ultimately uncertain (see Figure 1, as well as the chapter in this volume by Laruelle).



Figure 1: A conceptual cartography of regional definition: post-Soviet, post-Communist, postcolonial, and Eurasia.

In addition to its various elements, post-Soviet is characterized by a complex, multilevel regional schematic. Each of the successor states is simultaneously a member of multiple regions that may overlap yet not coincide. It is important to consider a subregion's relative location in the multiscalar matrix, because its combination can influence how it relates with other post-Soviet subregions. To help bring some clarity, we offer a conceptual cartography that illustrates the spatial relationships among main regional levels. Underlain by the Russian Empire, the post-Soviet region is made up of fifteen subunits and forms the layer central to our study. In turn, post-Soviet in its entirety belongs to the wider post-Communist region. With the exception of the Russian Federation, post-Soviet also belongs to the non-contiguous postcolonial region. Finally, much of post-Soviet belongs to the ambiguously delimited Eurasia region.

While a number of regional layers might be added (de facto states, substate ethnic republics, city regions, regions of security and economic alliances, etc.), the conceptual cartography provides a basic framework for locating a given area in its matrix of layered regions and how its collection of memberships might influence the relative salience of post-Soviet. Here we want to emphasize that, first, each of the regional layers took shape in a specific historical context and is informed by a set of understandings specific to it. Second, no one historical-regional layer represents a clean break from the one preceding it; post-Soviet is shaped by what social scientists call "path dependency," a term that "refers to the fact that decisions taken in the initial phase affect subsequent developments in an irreversible way."²⁶ The Soviet Union was a distinct social and political system that was institutionalized through a set of practices that are inherently spatial. For the states that were formerly part of the Soviet Union, certain conditions of dependency resulting from this system remain.

In sum, we argue that post-Soviet as a modifier is the key term for understanding the successor states as a region, acknowledging the varied nature of this transformation across a diverse historical and geographic space. This position rests on two points. First, the transformation from Communism is a process that continues today; its endpoint cannot be assumed from existing academic paradigms or the experience of other world regions. And second, the elements of this transformation have played out not only in political and economic institutions, but also across the range of structures

that condition social life, including the human landscape, religious practice and belief, and the livelihood strategies that determine individual movement across space. In blending the historical and the geographical, we seek to broaden and deepen the consideration of the contexts in which the post-Soviet transformation took place.

Subsequent chapters of this book take a historical-geographical approach, drawing on the concept of path dependency and our conceptual cartographic framework, to provide what we term post-Soviet *spatial genealogies*—lineages of ideas, institutions, and practices that, though emerging in the historical-geographic context of the USSR, serve to define post-Soviet. These chapters range from considerations of the urban form to the dynamic role of religion, economic change and mobility, and the varied role of the state, continued challenges to sovereignty, and other attempts to revise regional definition. The ultimate aim of this collection is to refine and clarify post-Soviet as an analytic that influences political, economic, and social conditions a quarter century after the fall.

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UNCERTAINTY IN THE URBAN FORM: Post-Soviet Cities Today

Megan Dixon and Jessica Graybill

Before 1991, across the Soviet Union, cities and their organization were recognizably “Soviet.” Since then, the nature of these urban spaces has grown more nuanced. Are they more national—more Russian, more Kazakh, more Armenian? Are they more modern, more global? Today, notably in Russia, many aspects of the urban order might remind us of the Soviet era: the recentralization of power in Moscow under a “vertical” structure that negates horizontal connections between subordinate cities and provinces, the appointment of regional and city officials by the central government, the emphasis on military display, the presentation of the West as a moral and economic enemy. But beneath these centralized structures, other phenomena shape a new reality. While political power seems recentralized and renationalized, cities are now expected to function in a competitive global network. A return to central power does not mean a return to centralized financing of urban development; city residents now live within a globalized set of economic relationships, which determine everything from food prices to architecture. The connections—and disconnections—of cities to one another, to surrounding regions, and to places “abroad” have evolved. What people do and see in public—and in private—has changed. Urban life in the former Soviet Union (FSU) is now *post-Soviet*, but it is not monolithic in the sense of a single new spatial order.

Soviet Legacies

As part of Communist ideology, the Soviets sought to develop a network of cities that could balance two principles: a mathematically idealized, nominally equitable distribution of population evenly across the USSR, along with strict hierarchical (vertical) relationships that forced each city to privilege its connection to Moscow over ties to other cities in its own immediate region.¹ In the FSU, the number of people living in cities varies, but it is

highest in Belarus, Russia, and Ukraine (77%, 74%, and 70% respectively), a legacy of the Communist Party's preference for using cities to promote the revolt of the proletariat and fuel the industrialization of the Soviet Union. The percentages are lowest in the Central Asian states of Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan (36%, 36%, and 27% respectively), which entered the Soviet era as heavily rural, agricultural, and pastoral.²

Notoriously, Soviet urban planners took little account of individual choice in their designs. In the Soviet era, any new construction or retrofitting of existing urban fabric followed several key ideological principles, such as the idealization of heavy industry, collective life, and grandiosity at the expense of human-scaled intimacy. In contrast to the often-beloved pre-Soviet urban cores, Soviet designs and construction favored the monumental and the minimalistic. On the surface, development was highly managed and simplified. Below the surface, however, daily life contrasted starkly with urban-planning ideals. In the post-Soviet era, globalization and connections across new borders have brought diverse new choices for urban space, which exist in tension with persisting conventions.

Deciphering urban development in Russia, and connecting to its more productive possibilities, increasingly requires that we factor in decisions made at the individual level, decisions that are no longer amenable to or dictated by planning ideals and ideology. We need to examine more intimately scaled phenomena in order to capture these individual strategies. For example, in the 2000s, new patterns of transportation developed in the outer residential ring of St. Petersburg, where tall, gray-white apartment blocks stretched away from metro stations, and tram rails ran down the middle of streets that were wide beyond all human proportions. At the corners, instead of waiting for buses or streetcars, people often opted for *marshrutki* (fixed-route mini-van taxis that carry as many passengers as can cram inside). These vehicles travel routes that are unpublished by the authorities but widely known to the locals. A stranger can simply ask how to get to a certain destination and be told which numbered *marshrutka* to take. Although there are certain standard stops, especially at metro stations, passengers can request to get off and on at almost any point along the route.

Is this informal transportation system a Soviet or post-Soviet phenomenon? The *marshrutka* continues the Soviet-era practice of filling in the spaces ne-

glected by the authorities. The shadow-economy entrepreneurship of black marketeers, or *farttsovshchiki*, served a similar function, supplying consumer goods when the Soviet system could not. Though *marshrutki* reflect that era's influence in their capacity to plug a gap in official planning, they also go well beyond Soviet traditions, illustrating the resilience of private citizens from Lagos to Istanbul in dealing with failing public services.

Post-Soviet urban visions can still be strongly shaped by Soviet conventions. For example, Almaty, the former capital of Kazakhstan, gained a metro system only in 2011, more than 23 years after first construction began. During Soviet times, Almaty was considered a provincial city, yet still important enough to deserve a metro. With Kazakhstan's move to independence in 1991, funding disappeared, reemerging only in the mid-2000s. Today, average daily ridership is 1.4 percent of the city's population, well below the average in other post-Soviet capitals (in Moscow it is 60 percent).³ Many urban dwellers rely on the more extensive bus networks or prefer the prestige of automobile ownership. Almaty is at once Soviet and post-Soviet: Urban planners look to the past in deciding what infrastructure to develop, yet many citizens want more autonomy in their choice of transportation.

Soviet and post-Soviet visions clashed in St. Petersburg in the late 2000s over changes to designs for the new Baltic Pearl residential, commercial and public-use district made by a British architectural firm that had been brought in to spice up the Russian-designed, Chinese-financed project. One planner, worried that commuters streaming home from the metro might disturb the privacy of residents in a particular courtyard, had wanted to rearrange the proposed walkways. But would the majority of Baltic Pearl residents, like most Soviet citizens, use public transportation? Conceptual drawings of the project depicted prosperous-looking people in automobiles, contrasting with the streetcar line that for years had passed by the district's southern edge. Though the architects aimed for a global steel-and-glass esthetic, the district's midlevel housing retained a classically Soviet open-courtyard configuration. Even as highways into the city fill with private cars, a Soviet focus on social mixing in shared public space won out in the end.

Similarly, the sparkling new urban landscapes of Astana, which in 1997 replaced Almaty as the capital of Kazakhstan, are surprisingly reminiscent of Soviet-era planning. Specifically, showcase buildings designed by inter-

nationally renowned architects line the center of the new part of the city. They stand along a wide boulevard with marble-covered walkways and elaborate gardens, leading from a larger-than-life, yurt-shaped glass-and-steel shopping center toward the seat of government and the president's White House. While the elite shopping venues are new since Soviet times, the focus on internationally respected architecture, a walkable city center, and high government visibility were quite typical of Soviet cities. Equally reminiscent are many of the city's residential buildings: They include a Kazakh-themed replica of one of the high-towered "Seven Sisters" structures of the Stalin era, and plenty of the monolithic apartment complexes of the kind one would find in any large city of the FSU.

Post-Soviet Metrics

Western scholars have used the term "post-Soviet" to gauge how far states in the FSU have moved away (on a presumed linear trajectory) from being "socialist" (read: "wrong") to being modern, Western, and progressive. If we acknowledge this and hold ourselves to agnosticism on the question of whether or not the "transition"—or "transformation"—is complete, we can focus less on the absolute (generalized) degree of completed "transition" from the Second World to the First, from developing to developed, from communist to capitalist, and simply observe. The term post-Soviet may be less an overall organizing logic and more a measuring stick: How much is a given person, institution, or group invested in continuity with the past? How much, by contrast, is there evidence of a desire to break with the past and form an association with something global, international, and/or regional, or consumerist, innovative, and/or disruptive? How much, finally, are people and institutions held in "Soviet-ness" by a lack of other visions or options?

Sometimes we assume that the transition to a market or quasi-market economy in urban centers must be uniform. But the choice of being or acting "Soviet" or "post-Soviet" might be involuntary and related to survival: St. Petersburg residents who simply want to get home from the metro station use a *marshrutka* for convenience. In other situations, the association might be deliberate; the metro system in Almaty appealed intentionally to Soviet urban planning practices, which had always signaled progress and political power. A particularly relevant metric might be a renewed differentiation of society by class: Whether a person feels Soviet, post-Soviet, or something

else might depend very much on whether the person or institution in question can marshal resources to cover the costs (both financial and political) of access to new urban spaces and phenomena. A study done in Moscow showed how differently structured economies existed in parallel during the 1990s; some residents lived by bartering and trading services, while others had enough hard currency to become more “Western.” These economies were carried out by residents in different spaces in the city, and sometimes produced overlapping but mutually exclusive paths.⁴

Post-Soviet urban life functions within and is still influenced by the highly managed structure designed by Soviet planning. Discovering the spaces in which individual life strategies are worked out is crucial for understanding how and whether cities are developing in new ways or still “transitioning” out of old ones, and also for discerning political and cultural stability in the face of an ostensible return to authoritarian governance. As before, when an emphasis on Kremlin-watching in the early 1980s failed to predict the effects of perestroika late in that decade, and the focus on market reforms and oligarch-watching in the 1990s failed to predict the rise of Vladimir Putin and the “vertical” in the 2000s, there is a danger of accepting and becoming overly persuaded by the state’s chosen depiction of itself. To make sense of urban change means grasping the actual (rather than intended) functions of certain cities, calculating existing populations using official and unofficial labor and migration data, and testing new terms and concepts from the global urban studies literature on current urban processes in post-Soviet places.

Urban Archipelagos

In Russia, urban centers and agricultural regions are heavily weighted toward the western and somewhat southern part of the country, away from the permafrost and short growing season of Siberia and the Far East. Russia’s wealth in natural resources, such as timber, minerals, and oil and natural gas, prompted development of an urban industrial and extractive network that extended east and north, chiefly along the Trans-Siberian Railroad, but also along railroad spurs to places without any road or rail connection. Some of the major Siberian cities were home to huge hydroelectric projects built to power industry, such as Krasnoyarsk, Irkutsk, and Bratsk. Considerable resources and incentives were required to develop and maintain populations in such cities as Magnitogorsk, Nizhnevartovsk, Norilsk, and

Surgut. The resulting urban network to the north and east was described as an “archipelago,” since it existed as fairly isolated “islands” of industry and population linked by thin lines of transportation. One could argue that this urban archipelago also stretched south, drawing in the Soviet-era capital cities in the southern and Central Asian socialist republics and creating a continent-wide network of urban political centers that controlled the distribution of goods, services, and lives across Eurasia.

Some have argued that the socioeconomic and political resources required to sustain this effort always exceeded the gains; it was thought that post-transition market realities would cause a painful contraction in this over-extended urban network.⁵ Siberian cities were meant to be waystations for a younger population that would move south when its working years were over to settle in places with more resources for retirees.⁶ Indeed, out-migration from cities in the Russian north from 1989-2002 bore out predictions of contraction.⁷ Yet what was described as the “psychic costs” of migration already pointed to factors which contradicted the broader rational principles; residents’ investment in social capital in the north and the lack of it in logical destinations for migration mean that the northern cities have not collapsed as some expected. For example, Surgut, a Siberian city expected to decline and shrink, paradoxically has developed a stubborn and proud sense of place which stabilized its population and even impelled some population growth.⁸ In fact, while a sharp drop in many northern urban populations did occur during the 1990s, the 2010 census shows population growth since 2002 not only in Surgut, but also in Yakutsk, Khabarovsk, Nizhnevartovsk, Novosibirsk, and Tomsk. This situation again points to the difficulty of discerning broader trends from the impact of millions of individual decisions that affect the structure and character of post-Soviet cities.

Soviet-era planning of the 1960s and 1970s failed to lay a flexible foundation for further urban growth; it often intended and expected certain cities to remain within a certain size limit or to grow more than they did, and did not provide for population growth where opportunities were most attractive.⁹ One feature of this was the *propiska* system, which allotted residency in cities by a registered document, theoretically limiting how much cities could grow in spite of demand for housing and jobs in a particular location. While mobility has been greatly liberalized since Soviet times, this system continues to operate, hampering the ability of the young and talented to put down

solid roots in popular cities like Moscow and St. Petersburg.¹⁰ While there has in fact been considerable migration—often only quasi-legal—of labor to cities offering opportunities, the failure of the state to allow individual choices to self-organize without restriction arguably works against a full transition of cities to a post-Soviet paradigm.

The growth of urban connections—and the ability to choose how to move across them—is also hampered by the legacy of uneven lines of transportation. Road systems radiate out from provincial capitals but do not connect across provincial borders, inhibiting inter-province (horizontal) connections. The resulting unconnected areas, the *glubinka* or “depths” of Russia, confirm the emphasis on vertical connections of power but weak horizontal connections across space.¹¹ This means that people living near the ends of or outside the transportation network, beyond the cities’ relative post-Soviet transformations, live parallel, ultimately more “Soviet” lives, disconnected from new global flows and influences.¹² Another restriction on overall individual mobility lay in the Soviet lack of emphasis on the private automobile, that is, an attempt to control individuals’ choices about where to move both within the city and around the country. Soviet planning created a reasonable network of railways between many cities and public transport inside them, but it failed to provide a reliable road network among distant places.¹³ This situation has been remedied in part by gradual upgrades to the trans-Siberian highway crossing Russia from Moscow to Khabarovsk, continuing as of 2016, but the Trans-Siberian Railroad is still the major east-west corridor. Compared to the recent Uzbek construction of intercity highways or to Chinese construction of the New Silk Road, a transportation project connecting western China to Europe and bypassing the trans-Siberian route, Russia has clearly been placing far less emphasis on horizontal connections and economic interchange.

These transportation constraints prevent cities from developing horizontal connections among themselves rather than vertical ones to Moscow.¹⁴ In the late 1990s in Russia, there was great enthusiasm for the role of decentralizing regions in the new economy and in the ability of cities to innovate; still drawing on that enthusiasm from the end of the Yeltsin era, many argued that cities in regions far from Moscow could create stronger horizontal ties across international borders, thus adapting more effectively to globalization and furthering their development through those connections.¹⁵ While

cities of the Far East such as Khabarovsk, Vladivostok and Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk have indeed developed economic ties with Asian partners such as China and Japan, the enthusiasm for this decentralization faded under the Putin government thanks to changes in political structure that worked to establish the power vertical. Today, Moscow intends to be the main economic engine of Russia, pulling opportunity, political power, and financial resources into its orbit. Thus the ability of cities to function apart from Soviet hierarchies is still hampered, even as particular landscapes within cities display the effects of globalization, wealth, and changing property regimes.

Local Landscapes

At the level of life inside the city, there were several continuities inherited from Soviet planning. Generally, many cities had a historical core, where apartments were prestigious but often cramped. These were surrounded by an industrial ring. Finally, cities had an almost purely residential far outer ring, ideally featuring a full range of services but typically lacking them. This outer ring presented the iconic vision of Soviet urban life, composed not of detached individual houses but of high-rise apartment buildings on the models proposed by Le Corbusier, often reminding Westerners of lower class “housing projects” such as Cabrini Green in Chicago or Pruitt-Igoe in St. Louis. The self-mocking animated prelude to the 1970s film “The Irony of Fate” shows the origin of this Soviet urban landscape: A lone architect has his beautiful vision of a new apartment house shorn of all creativity by a series of committees which must put their stamp on his blueprints; the resulting bare concrete multistory block proceeds to distribute itself in multiple copies throughout the varied landscapes of the Soviet Union.

While a significant feature of the post-Soviet city is diversification away from this iconic type of space, the results have been uneven. From a reputedly even distribution of many socioeconomic levels, stark stratification of residents by class has occurred quickly in post-Soviet space, both horizontally and vertically. Where historical and Soviet-era architecture often created a courtyard for public space where the “classes” were intended to mix, newer developments for the wealthy might either be gated or dispense with courtyards altogether, exemplifying a rejection of Soviet classless ideals and aiming to imitate or surpass global models of luxury.¹⁶ Beyond the ring of residential high-rises, city outskirts have seen the mushrooming of tracts

of detached houses served by private cars, a form of residential space that harkens back to the pre-Soviet dachas and village houses that persisted at the outskirts of some Soviet-era cities; this “suburbanization” is a new feature since the 1990s. Meanwhile, in cities such as St. Petersburg, with highly desirable but very limited downtown housing, the (sometimes barely legal) addition of penthouse structures on top of historical buildings has created a layer of wealth on top of older structures.¹⁷ Gentrification of central areas of Moscow and other major historic cities¹⁸ has reversed the 1920s efforts to evict aristocrats from the central city and house rural migrants in communal apartments (*kommunalki*); wealthy Russians evict—or await the death of—older residents, and then remodel several rooms back into a single unit.¹⁹ Stratification is extended further in certain neighborhoods, by story or floor, and even by architectural era: *khreshchevki*, or mid-rise apartment buildings from the Khrushchev era, were constructed less well and currently need renovation, and thus tend to house less affluent residents.²⁰ Meanwhile Stalin-era buildings with high ceilings and solid masonry tend to occupy more central locations and command higher prices. And, in some places, faceless Soviet-style buildings are built anew, perhaps with a bit of decorative concrete paneling, as in Astana, or with brightly colored painting of the facades, as in many cities in the Russian north. Multiple “economic logics” of ownership, including “pre-Soviet, Soviet, and post-Soviet traditions of property,” have come to structure space differently for different portions of the Russian population, producing an uneven patchwork of urban landscapes.²¹

The central areas of major cities have become as expensive, or more so, than their Western counterparts, pushing out former residents and smaller businesses to informal markets at the cheaper outskirts. The global parity of pricing coffee means that an increase of 1,500 times over the early 1990s price of a hot cup excludes some St. Petersburg residents from previously accessible daily spaces. In the new cafes, a series of semi-competitive chains that sprang up as consumer tastes played more of a role in determining food offerings, anything by the late 2000s would be out of the price range of a person without much income. Where choices in retail food had been bleak and sparse in the Soviet period, the 1990s and 2000s saw an explosion of coffeehouses, international chain restaurants (Pizza Hut, Subway, McDonalds) and cafes (Kofe Haus, Chainaia Lozhka, etc.) with a related new use of retail-public space for socializing and cultural exchange.²² In Moscow, the restoring of the name Okhotnyi Riad to the ancient shopping

street opposite the Kremlin, as well as the rarefying of the GUM (State Department Store) on Red Square into a collection of boutiques and luxury outlets, transformed that previously shabby but generally affordable—and thus accessible—shopping space into a realm of elites, from the center of the Communist ideology for a new “classless” society into a showcase for Russia’s new wealthiest.

Arguments for a global context affected other retail spaces in the economic evolution of the post-Soviet period. In the 1990s, small kiosks clustering at metro stations created a new retail space in many cities. In St. Petersburg, for example, such kiosks filled available economic niches during different phases of the post-Soviet transition, demonstrating that economic actors responded with entrepreneurialism and flexibility when conditions permitted.²³ The removal of such kiosks in many locations was billed as the creation of urban streetscapes acceptable to a global esthetic; the kiosks typically retreated to locations along below-street passageways or minor metro stops. Increasingly, along new highways, Western-style big-box stores with large parking lots have created nodes of post-Soviet automobile-based consumerism.

These stores are increasingly accessed by private automobile, a development that seems to signal greater individual mobility. Perhaps paradoxically, though, the Soviet-era city had in some ways allowed more possibilities for individual choice and the deployment of life-strategies for the average person. As certain residential areas of cities have gentrified or become gated, the enclosure of central city courtyards (or *dvory*) previously open to free public passage has caused some to lament the ability of pedestrians to travel through, for example, large blocks of St. Petersburg without ever using a street. While some sections of the city, especially newer ones, never became well-served by public transportation, other districts had enjoyed access via multiple modes of public transportation, only to see this access reduced by deteriorating fleets and reduced routes. Even when better vehicles were added to the fleet, public transportation sometimes lost its appeal due to the overwhelming number of private cars on roads not built with them in mind: Both St. Petersburg and Moscow infamously suffer from interminable traffic jams that greatly slow the buses and streetcars. The ability to ride in a car is a badge of belonging to a class that does not need to enter the traditional space of public transportation; spending a considerable time at bus stops, in lines, or on public vehicles is a far different experience

of the city than riding within the enclosed private space of a car. This differentiation also supports the idea that post-Soviet and one's identification with it might depend on one's access to resources and concurrent placement in the new economy.

During the Soviet era, urban ideology required the creation of parks to promote resident health and communal experience. There were pre-Soviet and Soviet parks that played a cherished role in collective recreation. In addition, the failure of the Soviet state to address urban dilapidation sometimes produced green spaces of which people grew as fond as of official parks; clusters of trees and benches developed in places where the city could not afford to rebuild. In the late 1990s, some activist groups began to focus on preserving Soviet-era green spaces as a way to develop civic consciousness and assert the political existence of middle, working, and lower class people against the newly wealthy and politically powerful. In St. Petersburg, a few groups, led by EKOM, have worked on laws and ordinances to prevent developers from conducting infill projects in the existing green courtyards—not in a direct transfer of Soviet-era efforts at creating a mixed-class society through courtyards, but in an effort to preserve the “lungs of the city,” literal space to breathe between buildings, and leisure space for those with less access to the new luxury zones.²⁴ While the work of these groups might seem like a continuation of Soviet identities, it is so in interesting ways: The activists tend to claim a Soviet-era idealism and sense of civic participation that has been submerged under a retrospective vision of the Soviet era as repressive and stagnant. In that sense, activists are recasting post-Soviet in a powerful and politically active way; efforts to defend these spaces in particular consolidate a paradoxical flexibility to claim space that existed in the Soviet era.

In spite of some successes, under President Putin “average” residents have increasingly struggled to retain access to significant urban spaces for public political speech. Nothing makes this more viscerally clear than the government's crackdown on the radical art group known as Pussy Riot, whose guerrilla performances in public in 2012 raised the government's ire by practicing free speech on issues such as LGBTQ rights, the role of the Russian Orthodox Church in everyday life, and the right to freedom of speech in all public places. In 2011-2012, during street protests in Moscow over national elections, the government sought to undermine the opposition by prevent-

ing it from holding political demonstrations in locations seen as symbolic in Soviet times—some of which are still seen as valuable by the new Russian state. It takes a serious event to make mass use of public space possible. When the politician and opposition leader Boris Nemtsov was planning a large demonstration against the Putin regime for March 1, 2015, his group was forbidden to gather on Red Square, the most central and symbolic location in Moscow; forced to default to his second choice, the working class district Mar'ino, Nemtsov asserted that this location reflected the connections of his constituents to a different set of goals than those sought by politically connected oligarchs. After his assassination two days before the scheduled protest, the huge gathering on Moskvoretskii Bridge where he was killed, right below the walls of the Kremlin, showed that even the central state authorities could not maintain sole symbolic control over the city's spaces. Free use of "public" space for political speech—"true" public space in the Western argument—is a phenomenon arguably both late-Soviet and post-Soviet, but it is also framed as a global practice by a state which asserts that such protests are provoked from outside the country by other governments or foreign activist movements.

In a way, the state and activists are struggling over what "Soviet" should mean in the post-Soviet era. The return of certain kinds of Soviet state-sponsored events to symbolic public spaces—such as military parades on Red Square in Moscow and on Palace Square in St. Petersburg—marks a turn in the identity of city spaces since 1991. In the early years following the end of the USSR, the May Eighth Victory Day gathering in some locations consisted of small groups celebrating the end of the Soviet regime; by 2001, grandeur had been restored; and by several years into Putin's tenure, tanks had returned. Arguably, and not only in Russia, a sense of multiple possibilities in the 1990s has closed back again into a singular control of the "public" space.

Clearly, the state has sought to limit nonstate, flexible uses of urban space and has done little to strengthen weak horizontal connections between cities. By contrast, it has actively tried to create flashy, globally competitive spaces by initiating mega-events, subsidizing urban infrastructural upgrades for specific purposes (such as the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Summit in Vladivostok), or marking sites with privileged global architecture, since these are all globally recognized ways to demonstrate economic development. The negotiation and implementation of urban megaprojects again reveals the stra-

tegic aspects of the post-Soviet era. Construction for the 2014 Sochi Olympics showed that the state has very much tried to take control of the *kind* of connections that Russian cities will have to the outside world, trying to position them as competitive players in the “world city” hierarchy by creating specific kinds of prestige buildings and sporting arenas. All the while, this kind of “development” is very much driven by Moscow and ignores the actual local needs of the city in question; because all decisions about the megaproject become determined by a small lobbying elite, the release of genuine urban processes of organic development do not take place. Given the absence of the former redistribution policies of the Soviet regime, this leaves post-Soviet cities angling for resources in a form of competition that serves very few of their citizens.²⁵ This facsimile of global connections is reflected across the post-Soviet and other world regions: For example, Astana as well as Middle Eastern and Southeast Asian cities have attempted to reproduce a global esthetic in their new architectural showpieces, a gesture made usually by government and financial elites who want to signal their belonging in a world of globalized modernity and pseudo-capitalism.

Another worldwide conversation which post-Soviet cities might be expected to join relates to climate change and sustainability. The Soviet focus on progress as industrial growth resulted in an almost complete disregard for the natural environment.²⁶ For example, the Cold War push for nuclear fuel production isolated and contaminated the closed city of Ozyorsk in the Urals after a reactor exploded in 1957. Ultimately, waste from the plant reached the Ob, one of Siberia’s largest rivers, which drains into the nearby Kyzyltash and Karachi lakes, hundreds of kilometers of the surrounding area, and finally into the Arctic Ocean.²⁷ While this example is extreme, heavy pollution from industrialization and extraction continued to occur alongside urbanization up to the early post-Soviet period, when industrial and extractive activity collapsed across much of the Eurasian urban “archipelago.”

Today, a growing number of academic and popular publications on the harmful environmental conditions of the FSU’s cities suggests active public involvement with socio-environmental issues. One prominent example concerns garbage in urban areas. City leaders have not increased infrastructure to contain or remove large amounts of packaging waste from imported goods in the post-Soviet era. (Soviet goods were often wrapped only—and more sustainably—in paper and string.) City-wide recycling efforts do not

exist in any city of the FSU (including the largest, Moscow), producing hazardous conditions and contention between citizens and city governments. Other concerns, such as motor-vehicle emissions and contaminated water supplies, remain largely unaddressed. In some cases, where urban and regional growth infringes upon land valued by environmentalists, conflict arises when citizens join forces to criticize or block urban growth. For example, protests to protect the Khimki Forest near Moscow from transportation development²⁸ and the movement to block the Gazprom/Okhta-Center skyscraper in St. Petersburg have been successful. Most citizens in most cities, however, do not oppose urban development plans, relying on the state to protect—and develop—cities and the environment.

Since cities in the FSU are no longer subsidized by the central government, they are hampered in their ability to address things that seem so essential in the West, such as environmental health. Cities that are making headway in addressing environmental concerns are those with superior geographic locations, strong historic roots, or attractive environments for foreign investment and economic growth. At least at federal and international levels, environmental discussions since the mid-1990s have included the concept of sustainability.²⁹ In creating new environmental policy directives, Russian policymakers invoke Tsarist-era Russian and Western ideas about living in harmony with the biosphere as a foundation for creating sustainable development. Indeed, recent legislation recognizes the need to address anthropogenic climate change, especially as it threatens the geo-strategically important cities and resources of the Russian north.³⁰

Concluding Thoughts

The need to overhaul and redesign urban places and governance raises questions about the roles of citizens and government—national, regional, and local—in the region's cities today. Outsiders might feel confident that, under the influence of globalization, the FSU and its successor states cannot—will not—stay “Soviet.” Must they not acquiesce to the flows of information and cultural influences, which will inevitably come across their borders? Must these flows not ultimately change post-Soviet urban space radically enough that it will require a term beyond “post-Soviet”? Must all of those who were born, came of age, and began their careers in the Soviet era pass through a certain amount of time and change in their surroundings

before—or if—they become post-Soviet? At the current time, in spite of these expected dynamics, equilibrium seems to reign between Soviet continuities and post-Soviet change, centralizing management and decentralizing global trends. In Russia, the public demonstrations of 2005-2008 and 2011-2013 produced little significant policy change and were confined to major cities with more prosperous populations; opposition forces have remained quiet in public spaces since the murder of Boris Nemtsov in late February 2015. Whether or not an observer sympathizes with movements such as these across the FSU, they certainly indicate a level of dissatisfaction and a desire for change in this region's cities on the part of at least some of the residents. The mode of discouraging such demonstrations—prevalent also in many Central Asian states—indicates a desire for greater control over the urban population, which does not accord with the ability of cities and their residents to develop independently and flexibly. Distance from larger urban areas and capital cities, such as Moscow, may affect how freely stakeholders in cities can conduct public negotiations over economic and political conflicts; indeed, urban residents of western Kazakhstan who work in the oil fields have been quite vocal about wages and working conditions, and residents of Vladivostok openly communicate their displeasure at the city's ingrained, infamous corruption in the news media and in forums like Facebook and its Russian cousin, *Vkontakte*.

There is a substantial Western discourse about the economic and political-geographic roles that cities play in a globalized world. Prompted by data showing that more than half the world's population lives in cities, recent popular writing on the new urban era asserts that cities will become more important and more powerful political actors than nation-states.³¹ In the case of Russia and of the post-socialist states in its orbit, this may be premature enthusiasm, rather like the euphoria over the region-based decentralization of Russia in the late 1990s and early 2000s, and related to previous predictions of "the death of the nation-state" for which we still wait in vain. Yet the heavy hand of the central government may obscure other developments: In April 2016, President Putin held his annual call-in show, which allows viewers to phone in their questions about life and governance in Russia. A legal activist from St. Petersburg posted proudly on Facebook that no one called in from St. Petersburg, which he believed indicated the city administration's high level of responsiveness to public comment.

The goal-oriented imagination that Russia and other Soviet successor states have transitioned, or even can fully transition, to a post-Soviet existence will miss important developments which could offer productive openings for dialogue. Just as the West remains unevenly developed, the FSU has areas that have developed new spaces and connections while other areas remain outside global influences or even state control. Ultimately, acknowledging that an individual, a group, an institution, a place, a phenomenon—anything—can have *both* Soviet and post-Soviet qualities or characteristics at the same time is important for making sense of people, places, and phenomena across the FSU.

Endnotes

1. Several scholars outline this. See, for example, George Demko and Roland Fuchs, *Geographical Perspectives in the Soviet Union* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1984); and Olga Medvedkov, *Soviet Urbanization* (New York: Routledge, 1990).
2. Data from <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.URB.TOTL.IN.ZS>.
3. Data from <http://www.metroalmaty.kz/>.
4. Marianna Pavlovskaya, "Other Transitions: Multiple Economies of Moscow Households in the 1990s," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 94, no. 2 (2004): 329–351; "Between Neoliberalism and Difference: Multiple Practices of Property in Post-Soviet Russia," *Europe-Asia Studies* 65, no. 7 (2013): 1295–1323.
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CURSED ECONOMIES:

How the Soviet Legacy Haunts and Hampers Reform

Sergey Aleksashenko

The disintegration of the Soviet Union—an imperium that covered one-sixth of the earth's land mass and ruled more than 290 million people—was unprecedented in human history. The fall of empires is of course nothing new; the Romans, Ottomans and British all had their heyday, then faded away. The difference is that they took decades, even centuries, to decay. The Soviet Union collapsed in the blink of a historical eye. In less than a year the Communist monolith gave way to fifteen new nation states that held forth the promise of enormous change. Democracy, free markets, property rights and the rule of law would replace the dictates of a planned economy devoted first and foremost to military power and ideological conformity.

But in the political and economic rough and tumble of the 1990s, disillusion was quick to follow. As with any inheritance, the gifts bequeathed to the new generation of nation states were parceled out unevenly, and some of the Soviet Union's children were luckier than others. The Baltic states looked to and were embraced by the West while Moldova and Ukraine, despite their common borders and easier access to the European Union and its markets, remained until recently under a Russian shadow, one which still hangs over Belarus. The new Russia may have inherited the bulk of the Soviet defense industry, with its huge natural resources and bounteous technology, but along with that came reawakened problems that had bedeviled its imperial ancestors—tension with Georgia, nationalistic strife in Chechnya, divide-and-rule tactics in the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Further afield, the newly independent states of the Asian steppes remained under authoritarian rulers who managed to keep ethnic tensions in check while maintaining a certain political distance from Moscow as they cultivated ties with an increasingly more powerful China.

Though it is possible to assess the varying geographic advantages, political stability, and economic potential of these post-Soviet states, definitive conclusions about their futures remain elusive. There are too many potential bifurcation points; the decisions and choices these countries make can turn the historical tide in unpredictable ways. These uncertainties apply just as much to small countries like Kyrgyzstan, Armenia, and Georgia as they do to major regional powers like Russia, Ukraine, and Kazakhstan. Post-Soviet countries differ from one another in history, in culture, and in their readiness to move from the Communist past, but all share one essential fact: a quarter of a century after the Soviet Union's demise, its ghost still haunts its successor states.

Economically, the Soviet legacy is vast and varies from land to land: over-reliance on natural resources, flailing technological know-how, and the curse of the Soviet military-industrial complex that keeps some of them under the shadow of militarism. But perhaps the most pernicious and persistent of these legacies is the cynical violation of property rights and the isolationism promoted by some governments that limits access to the global marketplace and prevents the real transformation of their economies.

Self-Inflicted Isolation

Over the course of nearly 75 years, from 1917 to 1991, the Soviet Union built a unique economic system based on three pillars: state ownership; central planning for the production, price, and distribution of goods; and a self-sufficient economy with minimal commercial and technological links to the rest of the world. This system proved neither effective nor competitive; it could not absorb exogenous shocks such as a sudden plunge in oil or crop prices and it was not able to provide a quality of life comparable to that in the West. Nevertheless, though no one proposes a full-scale restoration, various elements of the Soviet economic tool kit are still employed by Russia and other post-Soviet countries. Perhaps the system's strongest legacy is economic isolationism, the effects of which are felt today throughout the post-Soviet space. It is characterized by a lack of cooperative commercial and technological links with other countries, particularly the world's more developed economies.

The Soviet Union was outwardly an active participant in world trade, but the basis of its exports has always been commodities (energy, timber, wood,

metals, chemical products), the production of which did not require cooperation with the West (except, on occasion, for the purchase of various technologies). Soviet imports, on the other hand, consisted predominantly of final products, which did not require the establishment of companies designed to assemble foreign components. A central goal was economic self-sufficiency, and any hope of technological cooperation was rejected from the outset.

During the 1990s, almost all post-Soviet countries began to attract foreign direct investment. However, these efforts concentrated either at the beginning of the development chain (the extraction of raw materials), or at its end (production of food, beverages, tobacco products)—efforts that did not pave the way to greater integration with international markets.¹ Eventually, differing political visions undermined the flow of foreign funding. For example, while President Boris Yeltsin put much effort into opening up the Russian economy in the 1990s, his successor, Vladimir Putin, changed the situation for the worse. The adoption of the special law² in 2008 fixed a list of “strategic sectors”³ in which foreign investors were allowed to buy large blocks of shares (over 20 percent) only with the permission of a special government commission, which worked without formal procedures and rules. Even in sectors that Moscow sees as its priorities (e.g. the automotive, aviation, and space industries) the influx of foreign capital (primarily for technological development) has been modest.

The annexation of Crimea and the participation of Russian troops in the war in eastern Ukraine has led to large-scale economic sanctions against Russian banks and companies. Though these sanctions place an obvious burden on the economy, they can be endured for a time; far more serious for Russia’s long-term development are the rising political risks associated with a radical decrease in the flow of foreign investments, which will undermine industrial development and further erode living standards. The Kremlin does not want to change its Ukrainian policy or bow to foreign pressure. Since the second half of 2015, Moscow has devoted a significant portion of its budget to a large-scale “import substitution” program that calls for the production of many types of industrial equipment, machinery, and computer software without any reliance on international cooperation.

In today’s global economy, self-imposed isolation, whatever its short-term advantages, is ultimately self-defeating. Economic growth requires foreign

investment—many developing countries that export raw materials welcome access to modern equipment and the technical know-how, managerial talent and highly skilled labor forces that come with it. Globalization implies the free movement of labor and capital. It is not welcome by everyone, though, and many people see its negative effects and advocate its restriction. However, for developing countries it is an essential prerequisite for better living standards. The Putin government's desire to curb and control foreign investment puts heavy chains on the economy that will inevitably hold Russia back.

The Resource Curse

So too will the resource curse. For Russia and many other post-Soviet countries—Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan—natural resources are the main exports and pillars of their economies. In turn, they are highly vulnerable to the fluctuating world prices of hydrocarbons and metals. In Soviet times, the military had economic priority and first claim to raw materials; in 1989 Russian experts estimated that military expenditures approached 10 percent of the USSR's entire gross domestic product. Yegor Gaidar, the Soviet economist who won fame and condemnation for the “shock therapy” he administered to the newly liberated Russian economy, once noted that the Soviet Union produced 20 times more tanks during the 1970s than the United States. By 1991 the Soviet Army (Eastern European countries not included) had 63,900 tanks—six times more than NATO.⁴ Reform in the 1990s brought steep spending cuts and a sharp contraction in arms production. This helps explain why the growth of Russian commodity exports in the first half of the 1990s was not accompanied by increased production.

Although dependence on raw materials in many post-Soviet states is high—overall exports of these precious commodities often exceed 75 percent of all other exported goods^{5, 6}—this is not very extraordinary in comparison with Gulf countries, where the share of oil and gas revenues in the budget and balance of payments may exceed 90 percent. In general, it would be wrong to assert that dependence on natural resources and raw materials make an economy more fragile—consider Norway, where oil and gas make up two-thirds of all exports. Moreover, this dependence on raw materials for some post-Soviet economies has evolved over decades. One can't expect it to disappear overnight. Attracting foreign investment to increase the export of goods and

services from other sectors is a heavy task, and experience shows that most post-Soviet nations are not making significant progress in doing so.

Comecon Does Not Exist but ...

After the Second World War the Soviet Union extended its ideological and political influence in Eastern Europe as pro-Soviet governments took power. Maintaining their loyalty required the Kremlin to extend significant financial resources via two main channels. On the one hand, the Soviets sold energy and other natural resources to the East Europeans at prices significantly below the world market while buying their food and other products, often at inflated prices. On the other, a closed and isolated economic system was built within the framework of Comecon (The Council for Mutual Economic Assistance), an economic union of Communist states founded in 1949. Recognizing that it is more efficient to produce goods as close as possible to consumers, oil refineries and chemical plants were constructed in Belarus and fed by gas and oil pipelines from Western Siberia, the center of hydrocarbon production in the USSR. Thus was created an inflexible system of hydrocarbon exports (inherited by Russia), tied to one consumer, the markets of Eastern Europe. The members of this closed economic bloc refused to use components produced outside the Comecon area and refrained from industrial and technological cooperation with Western companies. Inevitably, this eliminated competition with Western goods and opened a gradually widening gap in the quality of production. By the time of the Soviet Union's implosion, this gap was so great that existing production capacities were obsolete. It was necessary to build new facilities, which made the technological renovation of the socialist economies much more expensive. In fact, this technological divide has still not been bridged by any of the post-Soviet countries, which find it practically impossible to gain any substantial share of global markets with substandard products produced with outdated equipment and technology. In the long run they can narrow the development gap only by working with and learning from foreign firms.

Hard Power as the Guarantee of Greatness

Almost immediately after the 1917 revolution, the Soviet Union was faced with a massive foreign intervention that provoked a kind of "birth trauma" for the new state. The concept of a country surrounded by enemies—a besieged

fortress—became entrenched in the minds of Soviet leaders. Throughout its existence, the Soviet Union allocated enormous resources to the military, which gradually led to the comprehensive militarization of the economy.

Several stages of this process can be identified: rapid industrialization during the 1930s; the dramatic buildup of military and industrial production east of the Urals after the German invasion in June 1941; the missile and nuclear programs of the late 1940s and early 1950s; and a renewed arms race in the 1970s. The methods used to create massive heavy industry devoted to military power worked well for a time, but in the long run they created overwhelming shortages, slowed technological progress in civilian sectors, and lowered living standards. Instead of comprehensive economic, political, and societal development, the Soviet state became obsessed with maintaining martial strength.

Among other Soviet assets, Russia inherited permanent membership on the United Nations Security Council as well as the bulk of the Soviet military-industrial complex and much of the economic burden that came with it. Yet it would be a mistake to believe that the Soviet defense industry was concentrated in Russia—it was spread throughout the USSR (though usually the final assembly of weaponry took place in Russia). Thirty percent of the defense industry was located in Ukraine, which specialized in the production of naval and aircraft engines and ICBMs such as the SS-18. Kazakhstan was involved in the production and testing of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons, missile launch platforms, and artillery. Belarus remains a key producer of transport vehicles for the Topol-M, Iskander, and other types of missiles. Moldova, Latvia, and Lithuania produced various microelectronic components; Estonia manufactured small-size nuclear batteries for space and isolated locations.

Though the Baltic countries and Moldova virtually lost their defense industries in the transition, other former Soviet states are looking at different options in the arms trade. Kazakhstan is developing a naval industry. Georgia, which produced Su-25 fighters and T-72 tanks, has upgraded its weapons industry with help from Israel, thus being able to export its production to developing countries. Belarus benefits from Russia's beefed-up militarization program, triggered by the sharp cooling of relations between Moscow and the West.

Though President Yeltsin slashed military budgets and pushed the export of natural resources once devoured by the defense industry, pressure to stoke

military spending never really faltered. From 2005 to 2011, Russia's military budget increased by a factor of 4.5, despite the fact that total federal budget expenditures increased by 3.6 times. In 2011, President Dmitry Medvedev approved a huge rearmament program at a cost amounting to 20 trillion rubles⁷ for the period 2012-2020.⁸ As a result, in 2015 Russia's military budget more than doubled from 2011, compared with an overall spending increase of 13.6 percent. The share of military spending in the federal budget rose from 10.9 percent in 2005 to 25.2 percent in 2015;^{9, 10} again, many of the costs associated with social security for servicemen and their families, pensions, and the maintenance of mobilization capacities are not included in these calculations.¹¹

The Russian defense and scientific establishments, like their Soviet antecedents, remain almost completely isolated from the civilian sector. Since the Soviet era, industrial companies and research institutions dealing with defense have had their own organizational structures (in the 1970s and 1980s, defense-related companies were overseen by nine government ministries); scientific research for civilian purposes and products without military uses have never had priority. No scientific or technological advances could be used in the civilian sector; defense-industry employees held classified status that severely limited professional mobility between defense and civilian businesses. As a result, any potential benefits from the military-industrial complex do not add to the nation's overall economic growth or well-being.

During the last decade, the majority of Russian defense enterprises were merged into the state-owned Rostec corporation, comprised of holding companies that include involvement in civilian sectors. But even in cases where both civilian and defense companies exist within one corporation they are divided into different organizational units, with complicated results. This situation continues in other countries as well. The case of the Ukrainian aircraft maker Antonov, which has great expertise in transport aviation, offers a good example. Though the company was invited to participate in the European A-400 Airbus project, rules governing the use of classified military technology caused it to decline the invitation.

Size Does Matter. And Weather as Well.

Any discussion of economic development in the post-Soviet states must take into account the huge natural impact of Eurasia's extremes of climate

and boundless space. The USSR extended more than six thousand miles from east to west and more than three thousand from north to south. It occupied ten time zones and watched over nearly 40,000 miles of borders. While much of this territory was not suitable for permanent human habitation, preserving the integrity of such a vast state required enormous expenditures for everything from railroads to power lines to oil and gas pipelines.

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the formation of independent states eased the problem for all countries except Russia. The Russian Federation's share of fertile and populated areas has decreased, even as its portion of remote areas has grown. Overall, Russian territory was reduced by 22 percent, while its population, according to official estimates, is now just over 146 million, roughly half that of the old Soviet Union. Its natural resources lie mostly in Asia, where geographical distance and harsh climate conditions make life more expensive.

The transition to a market economy has highlighted the economic complications of geographic distance. Today, Russia is forced one way or another¹² to subsidize the high cost of transporting coal, metals, grains, and other key commodities. For many industrial enterprises located in the middle of Russia—in the cities of Novosibirsk, Barnaul, Krasnoyarsk, and Irkutsk—the transport component (in some case, nearly 2,500 miles to the nearest seaport) is great. Such distances sometimes rule out the possibility of cooperation with foreign concerns, the establishment of export-oriented companies, or even undermine the sale potential of products to Moscow, St. Petersburg, or other major cities.¹³

Moreover, transport links with the many settlements of Krasnoyarsk Krai, Yakutia, the Magadan region, and Chukotka are available only two to three months of the year, when everything necessary for a year of human existence must be shipped in.¹⁴ The dwindling state resources for supporting life in such unforgiving environments has led to rapid population decreases in many remote regions of Russia. Since 1991, Chukotka's population has fallen by 70%, in the Magadan region, by 63%, in Kamchatka, by 34%, and in Sakhalin, by 32%.¹⁵ However, this trend is not universal. Regions rich in oil and gas reserves and a commensurate higher standard of living are growing steadily: In the Khanty-Mansiysk Autonomous Okrug the population has increased 27% since 1991, and in the Yamal-Nenets, by 10%.

Despite the pressure it places on the overall economy, such population shifts are positive in the long term because they reduce the nonrational use of resources. Nevertheless, they present immediate difficulties as the number of operating companies and declining employment levels mean decreased regional tax revenues and higher social costs. As Russia does not have any special reallocation program supported by governmental funds this “scissors problem”—local revenues that decline faster than local expenditures—will become more visible and painful.

Power Is Property

The most important element of the Soviet and even Tsarist legacy in the Russian economy is the lack of well-established rules on private property. Until the mid-18th century, even nobles were not considered land owners, but rather simply users of the land given by the state; private ownership of land for the nobility was fixed by law only in 1835, and peasants were permitted to own land only after serfdom was abolished in 1861.

The October revolution of 1917 led to a massive nationalization of industry in Russia and the collectivization of the 1930s led to the restoration of land ownership by the state. The ban on private ownership remained in force until it was partially lifted in the late 1980s under Gorbachev’s *perestroika* reforms. By the end of December 1990, the Russian Federal Soviet Federative Republic adopted its own “Property Law,” which fully restored private property rights. Despite its adoption, the ownership structure inherited from the Soviet Union kept almost all enterprises in state hands.¹⁶ In the early 1990s, the absence of a government monitoring system allowed directors of enterprises to become quasi-owners who had the right to dispose of company assets as they saw fit. A massive wave of privatization followed in the mid-1990s, but this did not produce a system in which private property was seen as the pillar of economic and political stability.

Upon coming to power, Vladimir Putin’s attitude toward private ownership of former state property began to reverberate through Russia. In June 2000, Vladimir Gusinsky, the owner of the biggest media holding company, was arrested on trumped up charges. He was released from prison only after he agreed to sell his company to Gazprom. In the summer of 2001 a similar fate befell Yakov Goldovsky, the owner of the gas and petrochemi-

cals company Sibur. In 2003, the arrest of the largest shareholder of Yukos, Mikhail Khodorkovsky, led to the de facto nationalization of the oil and gas company's assets.

Putin's strong-arm methods have been accompanied by the formulation of a very specific formal rule: At any given moment, the state can demand the sale of privately owned assets—an offer that cannot be refused. Moreover, if a private owner wants to sell to a nonstate buyer, he must obtain state permission.

The Yukos affair offered the Russian bureaucracy an object lesson in how the government could arbitrarily take away private property, and its methods were copied by government officials throughout the country. The state's takeover targets can be businesses large and small, the beneficiaries state officials, their friends, and relations. Initiation of criminal proceedings against privately owned businesses has become widespread; in the years from 2008 to 2015, between 250,000 and 350,000 criminal cases were initiated annually. Though only two to four percent of these cases have ended in jail terms or other legal punishments, between 85 and 90 percent of the accused have lost their businesses.¹⁷

In Ukraine, where high-level corruption is enormous, a business's prosperity often depends upon government concessions: In the early 1990s, some businessmen obtained exclusive rights to export certain commodities; others were allowed the free use of government-owned gas and oil pipelines; still others were permitted to charge high rates for their power stations without having to pay for government-subsidized coal. The leadership in Kiev was able at any time to change the beneficiaries of such government largesse at will. It is worth noting that since Ukrainian independence was proclaimed in 1991, the country has seen 24 prime ministers come and go, but this way of doing business continues unchanged.

In the Baltic countries, such extreme corruption disappeared at the very first years of independence. In Georgia, Moldova, and Armenia, corruption scandals are exposed from time to time, but under the authoritarian regimes that hold power in Belarus, Kazakhstan, and the other Central Asian states the corrupt link between government power and private special interests is even more pronounced. Official corruption is aided and abetted by the courts, by law enforcement agencies, and by governing regimes. It is unlikely to end without political change.

Conclusions

Unlike many one-time members of the Eastern bloc, the former socialist republics of the Soviet Union (except for the three Baltic states)¹⁸ can't boast of great success in adapting to the post-Communist world. Their economies are not stable; periodic bursts of relative prosperity may come as commodity prices rise (as in Russia and Ukraine in 2004-2008), or radical reforms start to show results (as in Georgia in 2003-2007 and Kazakhstan in 2009-2014). But recession and economic stagnation come back fast if commodity prices fall or reforms are reversed (as in Russia from 2013-2016, and Ukraine 2012-2014). Most of these economies remain insular, isolated from global markets, and, except for natural resources, fail to attract foreign capital.

Though they are haunted by many of the same Soviet legacies, the post-Soviet states inherited different problems and are diverging as each country seeks its own way to economic transformation. Though a quarter century was more than enough time for the Baltic countries to overcome the bulk of the Soviet economic legacy, it may require another twenty-five years for Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova to find their economic footing, and much more time for Russia. The structure of the Central Asian economies has shifted toward more agrarian, traditional patterns that combined with authoritarian regimes and ethnic tensions make it difficult to move toward freer systems. In Kazakhstan, the region's economic powerhouse, divisions between the "Russian North" and "Kazakh South," though cooled in recent years, might still split the nation. Though the aging Nursultan Nazarbayev's authoritarian style is smoothed over with largely cosmetic concessions to republican government (a bicameral legislature, popular elections, etc.), the country's future, and its territorial integrity, will largely depend upon whether a smooth transition of power will occur when the term of its president for life draws to an end.

Of course, Russia remains a dominant factor in influencing political and economic developments in the post-Soviet space. Yet during the second half of Putin's seventeen years in power, Russia's economic strength has steadily deteriorated, and many experts believe that the longer he remains in the Kremlin, the worse things will get. His attempts to build a dirigiste economy in which private business incentives are suppressed and property rights abused, have crippled growth, eroded competitiveness, and may lead to prolonged stagnation, dashing hopes of foreign investment. The more the Russian economy weakens, the more reactionary its political system will become,

choking off any impulses to reform. This in turn would undermine the painful efforts of other post-Soviet states to develop modern economies. Many negative factors work against the aspirations of post-Soviet states. Some have been inherited from the Soviet Union, some have roots in the more distant past. They are chained to painful memories, a troubled political culture, and traditions so strong that they cannot be overcome quickly and easily.

Endnotes

1. The opposite pattern occurred in Eastern Europe, which pursued integration with the European Union as a gradually increasing number of companies developed cooperative relations, particularly with small and medium-sized enterprises in the West.
2. Federal Law No. 57, April 29, 2008.
3. This list included forty-five industries deemed essential to national security, including aviation and aerospace, TV and radio if coverage is more than 50 percent of any particular region of Russia, and the provision of services to railways and pipelines.
4. Yegor Gaidar, "Uroki SSSR," *Vestnik Evropy* 17 (2006), <http://magazines.russ.ru/vestnik/2006/17/ga3.html>.
5. World Bank, *World Integrated Trade Solution* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2015), <http://wits.worldbank.org/>.
6. Determining exact statistics is difficult owing to differing government accounting methods and imprecision in reporting. These figures are based on data from the World Bank, available at <http://wits.worldbank.org/>.
7. This amount represented 33.3 percent of Russia's GDP in 2011; total expenditures of the federal budget in 2011 amounted to 11.1 trillion rubles.
8. Russian Federal Treasury, "Federal'nyy Budzhet" (Moscow: Russian Federal Treasury, 2015), <http://roskazna.ru/ispolnenie-byudzhetrov/federalnyj-byudzhet/>.
9. A sharp increase in spending on domestic security and law enforcement took place at the same time—their share in the overall expenditures of the federal budget increased from 10.3 percent in 2005 to 15.6 percent in 2015.
10. Russian Federal Treasury, "Raskhody: Po Razdelam/Podrazdelam" (Moscow: Russian Federal Treasury, 2013), <http://datamarts.roskazna.ru/razdely/rashody/rashody-po-razdelam-podrazdelam/rashody-po-razdelam-i-podrazdelam/?paramPeriod=2014>.
11. As a general rule through individual tariffs for railway transportation.
12. Kazakhstan and its Central Asian neighbors are trying to minimize these geographical disadvantages through increasing ties with China, which has actively invested in regional development of roads, energy development, and other infrastructure as Beijing moves forward with its "One Belt, One Road" plans.
13. This "northern delivery" problem is the subject of special government scrutiny during annual discussions on the allocation of substantial budget resources.
14. Goskomstat, "Demografiia," (Moscow: Goskomstat, 2016), <http://cbsd.gks.ru>.

15. More precisely, according to the Soviet Constitution, the basic form of ownership was national property, but no documentary evidence was issued stating that land or other assets were owned by the state. The State Property Fund, which was supposed to fix all property rights, was created in May 1991.
16. Yelizaveta Bazanova, Yekaterina Mereminskaia, Yekaterina Derbilova, and Aleksandra Terentyeva, “Vladimir Putin Vnov’ Poobeshal Bisnesu Zashshitu ot Pravookhraniteley,” *Vedomosti*, June 20, 2016, <http://www.vedomosti.ru/business/articles/2016/06/20/645956-putin-opyat-dal-slovo>.
17. Of course, we should not forget that those countries were independent from 1918 to 1940 and retained significant institutional memory from that period.



SOVIET ETCHINGS ON THE POST-SOVIET PARCHMENT: The Past and Present of Mobility and Migration

[M]obility has already gone beyond the scope of Post-Soviet, spreading into new spaces of global capitalism and incorporating itself in a truly global order—Sergey Abashin¹

Alexander Diener

Few topics have occupied global headlines more consistently and pervasively since the collapse of the Soviet Union than mobility and migration. While the removal of systemic Soviet mobility controls allowed for the (re) emergence of trans-Eurasian connections, new border regimes also placed limitations on traditional linkages between both proximate villages and neighboring states. Current patterns of mobility within post-Soviet Eurasia point to an array of cooperative possibilities while simultaneously opening arenas for competition suggestive of old rivalries, as well as new ambitions.

Economic inequality within and among the successor states gave rapid rise to labor markets that catalyzed large-scale urbanization and massive flows of transnational migrants. Conflicts in varied locales also contributed to redistributions of population, as did the lure of ethnic homelands and the prospect of titular privilege. Relatedly, the complex processes of nation-building within the mixed ethnic landscapes bequeathed by the combination of Soviet nationality and mobility policies requires scholarly and policy consideration of belonging, configurations of citizenship, and the plight of both the mobile (migrants) and immobile—those family members not migrating or individuals continuing to reside outside territories designated as their historic homelands.

On a global scale, President George H. W. Bush's September 11, 1990 proclamation of a New World Order and subsequent claims by various observers² to

the “end of history,” “end of geography,” and “end of the nation-state” derived from new interstate and substate relationships and commensurate trans-border economic possibilities. The driver of this geopolitical and geo-economic transformation in Eurasia was the removal of the barrier borders that, to greater and lesser degrees, cloistered the Soviet Union and many of its allied states from the rest of the world. The resultant competition to influence and exploit post-Soviet Eurasia has drawn comparisons to the historic Great Game. While such a referent likely obscures more than it illuminates,³ it is fair to argue that resource transit, new market development, western media expansion, and human migration both within and across international borders comprise powerful dynamics affecting post-Soviet economic, social, and political reality.

With this chapter, I consider the value of post-Soviet in light of these mobile dynamics. In historical perspective the Soviet-to-post-Soviet transition is just one in a series of such geopolitical and geo-economic shifts that have gained and lost relevance throughout history and should be treated as such in scholarly and policy considerations. In this sense, I follow the lead of Sergey Abashin, who questions the universality and self-explanatory nature of tropes like “post-Soviet-ness,”⁴ contending that while specific local conjunctures of multiple factors influence the countries of the region, not all can be traced to some “Soviet legacy.” Any model that insists on the uniqueness of this development risks isolating Eurasian area studies research from that of other regions and broader theory. Shifts from one paradigm of resource transit, commercial engagement, ideational sharing, and human migration to another may be more usefully approached as a palimpsest—a layering of new processes onto the old.⁵

The core question posed by this volume, however, relates to causation and structural conditioning of specific patterns (i.e. path dependency). I suggest that though legible, patterns of past mobility are impactful only to the extent that they are reified in conjunction with variables more traditionally associated with migration motives and commercial/resource mobility. In short, Soviet etchings on the Eurasian parchment give way to new, post-Soviet ones.

A Brief History of Eurasian Mobilities

Today, as in the past, changes in orientation, volume, and the nature of mobility/migration shape the perception of Central Eurasia. Once a borderland

between forest and steppe peoples with regular exchanges of culture-specific commodities (e.g. musk ox oil, arctic fox, sea otter, lynx, sable, stoat pelts, etc.),⁶ the region transformed through the advent of city-states into a socio-commercial network that included vast frontiers populated by nomadic tribes. These tribes served to both enable and constrain mobility between the various polities, acting at different times as conquerors, raiders, and security guarantors of caravan trade. With the rise of empires to the east (e.g. various dynasties of China), west, and south (e.g. the Hellenic, Roman, Persian, Arab), the region came to be defined by its capacity to support transregional trade. This was the high-water mark of the historic Silk Road,⁷ wherein fluctuating levels of connectivity spanned the Eurasian landmass to broadly distribute material and ideational culture along with varied groups of people.

Comprised of a series of routes over both land and sea that stretched bi-directionally east/west and south/north, the “Silk Road” was the foundational layer of the Eurasian mobilities palimpsest. More than silk and other such exotic commodities populated its corridors of connection. Large-scale population movements took the form of successive westward tribal or confederal migrations dating from the fourth century BCE to the sixteenth century CE, military conquests and subsequent settlements by the Arabs/Persians, Mongols, and Russians, as well as targeted economic ventures by particular groups (e.g. Sarts and Bukharin Jews).⁸ These historic mobilities constitute the foundation upon which “New Silk Road” referents to emergent connectivity in Central Eurasia are based. While a wide array of policy professionals and pundits make use of this term,⁹ it might well be critically considered through the concept of palimpsest.

New Silk Road discourses selectively privilege faded mytho-historic patterns for particular purposes that relate to specific geopolitical agendas. Rather than illuminating developments since the collapse of the Soviet Union, such framing of Eurasian mobility masks the prospect of entirely new dynamics of regional formation generating from emergent patterns of mobility and migration in relation to contemporary geopolitical, geo-economic, and global-regional cultural contexts.¹⁰

Today, all states of the post-Soviet realm pursue links to the global economy. Those vested with hydrocarbon, mineral, and other globally valued and transportable resources are joining multi-vectored networks of supply and

demand that, at times, follow but often divert from prior patterns of mobility that oriented toward the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). The commodities and means of transport radically differ from the historic Silk Road while the actors and geopolitical configurations of political space depart profoundly from their city-state, empire, and frontier predecessors. Examples include the Kazakhstan–China pipeline, which is China’s first direct import pipeline (14 million tons of oil per year), and the 1,100-mile gas pipeline from Turkmenistan to China via Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. The latter ended Russia’s monopoly on natural gas transit through former Soviet infrastructure and opened a new vector of connectivity requiring alignment of purpose with other Central Asian governments. Such alignment is novel in the region’s recent history, as its sovereign states have found few points of policy congruence. While such linkages fail to void Russian power in the region, they certainly mediate it. The prospect of alternative partners for trade and levers of power affirms the sovereignty of new states of Eurasia and raises prospects for competition between global and regional actors (e.g. China, Turkey, EU, Iran, U.S.). The multi-vectorized foreign policies of Central Asian states make clear that autonomy is a central goal of their respective regimes. Connectivity-forging efforts emanating from within the region, such as the Dauletabad–Sarakhs–Khangiran and the Korpėje–Kordkuy pipelines that join rail lines from Kazakhstan to Iran via Turkmenistan, reflect this autonomy by defying U.S. efforts to exclude Iran from the “New Silk Road” networks. Expanding relations between Central Asian states, China, the EU, and U.S. also defy Russian hegemony and punctuate the capacity of leaders to define their own geopolitical and economic agendas.

Former Soviet republics lacking hydrocarbon and other forms of transportable resource wealth have less capacity for autonomy. As evinced by their overwhelming reliance on remittance monies as percentage of GDP, migration to Russia has emerged as a major lever of influence over portions of the near abroad (Figure 1). Abashin goes so far as to frame migration as a tool through which Russian enacts a measure of control over Central Asia:

The status and label of “migrant” has become a new means of colonization, replacing the “alien” (*inorodets*) of tsarist times and the “ethnic minority person” (*natsmen*) of the Soviet period... It is simultaneously a means of super-exploitation and a new means of distancing—a substitute for the distance that, in the past, separated residents of the “center” from

the population of the “periphery” and placed them in informal relations of the “elder brother–younger brother” type.¹¹

Efforts to operationalize migration control as a mechanism of power are evident in both rhetoric and military action over the last decade. In a December 2012 “state of the union” speech, for example, Russia’s president, Vladimir Putin, suggested international passports (and visas) would soon be required for all people crossing Russian borders.¹² This portended a serious problem for many people and states, as citizens of the CIS have been able to travel between fellow member states without visas. Russian labor markets are attractive to migrants and ultimately essential for the economies of a number of southern tier states that rely on remittance monies. Recent figures indicate that personal remittances constitute a massive share of GDP for Tajikistan (28.8 percent—estimated by some to be as high as 47 percent), Kyrgyzstan (25.7 percent), Georgia (10.6 percent), and Armenia (14.1 percent). Estimates for Uzbekistan range from 12 to 16 percent of GDP.¹³ The requirement of visas would fundamentally change the mobility regime between Russia and both Central Asia and the Caucasus. Putin’s willingness to use intraregional mobility as a political tool became clear later in the aforementioned speech when he stated:

without a doubt, within the framework of the Customs Union and the Common Economic Space the...current system will continue to apply maximally simplified rules for crossing the border and staying on the territory of member countries of the Customs Union and the Common Economic Space.¹⁴

With the obvious goal of coercing states to join the Customs Union, Moscow’s actions reflect Abashin’s notion of a new form of core-periphery relations.

Such an exercise of soft power centered on human migration also has precedence in Russia’s policies toward resource mobility. For example, major water (im)mobility projects, including Kyrgyzstan’s 1,900-MW Karambata 1 dam and Tajikistan’s Sangtuda 1 hydroelectric plant, were brought to fruition through Russian sponsorship with an eye to influencing intraregional politics (i.e. relations between upstream states and downstream states). This reflects a long tradition of what Cynthia Buckley calls the “interventionist state” in Eurasian mobility.¹⁵

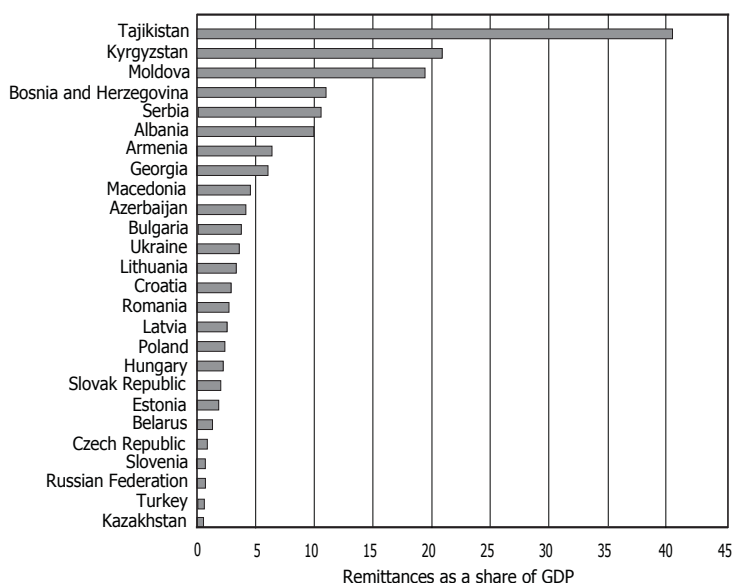


Figure 1: Remittances as a Share of GDP in the Economic Cooperation Administration Region, 2010
(Thanks to Tim Heleniak for assisting with finding the tables and data).

State Management of Migration

The palimpsest approach to Eurasian mobility reveals a deep tradition of state efforts to manage migration. The fact that authoritarian regimes have pervaded the region's recent past buttressed interventionist rather than *laissez faire* policy pertaining to population entrance, exit, and settlement. Perhaps most conspicuous in the mobility histories of both the Tsarist and Soviet states were mass forced migrations of peoples. At times, these were employed to quell dissent or punish those regarded as threats to the extant regime, but were also part of economic policies seeking to develop remote regions. The Gulag system famously transplanted large numbers of people to Siberia, while earlier efforts of the Slavophiles sought to offset Korean and Chinese in-migration, deemed "yellow colonization," by encouraging Russian settlement of the Far East.¹⁶

Voluntary migrations spurred by land-reform policy and financial incentives were also integral to the distribution of peoples in both the Tsarist and Soviet realms. The Stolypin reforms, for example, offered opportunities for serfs to forge new lives as landowners on the frontier of Russian expan-

sion, while the “Virgin Lands” campaign saw large-scale voluntary resettlement of Slavic peoples in Northern Kazakhstan.

On an international scale, out-migration from both Imperial Russia and the Soviet Union were highly restricted, though, as in the case of internal migration, there were periods of relative openness and unregulated migration. Stories of defection and escape forming “exile” communities are well-documented and ultimately profoundly impactful on the politics of the region. Much of the Eurasianist ideology, for example, originated among expatriate intellectuals, and Vladimir Lenin was among the most famous exiles whose writings and subsequent leadership transformed Eurasia.

Though it seems counterintuitive given the broad-based power wielded by both Imperial and Soviet leaders, undocumented/irregular internal migration occurred in both the Tsarist Empire and the USSR. Uncontrolled urbanization and rural out-migration required the creation of residency permits by Tsarist authorities in relation to St. Petersburg and Moscow during the seventeenth century, with similar policies later issued from the Soviet Kremlin. One might also look to the mass movements of people catalyzed by the First World War and their poor management by Imperial administrators. The arrival of those fleeing combat or famine in various regions was often heralded as giving rise to lawlessness, disease, and danger.¹⁷ Other cases of irregular or undocumented migrants in the region can be found within the Soviet system even after the Second World War. Persistent labor shortages in certain regions (e.g. western Siberia) prompted both official and undocumented seasonal labor brigades. Migrants from Central Asia and the Caucasus supplied the majority of the workers seeking to offset a Russian labor deficit and afford themselves unique earning opportunities.¹⁸

Tracing along similar lines, the post-Soviet era has seen massive flows of peoples from the southern tier to Russia and many of the more developed economies of the former Soviet realm (e.g. the Baltics, Kazakhstan, and Ukraine; Figure 2). This migration has proven largely uncontrollable by even the more authoritarian governments of post-Soviet Eurasia. The first wave occurred in the 1990s and was catalyzed by perceived or actual economic and political uncertainty in the emergent states, a desire to claim citizenship status in a titular nation, attempts to unify families within a single political territory, and open visa regimes among many members of the CIS. While the demise of Soviet-era

mechanisms for monitoring and managing population movement ushered in an era of greater migration, governmental inclinations for migration control remain.

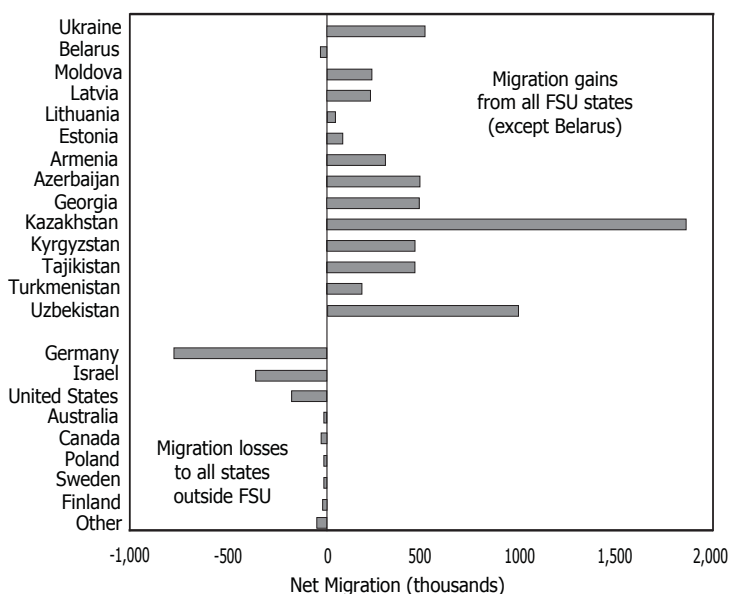


Figure 2: Russia: Net Migration by Country, 1989 to 2007.

The key point here is that despite a long tradition of seeking to manage mobility in the region, the recent efforts of states to shape the nature, timing, and content of migration/mobility into and out of their respective territories relates more to their respective state ideologies and economic conditions. To simply categorize these as post-Soviet is essentialistic. The refugee crisis in Europe and migration policies among North American states demonstrate that even Western democracies exhibit tendencies to shape migration. More impactful are current economic realities and ethno-national ideologies, which also relate in no small part to their Soviet past, but may be more fruitfully analyzed as products of contemporary geopolitics, economics, and social dynamics. While it is true that close to ten percent of populations from states within Europe and Central Asian (ECA) live outside of their home country, other regions enduring economic crisis and conflict also manifest large diasporas.¹⁹ Moreover, internal migrants are far from an intrinsically post-Soviet phenomenon. The Soviet collapse catalyzed a reconfiguration of economic geography and commensurate population shifts within all successor states but not in a manner so different from other parts of the world (Figure 3).

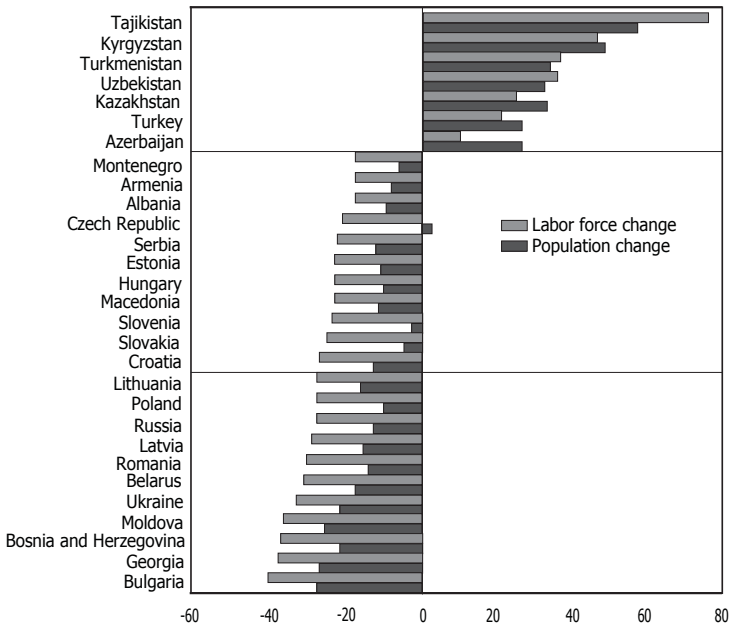


Figure 3: *Projected Change in Population and Labor Force Size in the Economic Cooperation Administration Countries, 2010 to 2040.*

For example, the abandonment of the Engels dictum, which espoused broad geographic distribution of resources and industry so as to foment universal development within a state, has famously catalyzed out-migration from cities in Russia's northern oblasts. Similar dynamics may also be identified as catalyzing urbanization in states like Kazakhstan. The Nazarbayev regime's 2006 shift from broad-based investment across the territory of Kazakhstan to targeted investment within a hierarchy of specific urban centers constitutes a major economic policy recalibration.²⁰ Those living in small and mid-sized cities and rural areas face the prospect of limited state funding in the near future. For such residents, dramatic reinvention of their locales is unlikely, so migration within Kazakhstan or abroad becomes likely. Similarly, environmental degradation in certain areas of Kazakhstan and other parts of the former Soviet realm prompts migration to areas offering not only greater economic opportunity but also prospects for improved health. The Aral Sea is a prime example, but a variety of other cases exist throughout the region (e.g. Semipalatinsk, Magnitogorsk, and Chernobyl).

I suggest our capacity for understanding is limited by regarding such dynamics as overtly couched in a particular history (i.e. post-Soviet), as similar

migration occurs in a variety of economic and political settings. “Rust belt” abandonment in the U.S and United Kingdom, along with environmental degradation in states across the developed and developing regions compel both internal and international relocations. Linking to broader theories would prove eminently more useful in pursuit of solutions than a regionally siloed and historically circumscribed approach to the problems.

The Role of Ethnicity in Post-Soviet Eurasian Migration

While the ethnic history of Central Eurasia may be readily told through successive events of migration, settlement, and resettlement, Soviet nationality policy’s population redistributions and institutionalization of identity groups currently drives much of the literature pertaining to contemporary Eurasian mobility and immobility. Lenin’s establishment of ethnic homelands and Stalin’s role in the People’s Commissariat of Nationalities (*Narkomnats*) provided a condition of titular privilege despite the Soviet system’s ideals of universal equality and de facto social primacy for Russians. The role of ethnicity and language as it pertains to post-Soviet citizenship derives in large part from this history. One may regard the language policies of the Baltic states, recent ethnic hostilities in Central Asia and the Caucasus, Russia’s annexation of Crimea and military interventions in eastern Ukraine, and Kazakhstan’s policy encouragement of diasporic return migration as examples.

These cases suggest a range of policies pertaining to nationalization and something far more complex than traditional push/pull models of migration. With every state of the former USSR adopting an ethnic state name, de facto conditions of “titularity” form. With the exception of President Alexander Lukashenko’s efforts to eschew Belarusian identity,²¹ the national groups after which each state is named have attained a measure of sociopolitical primacy. There are, however, degrees of titular privilege conditioned by factors beyond the Soviet legacy. Examples include the Baltic states’ enactment of the most extreme efforts at ethno-nationalization and Kazakhstan’s ambiguous nationalization that intentionally retains both ethnic and civic elements.²²

Ethnic un-mixing was more pronounced during the 1990s in certain states than others. It must also be considered incomplete. Not all those desiring to migrate were capable of moving for financial, family, and other reasons. The height of ethnic redistribution occurred in the early to mid-1990s but contin-

ues at a lesser scale today. Moreover, particular states have contrived to lure co-ethnic peoples back to the historic homeland with policies providing subsidized education and housing/employment guarantees. Kazakhstan is a case in point. Kazakh diasporic returnees (*oralmandar*) number in the hundreds of thousands and have, in conjunction with both high birthrates among Kazakhs and non-titular out-migration, catalyzed a shift in the titular demographic proportion of the population from roughly 40 percent in 1989 to 63 percent in 2009. The political consequences of this demographic advantage are largely kept in check by Nursultan Nazarbayev's lifetime presidency and his penchant for inclusivity; but the future of ethnic politics in Kazakhstan may be rightfully considered uncertain, as the succession questions loom large.

The process of return migration in post-Soviet space is neither assured of success nor based on perfect information.²³ Russian return migrants often face discrimination and find integration into their "historic homeland" more complicated than anticipated. Similar complexities exist among Kazakh return migrants, as well as Germans and Jews exiting the former USSR. Some have even reverse-migrated to reclaim citizenship in post-Soviet states. This is not, however, a purely post-Soviet phenomenon, as diasporic returnees in a variety of political, economic, and cultural settings face an array of prejudices.²⁴ It is also worthwhile considering those "diasporas" lacking a desire to "return" to a historic homeland. The *Koryo Saram*, or Soviet Korean community, is just one example of a group resistant to migration. While Koreans' position in various Central Asian societies is transforming from specific fields (e.g. professors, police, and other professional roles) to entrepreneurs and intermediaries for South Korean businesses, the group's identity remains generally re-territorialized to their respective Central Asian states.

The above examples show how homeland conceptions influence migration decisions in post-Soviet Eurasia. The pull of the ethnic homeland is not felt uniformly across the region and across groups or even within groups. Enclaves of co-ethnic peoples, whether within cities, rural areas of compact living in particular oblasts, or border regions, commonly constitute small-scale homelands from which many are reticent to migrate. Traditions and languages tend to remain viable outside the ethnic homeland, though assimilative dynamics are common for smaller groups or those lacking a co-ethnic state sponsor. Unfortunately, not all states are equally open to multicultural expression, and particular traditions and practices have become overtly targeted for exclusion.

Throughout the post-Soviet era, specific groups have faced sometimes subtle and sometimes overt pressures to migrate. The 2010 ethnic clashes in the southern Kyrgyzstani city of Osh are an example of the latter. Uzbeks were forced to flee but were confronted with the fortified borders of their co-ethnic state. Since the late 1990s, Uzbekistan's border policies have sought to overtly control trans-state movement of people and goods.²⁵ The Karimov regime's cloistering dynamic is mirrored in Turkmenistan, where uncontrolled mobility is considered a threat to current societal norms. For those successfully migrating to distant lands, discriminatory policies in receiving states relating to ethnicity, religion, and sexual preference have become all too common.

In many cases, the advent of new states centered on titular identities expanded the capacity for violence between ethnic communities. Either by state sanction or a lack of state capacity to prevent it, violence has occurred and driven both international and internal displacements of people. The Russian-sponsored separatist conflict in the Donbas region of eastern Ukraine has thus far claimed roughly 10,000 lives and decimated a number of towns and urban centers. The migratory response to this conflict resulted in roughly 1.6 million Internally Displaced Peoples (IDPs) resettling throughout Ukraine and over one million refugees seeking asylum outside of Ukraine, primarily in Russia and Belarus.²⁶ Additionally, Russia's annexation of Crimea in March 2014 and its subsequent implementation of repressive political measures against the peninsula's ethnic minority and dissident communities has compelled tens of thousands to voluntarily leave occupied Crimea for the Ukrainian mainland, contributing further to the overall number of Ukrainian IDPs.

These flows of forced and/or compelled migration within and across Ukrainian state borders carry a certain ethnic component, as ethnic loyalties may inform the decision of some migrants fleeing the Donbas to seek refuge either in Russia or elsewhere within Ukraine. However, despite narratives emanating primarily from the Russian media that frame the conflict in Ukraine as fundamentally ethnic in scope and character, the decisive factor dividing these groups of migrants appears to be the relative salience of Ukrainian *civic* identities and attitudes toward the political ambitions and ideologies behind the Euromaidan protests and the new government that it brought to power. Hence, thousands of ethnic Russians from the Donbas and Crimea number among Ukraine's internally displaced, while similar numbers of ethnic Ukrainians have fled the Donbas to neighboring Russia. Moreover, thousands of

Crimean Tatars loyal to Ukraine and fearful of targeted repression by Russian occupying forces have left their Crimean homeland for the Ukrainian mainland, representing a significant portion of the Crimean IDP community.²⁷

While cases of overt conflict and diasporic return migration often result from ethnic motives, a large percentage of population mobility in post-Soviet Eurasia is driven by economic need and a desire for better lives. The massive flows of peoples from the southern tier to Russian labor markets as guest workers, commercial entrepreneurs, or irregular migrants have given rise to unprecedented numbers of Muslim peoples in major Russian cities. Their position in society is not necessarily one of potential assimilants. Rather, despite the aging Russian population with limited replacement capacity, the new migrants are generally viewed as temporary and given only restricted access to civil beneficence.

Their role in society is resonant of dual labor-market theory. Barriers to integration, both official and nonofficial, relegate migrants to secondary markets or the dangerous, dirty, and demeaning jobs that most “natives” avoid. Wage fluctuations and employment trends in the primary market, therefore, play little role in shaping the choices of migrants. Like labor migrants in other parts of the world, ethnic identities are reinforced by the marginality of their collective economic position. Moreover, the logistics of their daily practices as labor migrants double-down on this marginality by creating unique spaces that perpetuate transnationality.

While there is a spectrum of migrant work conditions, with some migrants being relatively prosperous and reinvesting their money in entertainment, others have little time for anything but work and sleep. The former are often the entrepreneurs that create ethnic restaurants, migrant cafes, and teahouses targeting a consumer base of other migrants with discretionary income. The latter migrants are the majority and commonly live in “rubber flats” with up to twenty flatmates (e.g. friends, family members, and colleagues). Privacy is a rare commodity, and for those sending the bulk of their income as remittances to family in their countries of origin, public spaces serve as sites of social activity. This is as true among Latin American migrants to the U.S. as it is for Central Asians to Russia.

Migrants in post-Soviet Eurasia have been predominantly male but are increasingly female, and family groups have joined the cadre of the mobile.

Free movement of Eurasian Economic Union citizens makes border-crossing easier but *patents* or legal status for work and residence remain expensive and difficult to obtain.²⁸ Irregular migration is therefore eminently common and many people work in Russia and other prosperous states of Eurasia without a permit. This is one of the main reasons that statistics are problematic with regard to migrants. Official statistics are also worthy of question due to their capacity for pejorative use by host governments.

Anti-foreigner public sentiment has been given credence by media campaigns portraying crime, disease, and a general discourse of danger pertaining to migrant communities. This is especially poignant in relation to Muslim peoples and fear of importing Islamic radicalism. Terrorist attacks in France, Turkey, Belgium, the U.S., Egypt, Germany, and Russia further strain already complex relations between mobile peoples of the former Soviet southern tier and peoples of more prosperous host states. Fear of radicalized migrants, however, stretches far beyond Russia and the European states of the post-Soviet realm.

Media reports from Almaty, Bishkek, Dushanbe, and Tashkent include detailed accounts of confirmed and alleged Islamic terrorism. Specific individuals are commonly identified as having traveled abroad and subsequently become radicalized, which follows a trend among official Russian sources identifying virtually “all Muslims who have left Russia and other post-Soviet countries (as) extremists and terrorist who support ISIS ideology and are ready to fight for it.”²⁹ The irony of much of the jingoistic and ethnocentric rhetoric manifesting in relation to migration and mobility in post-Soviet Eurasia is that it is coupled with a discourse of social familiarity and cultural affinity based on a shared history. The term *nashi imigranti* (“our migrants”) suggests preference among receiving populations for those of the post-Soviet realm as opposed to “foreign migrants.” But even “our migrants” is parsed as to those more or less desirable. A palpable anti-LGBT sentiment within a variety of post-Soviet societies is gaining traction in public policy. This trend has already and will likely continue to serve as an impetus for migration among those denied the capacity to openly live in sexual freedom. The question is, where can members of this community go? This reflects the need to expand research into migrants’ lives and how both social and physical practices can generate attachments to sites of residence abroad, while remittances, seasonal travel, and communications technology sustain contacts with the homeland and, more poignantly, those who remain in the home of origin.

Conclusion

In considering the uniqueness of the socialist or former socialist setting, we must be wary of self-imposed limits, taking care to remain open to broader theories pertaining to topics such as mobility and migration as they apply in greater global contexts. Over-emphasizing ethnicity as the main motivator of migration in post-Soviet studies, for example, can impede understanding of the role of socio-economic factors. Classical economic theory, with its focus on economic returns for migrants, and neo-classical approaches that incorporate family strategies and risk management, can therefore be marginalized more than they should be. Moreover, concentrating on ethnicity can mask the complex composition of migrant flows and occlude the significance of factors such as age, health, gender, class, and family status. Rather than concentrating on ethnicity as a static identity upon which mobility decisions are inherently contingent, research should engage with individual characteristics and their relationship to agency.

Another problem is that the post-Soviet condition at the governmental level too often connotes to authoritarianism. Whether “soft” or “hard,” authoritarian regimes and democratic states possess varying capacities to control mobility. Eurasia’s migrant-receiving and migrant-sending states, therefore, belong in the mix of broader studies pertaining to state intervention in the migration process. Moreover, the salience of Soviet era networks—whether they be infrastructural, human, information, financial, environmental, or political—offer opportunities for research linking to a range of current theory. The significance of institutional contexts, state capacity requirements for implementation, and both short- and long-term economic policies could reveal much about growing inequalities across Eurasia. Variables and policy continue to evolve in Eurasia with democratization, judicial independence, constitutionalism, and human rights advocacy on the rise in some states and authoritarian intervention, control, and ethno-nationalism advancing in others. How these dynamics affect migration and mobility remains a poignant question for the region.

Considering the infrastructures and patterns of human, commercial, resource, and ideational mobility in Eurasia as a palimpsest relates to the question driving this volume: Is the notion of post-Soviet still relevant twenty-five years after the collapse of the Soviet Union? The answer is yes, but with the

caveat that it remains so as the most recent paradigmatic inscriptor. It will, over time, fade and take its place alongside recurrent patterns, analogous events, and comparable actors that manifest, recede, and re-emerge over the course of history.

Path dependencies clearly remain in the realm of mobility and migration relating to Soviet infrastructure, shared culture, and policy legacies. However, contemporary patterns are also profoundly shaped by the dynamics of sub-regional reorientations, globalization, and trends identifiable within broader migration and mobility theory. In short, Soviet-related path dependencies must now contend with the elite-driven and grassroots (re)activation of historic patterns of mobility, as well as new (im)mobilities relating to specific configurations of power, economic trends, technologies, and ideals.

Research in Eurasia, as elsewhere, must take into account that states and non-state actors endeavor to influence public opinion as to what is normatively good and bad, socially constructive and destructive, and practically licit and illicit. In an applied sense, such valuations define what is shuttle trade or smuggling, freedom fighting or terrorism, the free exchange of ideas or piracy of intellectual property, religious education or terrorist training, and neoliberal free markets or neocolonial exploitations. The palimpsest approach reveals how post-Soviet patterns and ideals are neither immutable nor impotent in determining these valuations. Rather, that which is attributable to the post-Soviet exists within a dynamic nexus of variables. Physical infrastructures, historic socio-cultural orientations, and recent economic-political contingencies shape the calculus of migrants as well as the attitudes and ideals of sending and receiving states and publics. Such is the case throughout the world. While post-Soviet may constitute the most legible etchings on the current Eurasian parchment, the referent is beginning to obfuscate emerging dynamics by defining the region not by what it is but by what it is not.

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FROM PRIVATE TO PUBLIC: Religious Practice and Belief in Russia and Central Asia

Edward C. Holland and Matthew Derrick

The Soviet secularization experiment was unique. Never before had a state directly challenged the existence of God. To quote Paul Froese, the Soviets “hoped to expunge not only the existence of religious institutions but also daily expressions of spirituality and, most dauntingly, belief in a supernatural realm.”¹ While the Bolsheviks had success in diminishing the social and cultural role of religious institutions and undermining individual belief among a large percentage of the population, their direct questioning of God’s existence failed to universally eradicate religious belief across Soviet society. The Soviet secularization experiment was a failure—in the post-Soviet period, God “seems to be alive and well and living in all Russia.”² The same claim can be made for the other Soviet successor states.

This chapter considers the failure—to borrow Froese’s phrase—of the Soviets’ plot to kill God. We argue that throughout the post-Soviet space religion has been accorded an increasingly public role in the quarter century since Communism. Institutionally, religions have cultivated links to the state, reproducing and relying on the models of church-state relations that existed in the Soviet and Tsarist periods. In terms of personal practice, individuals are today more open about their religious beliefs than ever before; this does not signal that conversion rates are rising, but rather that there is an increasing acceptance of religion as both a practice and an identity.³ We filter this discussion of the shift from private to public religious observance through the example of Islam as practiced both in the Russian Federation and other post-Soviet republics since 1991.

The Secularization Experiment and its Post-Soviet Consequences

The Communists' approach to religion can be described as a coordinated campaign to undermine personal belief through an attack on the institutional structures of faith. Loyalty to the state was intended to take the place of belief in God. While the Soviet state successfully reduced the role of religious institutions in society, this campaign did not, in turn, result in the purging of personal belief. Put another way, in the absence of religious institutions religious belief did not dissolve. Faith, as experienced individually, must be distinguished from the role that religious organizations play in cultivating this faith—the binary of the private and the public.⁴ The project of scientific atheism was limited to the institutional realm, and, while effective at targeting religious organizations, it did not wholly undermine individual belief and private practice. As a process linked to modernization, the secularization of societies as occurred in the West—particularly Europe and North America—changed religion's role in the public sphere. Religion was no longer ubiquitous; instead, churches played more narrowly defined public roles while also serving as an element of individual identity for religious people.

Early on, the Bolsheviks made clear their position on religious belief, based on the characterization of religion as the opium of the people. In a series of decrees issued after the October Revolution in 1917, the Communists nationalized the property of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC), required the separation of the church from both the political and educational functions of the state, and denied the legality of church-officiated weddings, divorces, and baptisms. Beginning in 1929 with Stalin's Decree on Religious Associations, the Soviet state embarked on a universal campaign of persecution against religious institutions, believers, and clergy, targeting not just Russian Orthodoxy but other religions—including Islam and Buddhism—practiced in the Soviet state. Though there was a brief thaw in church-state relations during World War II, the late 1950s and early 1960s saw a renewed crackdown. In brief, throughout much of Soviet history the campaign against religion was enforced by the state through the elimination of religious institutions and the active persecution of believers. In turn, through the course of the Soviet short century religious belief was increasingly relegated to the private sphere.

This campaign against religious institutions began to change—as so much did in Soviet society—during Mikhail Gorbachev's tenure as general secre-

tary. In 1988, Gorbachev held the first meeting in forty-five years between the Communists and the church leadership. He offered state support for the millennium celebration of the baptism of Prince Vladimir of Kievan Rus' in June 1988, which, thanks to Gorbachev's endorsement, was granted widespread coverage in the Soviet media. Gorbachev made a second promise at the meeting: to draft new legislation on religion to replace Stalin's 1929 Decree on Religious Associations. The October 1990 Law of the USSR on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations guaranteed:

the rights of citizens to decide and express their attitude toward religion, to convictions corresponding to this, and to the unhindered confession of a religion and the exercise of religious rites, and also to equality and protection of the rights and interests of citizens regardless of their attitude toward religion.⁵

The law also ensured freedom of conscience for Soviet citizens and the right of believers to proselytize and spread their faith; a separation of church and state that was intended to ensure the equality of religious organizations and limit state patronage of a particular faith; and allowed for the formation of monasteries and other institutions designated for religious training. The Russian Soviet Federal Socialist Republic (RSFSR) subsequently passed a law similar to the Soviet legislation.

Upon independence in late 1991, religion occupied an increasingly public place in Russian society. The 1993 Russian constitution guaranteed freedom of conscience and religious worship in Article 28.⁶ As important as these legal protections was the initial acceptance of the expansion of religious communities that lacked a broad-based historical presence in Russia, including the Mormons and the Hare Krishnas (collectively termed "new religious movements"). A religious marketplace of sorts developed in Russia in the mid-1990s in response to the increased freedom of belief enshrined in legislation and the constitution.

Though the Russian Orthodox Church reestablished its central place as a key cultural institution in Russian society, it soon became clear that the church was not prepared for competition for adherents from those religions which sought converts after seventy years of state-sanctioned atheism. To counter the growing role of the new religious movements the church's patriarch, Alek-

sei II, cultivated close relations with the Yeltsin administration and acceded to more conservative and nationalistic elements in the ROC to prevent a schism.

The most important outcome of the church's attempts to counter the opening of the religious marketplace in Russia was the 1997 Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations, which altered the legal standing of the new religious movements.⁷ The Russian Orthodox Church, in collaboration with members of the Russian parliament, began working on revising the 1990 legislation as early as 1993; Aleksei II suggested that a revised law "would open new possibilities for the role of the [Russian Orthodox] Church in the New Russian Society."⁸ Critics of the law said that it violated the human rights conventions—including the Helsinki Final Act and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights—which Russia had previously endorsed.⁹ Despite such critiques, the legislation has enjoyed strong domestic support, and should be viewed, in part, as a product of the strident criticism of the new religious movements by leading political and ecclesiastical figures in Russia.

Perhaps most controversially, the Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations included a number of provisions specifically targeting those religious organizations that established a presence in Russia after 1991. It distinguished religious groups from religious organizations. The former are small-scale communities that were accorded few rights under the new law. It further divided religious organizations into two categories—those that had been established in Russia for at least fifteen years (and hence had been granted some form of recognition by the Soviet state) and those that had not. Those that fell into the latter group were disallowed from holding religious services, publishing religious tracts, or, more prosaically, opening bank accounts.

The legislation was arguably a step back from the rights enshrined in the 1993 constitution. Though the law's preamble reaffirms that Russia is a secular state, the Russian Orthodox Church is singled out as *primus inter pares* among religions in the country. The legislation recognizes "the special contribution of Orthodoxy to the history of Russia and to the establishment and development of Russia's spirituality and culture." This has led to concerns that the Russian Orthodox Church is politically privileged in what is officially a secular state. In 2002 the church secured the introduction of a "Fundamentals of Orthodox Culture" curriculum into Russian public schools.¹⁰ During the tenure of President Dmitry Medvedev (2008-2012), the Russian

state returned to the church property confiscated during the Soviet period as well. In turn, in its relations with other confessions in Russia, the Russian Orthodox Church has oscillated between hegemony—with the Roman Catholic Church, which has been forced to defer to decisions made by the Orthodox hierarchy—and ecumenism (in a broad sense of the term), with Islamic groups, for example.

Some religions have received protections similar to those enjoyed by the Russian Orthodox Church. The law also identified Islam, Judaism, and Buddhism as faiths that constitute “an integral part of the historical heritage of the peoples of Russia.” Along with Russian Orthodoxy, these three faiths have been classified as “traditional” religions, although this term does not appear in the 1997 law. Other religions face pressures that the so-called “traditional” religions do not, despite—or perhaps because of—the ambiguity of the 1997 legislation. There is also a perception of Russian Orthodoxy as the *de facto*—if not *de jure*—state religion:

Carrying particular weight in Russia, symbolic appearances of solidarity between President Vladimir Putin and Patriarch Aleksii [sic] II—sometimes with representatives of Russia’s other so-called traditional confessions (Islam, Judaism and Buddhism)—often translate into regional state officials taking decisions in the interests of only these faiths, including to the detriment of other religious confessions and non-believers.¹¹

The result of this haphazard approach to the legislation of religion is that new religious movements are unsure of their position in the wider political framework of the Russian state; this is particularly true for non-Orthodox Christians and members of other nontraditional faiths that have recently come to Russia in search of converts. For Buddhists, Muslims, and Jews, despite the continuing ambiguity of the term “traditional,” their position is strengthened by the linking of religion and national identity as commonly accepted in contemporary Russia.

Religion and Identity in the Soviet State and its Successors

Religion frequently served as an identity component for those national groups that either declared independence or sovereignty—as occurred in both the RSFSR and the Soviet Union more broadly—during the transition

period. The result, in the post-Soviet space, has been the *de facto* territorialization of religious identities along national lines.¹² In this framework, religion serves to complement national identity, connecting the condition of post-Soviet independence to a set of traditions maintained prior to the Soviet period (and in private during the Soviet period, as well).

The strategic deployment of religion was a conscious decision by nationalists. In the late Soviet period, national entrepreneurs in nearly all of the republics used religion as one of the collective values on which to construct their legitimacy; “what appeared immediately [after the breakup] was the need for a new kind of social cohesiveness that could create new cognitive frameworks and new social networks to cope with the dangerous process of entropy and anomie.”¹³ Religion, though rarely the central focus, functioned as a source of legitimacy for the nascent political movements that developed during this time. Lithuania is one exception. There, religion played a galvanizing role in both organizing resistance to Communism and legitimating the new state. The key part was played by the Catholic Church; though the Lithuanian Communist Party attempted to employ the same anti-institutional measures that succeeded against the Russian Orthodox Church in other parts of the Soviet Union, Lithuania’s political history inspired an immediate distrust of the Communist platform. Moreover, the link between nationality and religion is explicit in this case, given the role of Catholicism in the ethnic and national identity of Lithuanians.¹⁴

Throughout post-Soviet space, individuals and ethnic groups continue to identify with religions historically associated with their particular heritage. For ethnic Russians, the historical relationship between religion and nationhood is deep, intertwined with centuries of territorial expansion under the tsars. Orthodoxy provided ideological justification—a “civilizing mission”—for the Russians as their empire expanded eastward and southward and came to dominate Muslim groups and other non-Christians. For many non-Russians—especially Muslims—associations between religion and ethno-nationalism are more recent, in large part related to Soviet-era territorial projects. The union republics of Central Asia, as well as the Muslim-majority autonomous republics within the RSFSR, were created by the Bolsheviks in the 1920s and 1930s as a means of nationalizing peoples for whom Islam traditionally served as the primary source of identification. Each territory was designated the historic homeland of an ethnic group for which a national

language and a set of folk traditions were formalized and institutionalized by Soviet authorities. According to Marxist-Leninist theory, the construction of secular ethno-national identities was a historically necessary step that, in the process of displacing premodern religious foundations, would eventually give way to the ultimate goal of socialist internationalism. By 1991 the final step in this envisioned historical process remained far off (despite official rhetoric); seven decades was sufficient to foster ethno-nationalism—however “artificial”—among Soviet Muslims, yet this time period was far from enough to extinguish religion as an important source of identity.

Islam’s relationship with Communism in the Soviet Union can be characterized as ambiguous. Orthodox institutions and adherents were openly persecuted from the beginning of the Communist state; some of these same policies extended to Islam. Yet Soviet Muslims were able to blend their religious identities into their national-political classifications as members of a particular ethnic group and as Communists. Islamic doctrine makes certain concessions for adherents living in non-Muslim lands, referred to as *dar al-harb*. Such practice—which condones religious observation in secret—accommodates Muslims who must abandon open practice due to political persecution; in Central Asia, the closure of mosques and religiously affiliated educational establishments and the persecution of Islamic religious leaders made clear Soviet opposition to active religious practice. Lastly, there was less direct competition between Communism and Islam, in comparison to Russian Orthodoxy. Communist Party leaders, for example, could openly acknowledge their Muslim identity. More prosaically, the Communist system also provided valuable material benefits to the underdeveloped regions of Soviet Central Asia. Educational opportunities expanded substantially, as did, in turn, literacy, access to medical care, and newspaper circulation.

Many Muslims retained a sense of religious identity during the Soviet period: “Islamic society, despite persecution, preserved its worldview and moral values, even in the political context of the Soviet Union.”¹⁵ In the North Caucasus, for example, Sufi practices continued privately during the Soviet period. Publicly, Soviet policy toward religion was inconsistent. In February 1944, coincident with the deportation of the Chechens and Ingush to Central Asia, the remaining mosques still operating in the republic were closed; after the groups’ rehabilitation in 1957, until 1978, mosques and associated Islamic institutions were proscribed. In 1943, however, the Soviets had permitted

Islam to organize on a statewide institutional level, increasing the number of muftiates—or regionally oriented religious administrations—in the country.¹⁶

Post-Soviet Islam in Russia

The ambiguous legacy of the Soviet antireligious campaign with respect to Islam created a void into which Salafism rushed during the post-Soviet period—a form of religious competition not dissimilar from the new religious movements discussed previously. Muslims in the region were receptive to Islam as traditionally practiced, as well as nontraditional forms such as Salafism.¹⁷ Salafists, who endorse an austere form of Islam that closely follows the strictures of the Koran, proposed an alternative social structure rooted in the requirements of Islam. Though rigid in its doctrine, Salafism has become politicized in large part due to Russian policies toward conservative forms of Islam. Salafists were particularly influential in Chechnya, in part because they are linked to transnational networks of like-minded Islamists, but also because their understanding of Islam has served as a basis to overcome renascent clan identities among the Chechens and supplied a moral framework around which struggle against the Russians could be organized. After 1999, for example, the Islamic insurgency in the North Caucasus spread beyond Chechnya proper—a process that further accelerated after 2007. In turn, the Salafist presence is often used as an explanation for political violence and terrorism in Russia.

This marginalization is uneven across various Muslim groups. The Central Spiritual Directorate of Muslims in Russia (TsDUMR) and Council of Muftis of Russia—the two main umbrella organizations for Muslims in Russia—maintain a monopoly over official Islamic practice in the country. In the Volga region, where the republics of Tatarstan and Bashkortostan and Astrakhan Oblast are home to large percentages of Muslims, these two organizations compete for believers and have experienced little competition from nontraditional Islamic communities. In the North Caucasus, however, the local spiritual boards are widely viewed as corrupt and biased against the more austere forms of practice that have gained in popularity since 1991; in Dagestan, for example, there has also been substantial infighting for control of these institutions. This, in turn, leads to religiously motivated violence by those groups that find themselves outside of the political-confessional alliance. This violence has a larger social impact; among ethnic Russians there has been a notable rise in

xenophobia and racism against non-Slavs, including Muslims from both the North and South Caucasus and Central Asia.

Further contributing to the rise in social tensions is migration from the North Caucasus to other parts of the Russian state. Many Muslims from Russia's southern periphery now live in Moscow. Commonly held to be one of the most important cities in Orthodox Christendom—the Third Rome after Rome itself and Constantinople—the city's religious landscape has been transformed, most visibly through the reconstruction and reopening of Orthodox churches such as the Cathedral of Christ the Savior. Yet Moscow is a heterogeneous and dynamic city, serving as the node for migrants from the “near abroad” states of Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Moldova, and Ukraine—a post-imperial metropole that cannot be characterized as solely Orthodox. These migrants have substantially altered the city's religious balance, with the first three groups bringing with them Muslim religious practices to the Russian capital.

The Volga basin republics form a third region of Russia where Islam is widely practiced. Kazan, the political, cultural, and economic capital of Tatarstan, was the center of an aggressive post-Soviet sovereignty movement, but unlike Grozny—a city with which it was often discussed in tandem in the early 1990s—avoided open conflict with Moscow. In the past two decades Kazan has undergone a widespread re-Islamization, with the construction or reconstruction of more than fifty mosques (only one was officially in operation in 1989). The most visible is the massive Kul Sharif Mosque, which is symbolically located within the Kazan Kremlin near a historic Orthodox cathedral. Research from the 1990s indicated that a significant majority of Kazanian Tatars, similarly to those throughout Tatarstan, began identifying as “believers” soon after the demise of the Soviet system. However, reported religious belief in the 1990s did not translate into active practice, as few Tatars in Kazan and other parts of Tatarstan attended mosques, prayed, or followed any of the other central tenets of Islam; rather, the first decade of the Tatars' Islamic revival was tightly intertwined with a broader ethno-national revival and the region's quest for sovereignty.¹⁸

Although political elites in Kazan drew on the Tatars' Islamic identity as partial justification for Tatarstan's sovereignty campaign, they have been careful not to marginalize Russian Orthodoxy—ethnic Russians account for about half the city's population and 40 percent of the region as a whole. The po-

litical establishment instead officially upholds a policy of religious parity, touting the relations between the two main traditional religions in Kazan as a model of interfaith tolerance and peace—a message that has become increasingly pronounced in the Putin era of political-territorial recentralization. At the same time, officials are increasingly anxious over the upswing in recent years of literalist expressions of Islam; such “nontraditional” forms, generally attributed in Kazan to Wahhabism or Salafism, are framed as foreign imports and commonly linked to an influx of migrants from Central Asia and other Muslim-majority regions of Russia.

When aggregated, it is difficult to precisely pin down the number of Muslims in Russia. These estimates vary, ranging up to the frequently cited number of twenty million ethnic Muslims, a number first offered by President Putin in a 2003 speech. Some commentators have predicted that the Russian state will be majority Muslim by 2050, the result of divergent fertility rates and lower life expectancies between Slavs and traditionally Muslim groups. A similar prediction—that the high birthrates among traditionally Muslim ethnic groups would change the population picture (“by the year 2000 every second child born in the country could be of Muslim origin”)—was made prior to the breakup of the Soviet Union.¹⁹ More measured estimates come from the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, which predicted that Muslims would compose just below 15 percent of Russia’s total population by 2030.²⁰ A precise calculation of the size of Russia’s minority religious groups remains impossible, however, because no question on religious affiliation is included in the Russian census. Estimates are usually based on population counts for the ethnic groups that traditionally practice these religions.

Post-Soviet Islam in Central Asia

Concerns over the “threat” that Muslims pose to a Moscow-centered state are not new. During the late Soviet period, Central Asia was theorized to be the key site for the emergence of any anti-state movement associated with a politicized Islam against the USSR. In 1990, for instance, Michael Rywkin, one of the leading scholars of the Soviet Union’s Muslim populations, contended that the Muslims of Central Asia, their collective worldview shaped by Islam, were innately averse to modernization in general and to Sovietization in particular; their “continuing unassimilability,” he asserted, “will present the Soviet state with its greatest challenge as the world’s last great multinational

empire prepares to enter the twenty-first century.”²¹ Yet Muslims of Soviet Central Asia were among the most ardent supporters of retaining the union. A March 17, 1991, referendum on the future of the USSR posed the following question: “Do you consider necessary the preservation of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics as a renewed federation of equal sovereign republics in which the rights and freedom of an individual of any nationality will be fully guaranteed?” At least 94 percent of the voters in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan said “yes,” compared to only 71 percent in Russia.²² For a great majority of Central Asians after the breakup, independence was experienced as a highly ambivalent affair, not as the reward of a religiously inspired popular political movement.

Post-Soviet Islamic revivalism in Central Asia is unified by a set of inherited institutions and practices. In the wake of 1991, all five newly independent “Stans” formally declared themselves constitutionally secular states that were dedicated to freedom of conscience and religion. In practical terms, however, top political leaders were guided by the type of authoritarian, strong-state mentality and distrust of free religious markets that defined Soviet rule; assisted by state-affiliated institutions—perhaps most notably including national Muslim Spiritual Directorates²³—they moved to harness Islam’s public return by crafting and encouraging quasi-official national versions of religion. The relative salience of Islam in post-Soviet Central Asia’s nation- and state-building projects varied from territory to territory. In Kazakhstan, for instance, the importance of Islam was muted by a nascent national ideology that drew on the legacies of Tengrism, a pre-Islamic spirituality that incorporated elements of animism and shamanism. In Uzbekistan, late President Islam Karimov insisted on the enlightened status of the Uzbek people as his government put its weight behind what Adeeb Khalid has termed a “secular Islam,”²⁴ an appellation that would appear a logical contradiction were not the Soviet legacy of nation-building in Central Asia kept in mind. In Turkmenistan, “official” Islam was mixed with late President Saparmurat Niyazov’s infamous cult of personality; for example, Niyazov elevated himself as a spiritual leader in the vein of the Prophet Muhammad, dictating that mosque sermons include reading passages from his *Ruhnama* (*The Book of the Soul*) alongside passages of the Koran.

As the first decade of independence progressed, it became increasingly clear that state-subsidized versions of Islam were ill-equipped to compete with

new religious movements. Central Asian governments—much like Moscow at the time—were initially alarmed by the success of evangelical Christian proselytization and the conversion of traditionally Muslim peoples in the region; these concerns, however, were soon eclipsed by anxieties about the growing popularity of conservative, literalist forms of Islam. The lesson drawn, however, was not to liberalize religious marketplaces, but rather to supplement *de facto* state patronage of national religions with new laws that tightly control the scope of religious diversity in the region. The case of Kyrgyzstan is instructive here. The republic's 1997 Law on Religious Freedom and Religious Organizations (echoing Russia's Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations of the same year) set the tone for the region in requiring all religious groups to register with its State Agency for Religious Affairs (SARA), another Soviet-era institution with analogs in other post-Soviet Central Asian states. SARA of Kyrgyzstan was empowered to deny registration to religious organizations on a number of grounds, but a central consideration for rejection was whether a given religious organization was deemed to threaten state security or social stability.²⁵ The "threat" script served to further justify the state's privilege for "traditional" religions (Hanafi Islam and Orthodox Christianity,²⁶ as laid out in Kyrgyzstan's revamped 2007 constitution): Unlike "nontraditional" religions, they are understood as being apolitical and do not upset established configurations of group identity.

Post-Soviet Central Asia is also unified by increasing contact with the global *umma* (the community of Islamic believers)—through digital media, interaction with foreign missionaries who remain active in the region (in spite of state attempts to extinguish such activities), and greater opportunities to travel abroad (including making the *hajj*). For many observers, the reestablishment of ties with the global *umma* has been associated with a purported rise in Islamic fundamentalism, extremism, and even terrorism in the region. Conflicts in the region that are interpreted through a religious lens are more complex in their causes and motivations than simply Islamic radicalization. One must be cautious in linking incidents of religious extremism or politicized Islam occurring among post-Soviet Muslim societies to dynamics witnessed on larger geographic scales, as in doing so one risks hardening essentialist assumptions that Islam is inherently political, resistant to modern territorial divisions, and ultimately leads to anti-secular militancy. In this telling, the Soviet era was a historical diversion of little consequence, and post-Soviet politics as mediated by religion are a natural consequence of a

double “return”—the public return of Islam in the region, and the return of the region itself to a broader “Muslim World.”

Conclusion: From Private to Public

Religion, as a social process, reflects continuity rather than change from Soviet to post-Soviet. Private belief was maintained by Russia’s Muslims during the Soviet period. In 1974, 63 percent of all Chechens identified themselves as “believers” and only 12 percent of Chechens claimed to be atheists.²⁷ A survey conducted in the first years after the breakup reported a similar trend for another Muslim group in the North Caucasus; 74 percent of Avars (the largest national group in Dagestan) responded that they were religious believers and active practitioners.²⁸ In addition to this high level of self-identification, other religious practices were maintained during the Soviet years, including *sunnat* (ritual circumcision) and other religious rites, such as *nikakh* (a traditional wedding ceremony) and *kurban bairam* (“Festival of the Sacrifice,” one of Islam’s two most important holidays).

In the post-Soviet period believers increasingly have the opportunity to express that belief. In the decade after 1991, mosques were built in the North Caucasus, the Volga basin, and Central Asia. For example, the number of mosques in Dagestan mushroomed from twenty seven in 1990 to more than 2,000 a decade later.²⁹ They assumed the functions of unofficial mosques that emerged in the Soviet Union particularly during the 1960s and 1970s; in Central Asia, Zelkina writes of a parallel Islam that “functioned through a network of underground schools, mosques, and structures of Sufi (mystical) orders centered around local sheikhs.”³⁰ Given this rapid growth, the Russian government has tried to manage Islam in its national republics, primarily by bringing these new mosques into the existing institutional fold. The same type of policy has been pursued with varying levels of success in Central Asia.

Such attempts at the state management of religion are consistent across religions and through historical periods. But ultimately there are questions of both effectiveness and need. Both the Soviet Union and its successor states have used legislation and hierarchical institutions as mechanisms to control religions, their leaders, and believers. These attempts ultimately reflect the contradictions associated with religious practice and belief in the post-Soviet space.

Endnotes

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11. Geraldine Fagan, "Religious Freedom Survey, February 2005," *Forum18*, February 14, 2005, http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=509.
12. By "territorialization" we mean the close association of a certain religion of practice with a geographically delimited area, including states but also substate regions such as Russia's national republics.

13. Alexander Agadjanian, "Revising Pandora's Gifts: Religious and National Identity in the Post-Soviet Societal Fabric," *Europe-Asia Studies* 53, no. 3 (2001): 474.
14. Froese (2008), 155.
15. Aleksei Malashenko, "Islam Versus Communism: The Experience of Coexistence," in Dale Eickelman (ed.), *Russia's Muslim Frontiers: New Directions in Cross-Cultural Analysis* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 63.
16. Catherine the Great first established a muftiate for the Russian Empire's Volga Muslims in the late eighteenth century, in the wake of the Pugachev Rebellion, with the aim of bringing Islamic practice under state control. Galina Yemelianova generally characterizes the muftiates as "effective tools of control and regulation of the Muslim minority by the state." Galina Yemelianova, "Russia's *Umma* and its Muftis," *Religion, State, and Society* 31, no. 2 (2003): 140.
17. Salafism can be generally equated with Wahhabism, the term more commonly used in Russia, frequently with derogatory connotations.
18. Matthew Derrick, "The Muslim Spiritual Board of Tatarstan, Political-Territorial Transformation, and the Changing Character of Tatar Islam," *Journal of Central Asian and Caucasian Studies* 9, no. 18 (2014): 47-80.
19. Michael Rywkin, *Moscow's Muslim Challenge: Soviet Central Asia* (London: M.E. Sharpe, 1990), vii.
20. Pew Forum, "The Future of the Global Muslim Population: Projections for 2010-2030," January 27, 2011, www.pewforum.org/future-of-the-global-muslim-population-russia.aspx.
21. Rywkin (1990), viii-ix.
22. Valery Tishkov, *Ethnicity, Nationalism, and Conflict in and after the Soviet Union* (London: Sage Publications, 1997), 50-51.
23. In 1943, Stalin decreed the creation of the Muslim Spiritual Directorate of Central Asia and Kazakhstan (SADUM), with its headquarters in Tashkent, as a means of governing all Islamic activities in the region. With the breakup of the USSR, SADUM was replaced with five new independent Spiritual Directorates—one for each newly independent state of post-Soviet Central Asia.
24. Adeb Khalid, "A Secular Islam: Nation, State, and Religion in Uzbekistan," *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 35, no. 4 (2003): 573-598.
25. U.S. State Department, "International Religious Freedom Report 2008: Kyrgyz Republic" (2008), <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2008/108502.htm>.
26. The recognition of Orthodox Christianity in addition to Islam is a reflection of the fact that, largely as a result of Soviet-era migration patterns, ethnic Russians form a significant ethnic minority in Kyrgyzstan, today accounting for about 7 percent of the country's total population (down from about 20 percent a quarter century ago), mainly clustered in Bishkek.

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HOW "THE STATE" SURVIVED THE COLLAPSE OF THE SOVIET UNION*

William E. Pomeranz

A quarter century after the demise of the Soviet Union, the term post-Soviet continues to be used as a general tag for the remains of an empire. Russia often talks of reviving the Soviet space, even if its search for economic integration (the Eurasian Economic Union) and military partners (the Collective Security Treaty Organization) has failed to reach critical mass among the former Soviet republics. Yet outside the Baltic States, which eschewed ties with the former Soviet Union and definitively left for the European Union in 2004, the post-Soviet label retains its relevance in large part because the country's former members still share a common political legacy: the unified state.

Historically, the Imperial/Soviet state encompassed more than just the bureaucracy and public administration; it also served as the sole source of political authority while retaining substantial law-creating powers for itself. The first article of Imperial Russia's 1906 Fundamental Laws proudly declared that the "Russian State is one and indivisible."¹ Meanwhile, the 1977 Soviet constitution began by addressing the essential features of the Soviet state, including democratic centralism, socialist law, and the exercise of "state power" through a single institution (the Soviet of People's Deputies). The latter, of course, was a legal fiction. The Communist Party exercised monopoly rights over state power as expressed in Article 6 of the 1977 Soviet constitution.

The failure to impose limitations—whether through natural law theory, civil society, private law, or an elected legislature—separates the Tsarist/Soviet state from its Western counterparts. The state's prominence in the post-Soviet space was not immediately evident in the respective constitutions drafted by the 12 former republics; in many instances, the state's powers were not formally articulated. Other references appeared either benign or overly abstract.

Nevertheless, the idea of the state—as the single and supreme governing institution—endures across the post-Soviet expanse. Russia has embraced the concept, Ukraine continues to challenge it, while Kazakhstan, Belarus, and other former republics have rallied around these core statist principles as the best means for preserving personal rule and the status quo. Attitudes may vary, but as this chapter demonstrates, the traditional image of the unified state still links the diverse members of the former Soviet Union, to the direct detriment of any alternative notion of separation of powers.

The Rebirth of the Russian State

Russia serves as the prime example as to how the state emerged victorious during the transition process. The preamble to the 1993 Russian constitution speaks of the need to preserve Russia's historic "state unity" and of renewing its "sovereign statehood." Article 5, part 3 further declares that the federative make-up of the Russian Federation shall be based upon its "state integrity" and the "unity of the system of state power."

The state occupies such a prominent place in the Russian constitution largely because it remains the only institution that traditionally has held the country—and empire—together. The state, however, is not just a historic relic; it plays a central part in Russia's current system of government. This role may not be succinctly expressed in the Russian constitution; nevertheless, it is present and highly influential.

Ironically, it is the constitutional provision theoretically establishing a separation of powers that underscores the importance of the state. Article 10 declares that "state power (*gosudarstvennaia vlast'*) shall be exercised on the basis of a division (*razdelenie*) into legislative, executive, and judicial [power]." These bodies, the clause continues, "shall be independent."

"State power" is, in fact, a standard term under Russian legal theory that broadly corresponds to sovereignty. Some scholars view state power as a product of certain basic social interactions.² Alternatively, other commentators view it as a statement of rudimentary force; according to one definition, state power is a "system of relations of supremacy and subordination, a concentrated expression of will and force of the dominating social, national stratum (class, nation) or of the people, embodied in the state-legal institutions. [State power] guarantees stability and order in society, defends its cit-

izens from external and internal encroachments by utilizing various methods and means, including state coercion and military force."³

Western commentators naturally gravitated to the second half of Article 10 and highlighted a notion of separation of powers as the essence of the provision and Russia's democratic reforms. For Russians, however, the clause remains much more ambiguous; it begins with a notion of state power, which historically is singular and supreme, and then introduces a division of functions that operates as part of a constitutionally endowed unified state system.⁴

Thus, instead of facilitating a radical transformation, Article 10 enshrined a fundamental contradiction at the heart of the Russian constitution that, as we will later see, would be replicated throughout the post-Soviet space. The provision incorporates the idea of a division of powers, but subordinates it to the principle of a single system of state power. As one prominent Russian jurist noted, a reasonable interpretation of Article 10 would be to refer to the judiciary as an "organ of state power" (i.e., a part of the state apparatus) as opposed to an equal and independent branch of government.⁵ Moreover, by its very title, state power is linked to, and exercised exclusively by, the state. And only one institution fully represents the interests of the state under the Russian constitution: the president. According to Article 80, part 2, the president serves as the guarantor of the sovereignty, independence, security, and state integrity of the Russian Federation while ensuring the coordination and integration of the organs of state power. The Russian president exercises this authority as head of state but conspicuously not as the chief of the executive branch; that title belongs to the prime minister, who leads the government.

Therefore, it is the president who *de facto* presides over the highest level of government and oversees the implementation of state power under the 1993 constitution. The separation of powers, as it turns out, is more of a matter of internal organization rather than a defining political principle. The 1993 constitution provided additional privileges to the president as head of state. Article 104 granted the Russian president (among several non-legislative institutions) the formal right to propose legislation before the Duma.⁶ The president further received the right to issue decrees and directives that possess the force of law, provided that they do not contradict prevailing federal law. The president, with the approval of the Federation Council, appoints the Prosecutor-General pursuant to Article 129, thereby removing this critical law enforcement agen-

cy from the executive branch and placing it under direct presidential control. Finally, the Constitutional Court, in a controversial 2005 decision, concluded that the president essentially possessed the right to appoint regional governors as part of a constitutionally mandated (although not actually defined) unified system of executive power.⁷

Admittedly, other competing theories can be found in the Russian constitution, including federalism, the ascendancy of civil liberties, and the social state. The constitution further assigns ultimate sovereignty to the Russian people, providing it with a democratic veneer. None of the above concepts, however, outranks the inherent powers of the unified state, even if the realization of this ideal is still far from complete; indeed, the Russian state—while robust when defending its own interests—historically has been ruled through weak, arbitrary, underfunded, and often corrupt institutions.⁸ Moreover, the theoretical aspiration for state unity does not mean that the Russian government, from a purely policy standpoint, consistently pursues this objective. Vladimir Putin has followed a centuries-long tradition of supporting, and then backing away from, “modernization” depending on how it impacts his ability to maintain state control.

Historians and legal scholars have attempted to explain these policy differences by focusing on the “duality” of the Russian state and its underlying laws. Richard Sakwa, for example, distinguishes between Russia’s constitutional state and administrative regime, with neither side being sufficiently dominant enough to set the political agenda.⁹ Such splits undoubtedly exist in practice, and present-day Russian law has succeeded in penetrating various levels of state administration and daily life. From a philosophical standpoint, however, the dual state has never been upheld as a suitable model for national governance; on the contrary, it conjures up images of weakness and the collapse of law and order. Therefore, Russian legal theory extols the unified state, where the crucial relationship—between ruler and the state—is not formally regulated by law, whether the ruler is a tsar, general secretary, or president.

While many political scientists have dubbed the Russian political system super-presidential, it could just as well be described as traditionally statist. Fiona Hill and Clifford Gaddy, in their insightful biography of Vladimir Putin, list his belief in state power as one of his essential core identities.¹⁰ This underlying faith in the state as a positive—and indeed only—unifying political

force can be found in other post-Soviet constitutions as well. For Ukraine, the struggle to extract itself from this statist ideology, and introduce a genuine separation of powers, has dominated its post-Soviet existence.

The Post-Soviet Model of Statehood

Few Western commentators were naïve enough to believe that democracy would immediately flourish in the post-Soviet space. The former republics had lived under autocratic and authoritarian rule for so long that they lacked any national institutions that could facilitate such a transition. Not surprisingly, these new nations turned to what they knew best, which could be found in their common understanding of Soviet law and the pre-eminence of the state.

Thus, with the exception of Moldova, 11 out of the 12 post-Soviet constitutions linked "state power" with the concept of separation of powers. Most notably, Ukraine, despite all its efforts to distinguish itself from the Russian Federation, contained a similar expression of separation of powers as set forth in the Russian constitution. Article 6 of the Ukrainian constitution proclaims that "state power in Ukraine is exercised on the principles of its division into legislative, executive, and judicial [power]."

Therefore, just as in Russia, state power precedes any notion of separation of powers as the defining governing principle in Ukraine. The constitution further describes Ukraine as a unitary state, attributing almost mystical powers to the institution; according to Article 11, "The state promotes the consolidation and development of the Ukraine nation, of its historical consciousness, traditions and culture, and also the development of the ethnic, linguistic and religious identity of all indigenous peoples and national minorities of Ukraine." On a more practical level, the Ukrainian president, as head of state, enjoys similar executive privileges to those of his Russian counterpart, including the right to exercise legislative initiative, issue presidential decrees, and control over the appointment of the Ukrainian Prosecutor-General.

That state power precedes and in effect trumps any nascent concept of separation of powers remains one of the consistent features of post-Soviet constitutional thought. In Kazakhstan, for example, Article 2 declares that the state "ensures the integrity, inviolability and inalienability of its territory." Moreover, the articulation of state power follows the same formula as set forth in the Russian and Ukrainian constitutions. According to Article 6, "The state power

in the Republic of Kazakhstan is unified and executed on the basis of the Constitution and laws in accordance with the principle of its division into the legislative, executive and judicial branches and a system of checks and balances that governs their interaction.” Finally, the Kazakh president pursuant to Article 40 serves as “the symbol and guarantor of the unity of the people and state power.”

One can go down the list of post-Soviet constitutions and identify variations on the above theme, where any theoretical separation of powers is subordinated to an assertion of state power. Each successor republic must somehow reconcile the inconsistency of such thinking. Belarus, for example, has emphasized state power in introducing strict presidential rule, while Georgia, like Ukraine, has tried to re-interpret these competing principles along more democratic grounds. Moldova represents the main outlier, as Article 2 of its constitution exclusively links state power to the people’s right to exercise their national sovereignty. Nevertheless, Moldova remains connected to the post-Soviet space, since its primary constitutional dysfunction—a divided territory within a self-proclaimed unitary state—traces its origins directly back to the Soviet Union’s demise.

The Persistence of the Unified State

While no single sentence necessarily is determinative of a nation’s fate, state power has proven to be a remarkably durable concept. In the 1990s, Russia possessed a lively—and highly oppositional—Duma as well as an emerging vertical division of powers between Moscow and the regions. Both were eventually snuffed out by Vladimir Putin and his vision of the unified state, as elucidated in the 1993 constitution and in Russian history. Meanwhile, Ukraine is in the midst of a political transformation that fundamentally seeks to alter the relationship between the state and the other branches of government. Yet this experiment has already been tried once in Ukraine, with less than satisfactory results. In 2004, the Ukrainian parliament passed a series of constitutional amendments that substantially altered the balance of power between the president and the legislature, only to see these changes declared unconstitutional by the Ukrainian Constitutional Court in 2010. The latter decision paved the way for President Yanukovich’s revanchist state policies while seriously undermining public confidence in an independent judiciary.

Ukraine received a rare second chance in 2014 and, despite multiple ongoing crises, the possibility still exists to rethink its understanding of separation of powers. To succeed, however, the Ukrainian constitution must continue to evolve, stay open to interpretation, and be actively defended by civil society. Failure most likely would result in a return to the statist system that paradoxically also finds considerable support in the Ukrainian constitution.

The unified state consistently has defeated attempts at democratic reform in the post-Soviet space. The established state impedes change in other ways as well. Corrupt patron networks are a common feature throughout the former Soviet Union, yet despite broad public recognition of this problem, exposing and punishing high-level corruption has proven to be almost impossible.¹² The state naturally is reluctant to go after its own, other than to send periodic warnings to potential rivals. Bureaucrats, however, have an additional advantage; as servants of a highly powerful—and over-idealized—state, they also conveniently are representatives of the highest public good and therefore virtually unassailable.

Thus, despite various democratic trappings, the state quickly re-established itself as the dominant political actor in the former Soviet Union. The basic constitutional underpinnings of the statist system include: (1) the notion of a single and unified state as the highest political goal; (2) the supremacy of state power over all other branches of government; and (3) a president assigned the exclusive right to represent and to defend the state. But even this system already has experienced a unique institutional twist. From 2008–2012, Vladimir Putin served as prime minister to President Dmitry Medvedev. There was little doubt that Putin remained in charge, as his unilateral decision to return to the presidency later confirmed. Nevertheless, Putin demonstrated that one does not even need to be president to exercise control of the state, and that the latter remains the highest source of power in the post-Soviet space.

Conclusion

The veneration of the state has deep roots in Tsarist and Soviet thought. Therefore, it comes as little surprise that, twenty-five years after the collapse, the former Soviet republics still share a common political outlook even if other factors—language, economics, demographics, religion—are slowly

pushing them apart. What is particularly compelling is that while commentators focused attention on the new branches of government described in the post-Soviet constitutions, they consistently overlooked how the state managed to preserve its institutional powers over the other branches. The state did not wither away after seventy-four years of Marxism, and it is still going strong a quarter century after the end of the Soviet Union. Indeed, no matter what adjective one places in front of the term “state” in Imperial, Soviet, and post-Soviet history—absolutist, autocratic, socialist, totalitarian, secular, democratic—it is the state that always manages to survive. The supremacy of the unified state—as the highest governing principle and ultimate source of political authority—remains a defining feature of the post-Soviet space and, as it turns out, the most difficult one to overcome.

Acknowledgements

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Endnotes

- ★ This chapter was originally published as a *Kennan Cable*. See <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/kennan-cable-no18-how-the-state-survived-the-collapse-the-soviet-union>.
- 1. The "unified state," and how it functioned in a multiethnic empire, featured prominently in the works of the Tsarist legal commentator Baron Boris Nolde. For an overview of Nolde's writings, see Peter Holquist, "Dilemmas of a Progressive Administrator: Baron Boris Nolde," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 7 no. 2 (2006): 241-273.
- 2. T.N. Rad'ko, V.V. Lazarev, and L.A. Morozova, *Teoriia Gosudarstva i Prava* (Moscow: Prospect, 2014), 443-447.
- 3. V.D. Perevalov, et al., *Teoriia gosudarstva i Prava* (Moscow: NORMA, 2008), 53.
- 4. V.V. Komarova, et al., *Konstitutsionnaia Zakonnost v Realizatsii Printsipa Razdeleniia Vlastei na Primere Rossiiskoi Federatsii* (Moscow: Prospect, 2014), 46-55.
- 5. Anatolii Lyskov, "Sud-Eto Organ Gosudarstvennoi Vlasti," *Kommersant Vlast'* 27, July 13, 2009, 23-25.
- 6. Under Article 104, the right of legislative initiative belongs to the president, both houses of the federal legislature, the government, the Supreme Court, the Constitutional Court, and legislative bodies of subjects of the Russian Federation.
- 7. William Pomeranz, "President Medvedev and the Contested Constitutional Underpinnings of Russia's Power Vertical," *Demokratizatsiya* 17, no. 2 (2009): 179-192.
- 8. Marie Mendras, *Russian Politics: The Paradox of a Weak State* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).
- 9. Richard Sakwa, *Putin Redux: Power and Contradiction in Contemporary Russia* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), 62-79.
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FROZEN FRAGMENTS, SIMMERING SPACES: The Post-Soviet De Facto States

Gerard Toal and John O'Loughlin

The collapse of the Soviet Union was an event of global significance—all the more so because the process did not trigger an interstate war. The continent-spanning superpower with a terrifying arsenal of nuclear weapons dissolved, and fifteen successor states emerged and soon projected all the signs and accouterments of functioning states: centers of sovereignty, state bureaucracies, and official symbols of nation-state identity. The process, however, was not smooth; in many places, the disintegration of the Soviet Union was far from peaceful. In the Baltic and Black Sea/Caucasus regions, the territorial order created over decades by the Soviet Union had already fallen apart. As an empire, albeit one that thought of itself as anti-imperialist, the Soviet Union was a product of conquest by the Red Army as well as decades of population transfers and cartographic tinkering by a small Bolshevik elite. While the territorial order was not solely created by the Communists (it built upon Tsarist spatial legacies and historical forms), the official borders of the Soviet Union when it was dissolved in late 1991 were in many regions “Bolshevik borders.” In many places, that was already a problem and it would become more so as former Soviet Republics laid claim to the “territorial integrity” of the new sovereign states on the basis of the legal principle *uti possidetis* (as you possess).

In this chapter we examine the fragments of Soviet territorial arrangements that came apart, spaces designated as the homelands of “titular” groups that were recognized as autonomous entities within the Soviet Union and claimed exclusively by their official “parent” republics. Even before the fifteen successor republics gained their independence, key questions emerged about the status and spaces of titular nations. We examine three of them (Karabakhi/Armenian, Ossetian, and Abkhaz), and how they sought to secede from their parent states (Azerbaijan and Georgia), along

with a fourth—a former autonomous entity in Transnistria within Moldova (see Figure 1). We then present research on political attitudes in these four territories today.



Figure 1: Locations and territorial extent of the four de facto states (Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Nagorno Karabakh, and Transnistria) in the Black Sea and Caucasus region.

Making and Breaking the Soviet Fragments

The problem of the Soviet territorial order first became manifest as the ethno-territories¹ created to manage the socio-spatial diversity of regions across the Soviet Union's vast expanse started to test the boundaries of *glasnost* and *perestroika*. These political units were overseen by local administrative institutions responsible for the integration of contested spaces that saw conflict and violence during the period of revolution and civil war from 1917 to 1922. For example, on October 31, 1921, the Caucasian Bureau, the highest Bolshevik decision-making committee in the Caucasus, authorized the creation of a South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast (SOAO) within Soviet Georgia. The decision came in the wake of violence and invasion. In February 1918 and again in April 1920, South Ossetian villagers rose up against the Menshevik government in Georgia. The 1920 revolt, initially successful, was brutally crushed, and the Georgian government expelled thousands of Ossetians from the region.² In February 1921, the Soviet Red Army invaded and brought an end to the Democratic Republic of Georgia. South Ossetian Bolsheviks, denied the

goal of joining North Ossetia, appealed for autonomy within Soviet Georgia, something Georgian Bolsheviks opposed. The creation of the South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast was a compromise measure, its borders delimited after much negotiation. Nevertheless, the SOAO remained controversial with Georgian nationalists who reasoned that, absent the Red Army's invasion, South Ossetia would not exist. The creation of the Nagorny-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast (NKAO) as a majority Armenian enclave within Soviet Azerbaijan was a similar attempt to appease two competing centers of power.³

Abkhazia was different. It was initially proclaimed as a Soviet Republic within the Transcaucasian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic and only later saw its status diminished and subordinated to Soviet Georgia. Transnistria, at the time (1924), was created as an autonomous oblast within the Moldavian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (MASSR), then part of Soviet Ukraine.⁴ After the Soviet Union seized Bessarabia in 1940, following a secret additional protocol to the Nazi-Soviet pact of August 1939, Transnistria became part of the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic. This new entity was quickly overrun by anti-Soviet forces in June 1941, but retaken in 1944.

The nested forms of territorial governance across the Soviet Union required active management by the federal center to broker disputes between local and republican levels of government. For the most part, the process worked because the federal center was the ultimate decision-making authority, and because, when necessary, it was prepared to use force. During and after the Great Patriotic War, Stalin's government used brutal methods to create the socio-demographic spaces it wanted. A series of small nations were collectively punished by forced displacement to Siberia and Central Asia for alleged collaboration with the Nazis, among them Crimean Tatars and Chechens. When the power of the federal center began to falter in the 1980s, and its use of force proved inept, the territorial order of the Soviet Union began to disintegrate.⁵

It was in the South Caucasus that the first visible fraying occurred. In August 1987, Karabakhi activists sent a petition to the Central Committee in Moscow calling for the administration of the NKAO to be transferred to Armenia. When the petition was rejected in February 1988, a Karabakhi campaign of civil disobedience stoked fear among local Azerbaijanis. On February 21, an outbreak of ethnic violence against Karabakh Armenians that left two dead

catapulted the issue of Nagorny-Karabakh's status to the forefront of politics in the region and beyond. A deadly cycle of violence gathered momentum as pogrom fed pogrom.⁶ At the time, nationalist forces controlled neither Armenia nor Azerbaijan. The emergence of a rivalry between the two Soviet Republics over Karabakh, however, created a conflict that swept nationalist forces to power in both republics. The Soviet center tried to intervene, but in an inept way that alienated both Armenia and Azerbaijan. From a small, largely mountainous region in the South Caucasus, a territory never before considered core to the homeland envisioned by either Soviet Republic, violence and bitter ethnic cleansing erupted as both sides fought to secure the maximum possible territory.

The process of territorial fragmentation and accompanying cycles of violence was different elsewhere in the Caucasus. In Soviet Georgia, political liberalization revived nationalist aspirations for a whole and free nation with Georgians as the supreme people; ethnic Abkhaz (only 17.89% of Abkhazia's population in the 1989 census) revived the ideal of a more independent and autonomous Abkhazia. The Soviet Army's botched attempt to repress a Georgian nationalist protest in Tbilisi on April 9, 1989, provoked by an Abkhaz rally for independence, radicalized politics and contributed to the nationalist demagogue Zviad Gamsakhurdia's rise to power in October 1990.⁷ Gamsakhurdia had led a protest caravan of Georgian nationalists against South Ossetia in November 1989 (the month the Berlin Wall fell) that resulted in the first ethnic violence in the area in recent times. To Gamsakhurdia and his supporters, Georgia had been under Soviet occupation since 1921, and the ethnoterritorial entities created during Soviet rule were imperial encumbrances on the Georgian body politic. As radical Georgian nationalists sought to repeal the Soviet constitution, the ethnoterritorial structures created by the Soviets became institutional vehicles for Abkhaz leaders in Sukhum (Sokhumi) and Ossetians in Tskhinval(i) to break away from the territorial order being rearranged by the new government in Tbilisi. Under pressure in multiple locations from forces moving in opposing directions, the Soviet territorial order shattered.

The structural pattern in Georgia and its autonomous areas, where extremists pursuing ethno-nationalist visions provoked countermobilization and secessionism, looked similar in Moldova, but with two important differences. First, unlike Georgia, there was no standing institutional vehicle to push secessionism by the Russophone population on the left bank of the Dniester

River (the MASSR disappeared in 1941). Rather, the territory had a distinctive identity because its history and political economy, especially its industrial character, were different from right-bank Moldova (Bessarabia). Second, unlike the Georgian case, the rhetoric of countermobilization against the Moldovan nationalism that was temporarily ascendant in Chişinău/Kishinev was not ethnic but Soviet. It drew upon longstanding, moralized dichotomies from the Great Patriotic War, in which a united, multiethnic people fight against fascists from the West. In this script, all nationalism is innately fascist; only the Soviet Union/Russia stands for the “friendship of peoples.” Revisionist attitudes in the Baltic states and elsewhere toward the Great Patriotic War (including criticism of Moscow for ignoring the Nazi-Soviet pact of 1939), and policies privileging one nation’s language and culture above all others were purported evidence of “fascistic” nationalism. Moves by the democratically elected Popular Front of Moldova in the fall of 1989 to legislatively enshrine the Moldovan language, the Latin script, and special relations with Romania within the still-Soviet Republic provoked the creation of a Pridnestrovian Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic centered in Transnistria in September 1990. This became the foundation of Transnistria, which fought a brief war from March to July 1992 to secure “independence” from the successor Moldovan state that had been recognized by the international community after the Soviet Union’s collapse.

Questioning Post-Soviet De Facto States

A *de facto* state is a political entity that has proclaimed itself the sovereign ruler of a specified territory and has managed to survive for two years or more controlling all or part of that territory.⁸ While they may possess domestic or “internal sovereignty” by virtue of this control, their failure to acquire international legal sovereignty, sometimes termed “external sovereignty,” by the existing community of states means they are unrecognized *de facto*, not *de jure*, states.

The collapse of the Soviet Union saw the emergence of a series of *de facto* states in troubled territories. One that emerged on the territory of the Russian Federation, the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria, achieved recognition for a few years but was subsequently extinguished in the Second Chechen War.⁹ Other potentially troublesome territories with large ethnic Russian populations, like Crimea and the Donbas in Ukraine, as well as northern

Kazakhstan, saw rising tensions and secessionist sentiment but no emerging de facto states. In total, four post-Soviet de facto states have endured over the last quarter century: the republics of Abkhazia, Nagorny Karabakh, South Ossetia, and the Pridnestrovian Moldavian Republic (PMR, a.k.a. Transnistria). (Figure 1 indicates their locations by the extent of their current territorial control). Each is distinctive, and glibly homogenizing them or viewing them largely as post-Soviet phenomena can miss a great deal. Four points help illustrate why this is so.

Post-Soviet de facto states express and prolong pre-Soviet and Soviet era territorial conflicts.

As explained above, these post-Soviet de facto states are located in places with long histories of territorial rivalry between competing nationalizing projects. Efforts to organize diverse multiethnic Tsarist spaces into homogeneous nation-states were short-circuited by the triumph of the Bolsheviks. While the Soviet Union helped create the territorial templates of contemporary states, it complicated this by recognizing ethnoterritories within these spaces and/or adding neighboring spaces for geopolitical reasons. The transfer of Crimea from Soviet Russia to Soviet Ukraine in 1954 created a disjuncture between the imagined nation space of Russian nationalists (based on Tsarist and later Great Patriotic War visions) and the actual borders of Soviet Russia. This would prove to be a source of resentment and irredentist aspirations as Ukraine and Russia became successor states of the USSR. Within parts of Ukraine, especially Crimea, and to a lesser extent the Donbas, pro-Russia forces did aspire to break away and join Russia.¹⁰ These sentiments, encouraged by some in Russia, were never seriously pursued by the Yeltsin administration after the election of Leonid Kuchma as president of Ukraine in July 1994.

Post-Soviet de facto states are simmering, not frozen, conflicts.

Because the fragmentation of the post-Soviet republics of Georgia, Moldova, and Azerbaijan was locked in place by a variety of cease-fire settlements in the early to mid-1990s, the term “frozen conflicts” became a journalistic cliché. The legacies of violence in each case are very different. At one end of the scale is Nagorny Karabakh. At the time of the cease-fire in May 1994, an estimated 750,000 Azerbaijanis were driven from their homes, the vast majority not from the NKAO but from surrounding provinces seized by Ar-

menian forces as well as from Armenia proper. More than 300,000 ethnic Armenians inside Azerbaijan also were forcefully displaced. It is estimated that around 35,000 died in the conflict.

Next comes Abkhazia. At the time of the cease-fire in September 1993, well over half a million Georgians had been forcefully displaced. Estimates of wartime deaths also range as high as 35,000, the vast majority Georgian civilians. South Ossetia's conflict, which broke out in January 1991, ended with the Sochi agreement of June 1992. Approximately two thousand people died. While there was forced displacement, it was less extensive than in Abkhazia. Moreover, Georgia retained a presence in South Ossetia until August 2008. The fighting in Moldova in 1992 was largely concentrated in the period from March to July. A few hundred people were killed on either side. The intervention of the Soviet/Russian Fourteenth Army established a peace that has lasted to this day.

This is not the case elsewhere. In August 2008, Russia and Georgia fought a brief war over a Georgian attempt to take back South Ossetia. Georgia was defeated and approximately 15,000 Georgian residents of South Ossetia were unable to return to their destroyed homes. Two weeks after the cease-fire agreement, the Russian Federation broke its policy of not recognizing secessionist movements and their de facto states. On August 26, 2008, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev recognized the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, a move only a few other states followed. Russia continued to not recognize Transnistria or Nagorny Karabakh. In April 2016, a "four-day" war broke out between Nagorny Karabakh and Azerbaijan, which managed to seize some territory before the fighting was brought to an end. Casualties are believed to have been in the low hundreds.

The post-Soviet de facto states are not simply fragments of empire.

It is worth grasping how the different de facto states relate to the Soviet Union. For the Republic of Nagorny Karabakh, the Soviet Union was the overarching power structure that prevented it from joining Armenia and securing the territory for the Armenian majority in the face of perceived Azerbaijani encroachment and repression. For South Ossetia, the Soviet Union created the autonomous oblast and institutionalized ethnic links with North Ossetia. For ethnic Abkhaz in Abkhazia, the legacy is mixed. On one hand,

the Soviet Union became a vehicle for downgrading the status of Abkhazia and allowing “Georgians in the Kremlin” to pursue what they viewed as the “Georgianization” of Abkhazian territory, rendering the titular Abkhaz a small minority by 1991.¹¹ On the other, the Soviet Union in its heyday brought unprecedented prosperity to the region.

More than the other three post-Soviet de facto states, Transnistria came to be seen as a frozen fragment of the USSR. Its first post-Soviet president, Igor Smirnov, was a Communist Party stalwart and former factory manager from Kamchatka. Transnistria’s Soviet aura, however, was deceptive. Businesses based in the region secured the right to export to the European Union. But as in Russia, Soviet iconography and adapted state practices served to entrench a political economy that was organized around state-sanctioned oligarchic capitalism. In 2011, a politician with ties to competing factions within Transnistria’s oligarchy, Yevgeny Shevchuk, defeated both long-entrenched Smirnov and a Kremlin-backed candidate in the presidential election.

Russia’s policies toward the de facto states are constantly evolving.

Russia’s relationship with the post-Soviet de facto states has transformed over the last quarter century from ambivalence to active support. Moscow had a decisive role in creating Transnistria and, to a lesser and more debatable extent, in the formation of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. But it also refused to recognize the de facto states created there and maintained comprehensive economic sanctions (passed by the CIS in January 1996) against Abkhazia until Vladimir Putin’s ascent to power in 2000, when they were somewhat eased. The sanctions, however, were not fully abrogated until March 2008. Thereafter, Moscow moved to shore up its relations with de facto state elites and use them as “levers” to serve Russia’s national interests in regions immediately beyond its borders. The policy became more explicit in the wake of the 2008 war with Georgia.¹² Russia’s annexation of Crimea in March 2014 and its initial clandestine support for separatism across southeast Ukraine at the same time represents an intensification of Moscow’s territorial revanchism. Some Western analysts see a consistent geopolitical formula at work: use troubled territories and compatriots in neighboring states to stop integration with Western institutions. Others see the longstanding logic of Russian imperialism.¹³

The trouble with such interpretations is that they tend to discount the power of emotive ties between people in these troubled territories and Russia. Moscow's geopolitical strategy would not be possible if it were not for the fact that minorities in these troubled territories often fear the nationalizing project of the core nation and look to Russia as their geopolitical protector. This protector-victim relationship is particularly powerful; it underwrites the considerable subsidies Russia provides to the de facto states in Georgia and Moldova, and emergent ones in the Donbas.¹⁴ The Karabakh case is different, but even here Russia is an indirect protector in that it has a military alliance with Armenia, Karabakh's primary protector and patron, which commits Russia to intervene should Armenia come under attack.

In sum, there is no denying that Russia is the preponderant patron of the post-Soviet de facto states. Parent states like Georgia, Moldova, and now Ukraine (with respect to the Donbas separatist republics and Crimea) charge that these are "occupied territories" fueled by Russian money and run by Russian-appointed officials and even Russian citizens. But this rhetoric is problematic. Occupation suggests military control against the consent of the resident population. It also implicitly suggests a highly contentious claim to original ownership. Georgian nationalists may view the whole Soviet period as an occupation; indeed Georgia, following Latvia and Estonia, opened a Soviet occupation museum in May 2006 that provoked the ire of Putin.¹⁵ The implication of this contention, however, is that Georgia's ethnic minorities who secured ethnoterritorial regions during the Soviet period are instruments of that occupation, a contention that ultimately serves the interests of Russia as it provides no appealing space for Abkhaz and Ossetians within Georgia.

The De Facto Research Project in Post-Soviet Space

In 2008, we began a De Facto State Research Project to study public attitudes and internal dynamics within the post-Soviet de facto states in the wake of Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence (UDI) on February 17, 2008, and its subsequent recognition by many countries, including the United States, Germany, and France. At the time there was considerable speculation about a "Kosovo precedent" in the Caucasus. The issue was politically contentious. The U.S. wished to portray the Kosovo case as *sui generis*, without any precedent. Vladimir Putin saw this as a clear case of double standards. Speaking to Western reporters in the summer prior to Kosovo's UDI Putin

said, "there are no arguments in favor of a position that the Kosovo case differs from the situations in South Ossetia, Abkhazia or Transnistria."¹⁶ After Kosovo's UDI, Putin declared that "to support a unilateral declaration of independence by Kosovo is amoral and against the law. Territorial integrity is one of the fundamental principles of international law.... Here in this region we have Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Trans-Dniester that exist as independent states. We are always being told that Kosovo is a special case. This is all lies. There is nothing so special about Kosovo and everyone knows this full well."¹⁷

Kosovo's UDI was followed by the Bucharest Declaration on April 3, 2008, which stated that Georgia and Ukraine would one day become members of NATO. A few months later Georgia and Russia were at war over South Ossetia. As noted, on August 26, 2008, Russia broke with its longstanding policy of supporting state territorial integrity and recognized South Ossetia and Abkhazia as states.

We began our project with an emphasis on public attitudes and internal dynamics in the republics, since this seemed to be a major gap in academic and public understanding of the issues surrounding the independence declarations. Dov Lynch wrote in 2002 that "there has been virtually no comparative study of the separatist states. A critical gap has emerged in our understanding of security developments in the former Soviet Union."¹⁸ This is still generally the case. The goal of our project was to shed light on the hopes, wishes, attitudes, worries, and post-conflict experiences of the people who live in these small territories.¹⁹ Inevitably this goal clashed with the geopolitical objectification of these territories by Western commentators as "geopolitical black holes," regional "pawns," or "kleptocratic zones." Our purpose was not to advocate for the people in these regions but to present what they believed about their condition, the parent/patron states, and the world more generally.

Conducting social science research in these areas is challenging but we have managed to compile an archive of survey information that helps us understand these regions as never before. Here we summarize comparative results across the republics from representative surveys repeated about three-to-four years apart. Key questions taken from among 120 in a long questionnaire include relations with Russia, current and future political arrangements, and the contemporary situation within the republics.

Though these are not panel data, the repeated questions in the same communities with similar ethnic compositions between samples allow a high degree of confidence that they measure ongoing and consistent concerns of local populations.

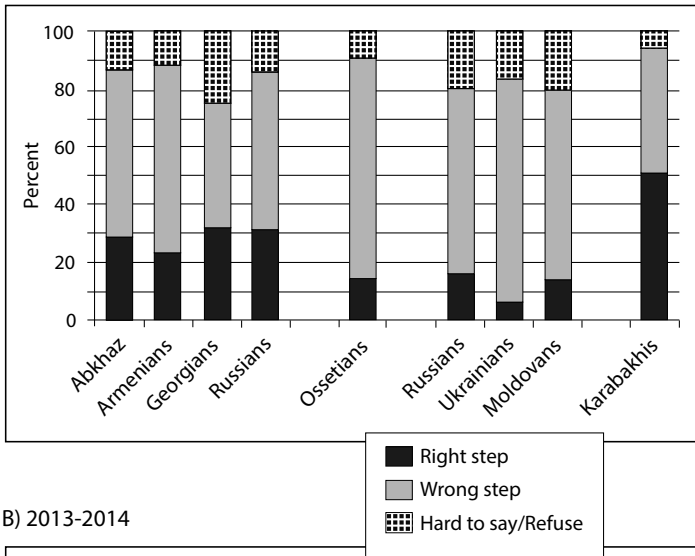
We compare data from Abkhazia (surveys March 2010 and December 2014), South Ossetia (November 2010 and December 2014), Transnistria (July 2010 and December 2014), and partially for Nagorny Karabakh (November 2011 and August 2013).²⁰ We have elaborated on the difficulties of survey research in these areas elsewhere.²¹ Despite these difficulties, the data remain the best available for these republics.

Among the primary similarities over the short three-to-five year gap and across republics are the clear ethnic differences in Abkhazia, and to some extent in Transnistria; the strong support for closer ties to Russia across all four republics, including support for a military presence that is tied to a needed sense of security; the consistency of results over time even after the major geopolitical and security changes in the region consequent to the Ukraine crisis of 2014-2015; the general regret about the end of the Soviet Union; and the pervasive lack of interest in Western-style democracy. Though we could examine the data by other demographic categories, we focus on differences between the nationalities in and between the republics since the ethnoterritorial dimension remains pervasive even in an age of new geopolitical realities.

Post-Soviet geopolitical orientation and relations with Russia

The end of the Soviet Union in 1991 is still strongly felt in the de facto states, arguably even more than in the fifteen successor republics because of the vulnerability of these small economies and polities. We have consistently found in surveys in the former Soviet Union over the past twenty years that the answer to the simple, but probing, question of whether “the end of the Soviet Union was positive or negative” reliably predicts a person’s beliefs about a wide range of geopolitical developments, ethnic reconciliation attitudes, and domestic political preferences. On the graphs below, there are only single bars for post-conflict South Ossetia and Nagorny Karabakh, which are now virtually mono-ethnic, while for Transnistria and Abkhazia, we report the results for the main nationalities.

A) 2010-2011



B) 2013-2014

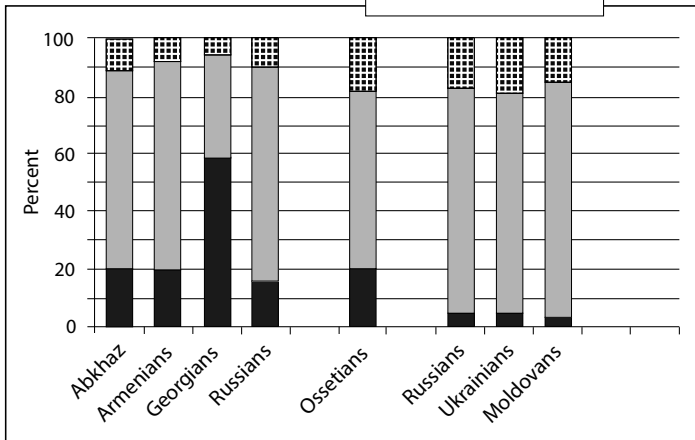


Figure 2: Responses (%) of the nationalities in the four de facto states to the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The question asked: "Was it a right or a wrong step?"

It is no surprise that a strong majority of people of all ethnicities (except the ethnic Georgian Mingrelians in Abkhazia) consider the dissolution of the Soviet Union a "wrong step" (Figure 2). The years since the local wars of the late 1980s/early 1990s have been characterized by political uncertainty, economic isolation, recurrent violence (in Georgia and along the Armenian-Azerbaijani cease-fire line), and widespread poverty. Nostalgia for a past that was peaceful and relatively prosperous is understandable and not confined to these

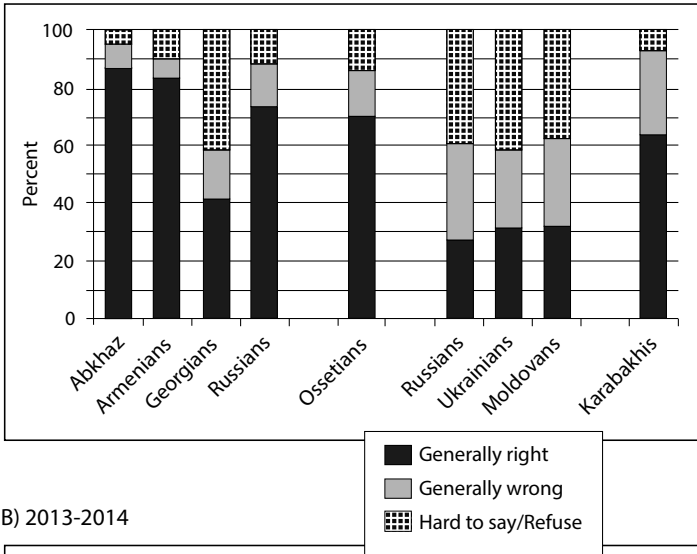
regions. Positive memory of the Soviet Union remains strong across successor republics, especially among segments of the population—usually poor and elderly—that suffered significant material losses from its collapse.

In all four de facto republics, views about the collapse of the Soviet Union are highly correlated with the political and economic prospects of the respective regions and nationalities. In the wake of the Ukrainian crisis, strong majorities among the Moldovans, Ukrainians, and Russians living in Transnistria, as well as South Ossetians, believe that the collapse of the USSR was a mistake; all of these groups have seen a dramatic drop in living standards and huge outmigration. In Abkhazia, similarly, a growing majority of Abkhaz, Armenians, and Russians believe that the end of the Soviet Union was a “wrong step,” as the republic continues to remain poor and isolated. Georgians show a trend that is the reverse of other groups; in December 2014, a majority (58%) believed that it was right to dismantle the Soviet Union. Respondents in Nagorny Karabakh are as equally divided on that question as they are on another key issue—their political future.

The question about the direction of the de facto republic (right or wrong) is an important measure of overall satisfaction with contemporary domestic developments (Figure 3). These right direction scores are much higher than either in the United States (about 25-30% in 2016) or Russia (45%, down 20 points from a year earlier). This measure is strongly affected by immediate economic trends and, in the case of these small vulnerable political units, by current geopolitical tensions and prospects of more violence. A certain “rally round the flag” element appears in the most dangerous times (noted in Transnistria especially) and local leaders can “legitimate” their foreign and domestic actions to generate more support for their positions. Over the four-to-five years of the survey intervals, the ratios saying that the directions were right have risen in the three republics closest to Russia, with majorities of all groups holding this position in December 2014. The question was asked in Nagorny Karabakh before the Ukrainian crisis; this republic’s tension with Azerbaijan distinguishes it from the other three republics. The biggest change is seen in Transnistria, where Yevgeni Shevchuk gave a fresh face to local politics after the long, unpopular rule of Igor Smirnov. Shevchuk advocated strongly for integration into Russia and heightened concerns about Ukrainian intentions in the wake of the Maidan revolution and tensions on the now-militarized border.

Facing elections at the end of 2016, his government recently declared that it was time to enact the results of the 2006 referendum, in which 97 percent of the region's residents voted to join Russia.²²

A) 2010-2011



B) 2013-2014

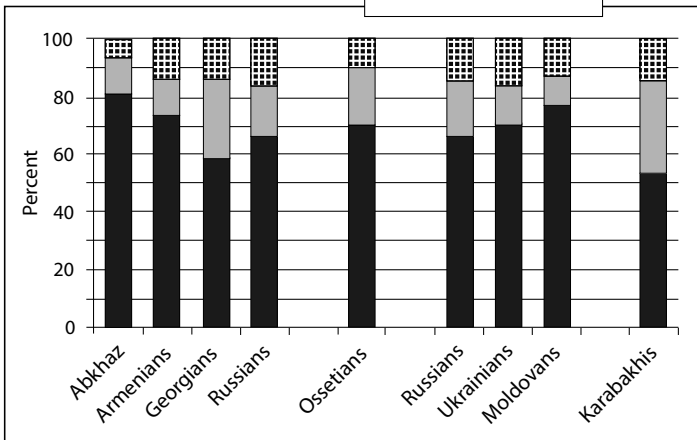
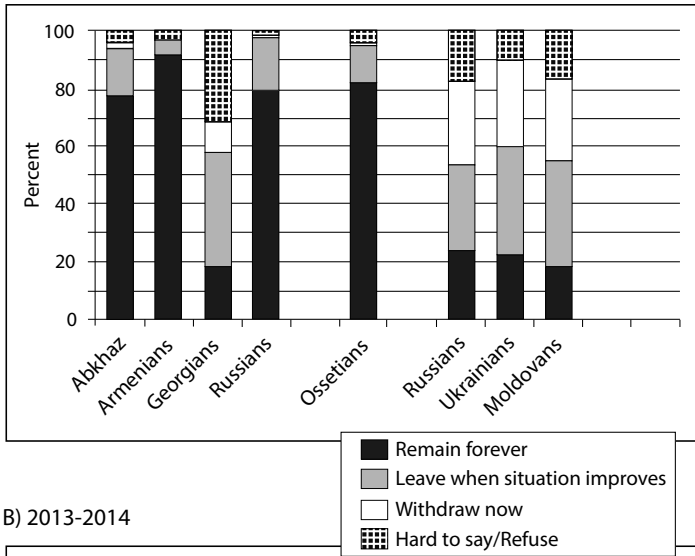


Figure 3: Responses (%) of the nationalities in the four de facto states for the question: "Is the state generally going in the right or in the wrong direction?"

A) 2010-2011



B) 2013-2014

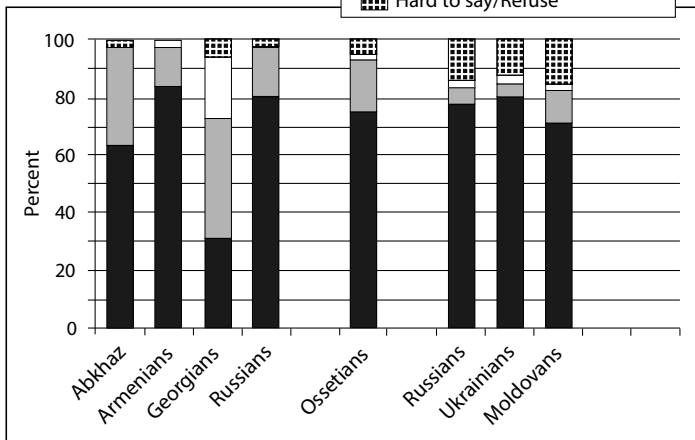


Figure 4: Responses (%) of the nationalities in the four de facto states to the question on the presence of Russian Troops. The question: "How long should Russian troops remain?" in the respective territories. The question was not posed in Nagorny Karabakh since there is no Russian base there.

Key to the future status of the de facto republics is the security guarantee offered by the Russian Federation and the presence of Russian troops, bases and equipment. We probed local opinions about this alliance, though not in Nagorny Karabakh, where, as noted, Russia's presence is indirect through its alliance with Armenia. No Russian troops are in the Karabakh republic. The effects of the Ukrainian crisis are visible in Transnistria in Figure

4. Elsewhere the ratios for the nationalities do not change much, with Georgians in Abkhazia most skeptical about Russian troop presence (less than one-third want them to stay permanently).

The clear sentiment of most residents in these regions toward Russia challenges rhetorical claims that these regions are “under Russian occupation.” One of our Abkhaz interlocutors told us in Sukhum (Sokhumi) in November 2009, “We can now sleep at night since the border is guarded by Russian forces.” That belief is widely shared; strong majorities in all groups, except for Georgians, want Russian forces to be the ultimate guarantor of their security by offering a tripwire against any possible attack and further military aid in the event of a conflict, as happened in South Ossetia in 2008. Borders with the parent states now have stricter controls than at any time since the wars of the early 1990s, making it difficult for locals with property and families on both sides of the border to cross the line. This is especially true for the sizable Georgian minority in the Gal(i) region of southern Abkhazia. Rhetoric about Russian occupation continues, but it is inevitably caught up in an ethnicized interpretation of original ownership of the contested territories. “De-occupation,” in effect, would mean expelling not only Russian troops but also all local residents who view them as allies.

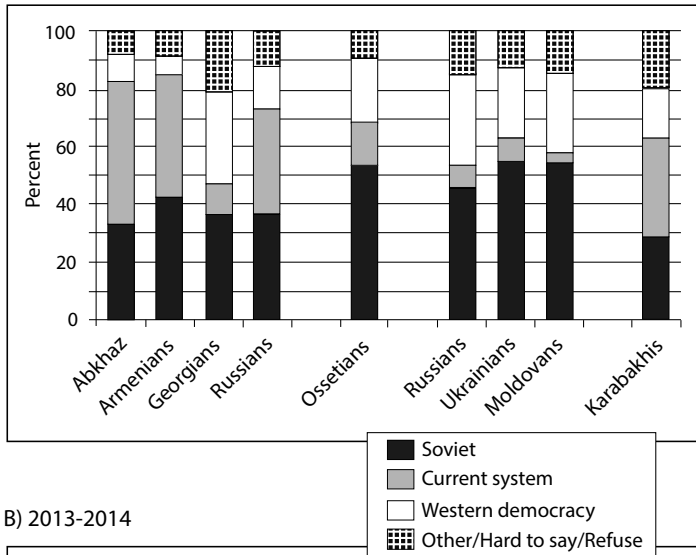
While two *de facto* states are unrecognized and two have an insignificant amount of international recognition, all have Russian backing. However, we found elsewhere in the survey that nearly half of their residents believe that their republic is a card in international games. This belief suggests that the respondents are not all that confident of Russian support should Moscow’s geopolitical interests change; what if, for example, Russian interest in an agreement with Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia to block proposed NATO expansion trumped its alliance with these small territories?

Political preferences and the uncertain future of de facto states

Though the *de facto* states have competitive elections, the usual democratic guarantees of equal access to the media, electoral commissions without bias, and freedom of political organizations from police and government pressures are not met. In all but South Ossetia, one of the key dimensions in local politics is the extent to which the republic will maintain its political

and economic independence relative to the patron state, Russia or Armenia. Two questions about the perceptions of political systems (extant and alternatives), and the preferences for a final political structure illustrate the current political picture in the republics.

A) 2010-2011



B) 2013-2014

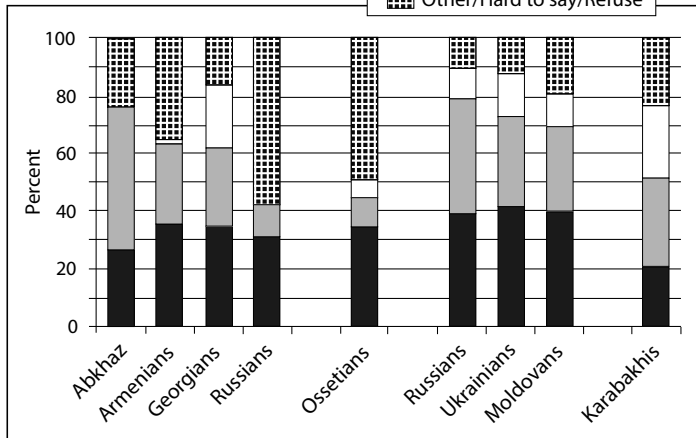
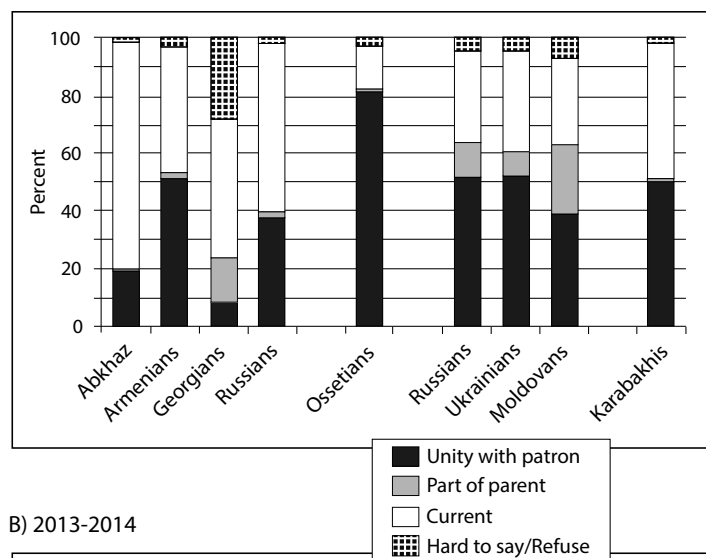


Figure 5: Responses (%) of the nationalities in the four de facto states about preferences for the “best political system” in the respective de facto states. The question named three options, the Soviet system, the current system in the Republic, or Western democracy, but it also offered the choice of “Other,” allowing the respondent to specify another political system, including the current political system in the Russian Federation.

A) 2010-2011



B) 2013-2014

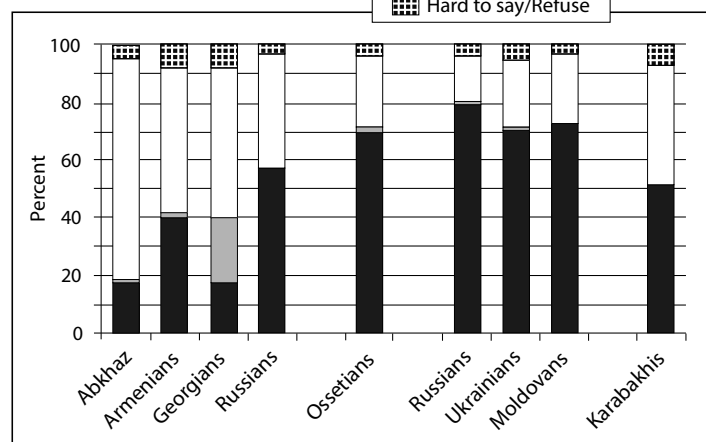


Figure 6: Responses (%) of the nationalities in the four de facto states about preferences for the final status of the respective de facto republic. For respondents in Nagorny Karabakh, the option about the patron "Integration with Russia" was replaced with "Integration with Armenia."

Offered a choice of three specific models of governance—and a category "Other" that could include the system currently in place in Russia—the Soviet option is still prominent (Figure 5). More than half of respondents in Transnistria and South Ossetia preferred this system in 2010-2011, with about one in three respondents in all other surveys opting for the Soviet system. Part of this preference is undoubtedly related to the nos-

talgia described above, but there is a decidedly undemocratic element in the republics, as can be seen in low support to a different survey question about free speech. The petty party politics and messy electoral structures in place could also explain these preferences for a one-party authoritarian system.²³

Over time, the ratios expressing more support for the local political system in place is growing, with about one-third support in Nagorny Karabakh and Transnistria. Only the Abkhaz, who dominate the local political scene completely, demonstrate majority support for the current system in their republic in both surveys. The sizable increase in the “Other” category for Ossetians as well as for Armenians and Russians in Abkhazia is related to the preference for the “Russian system,” that is Putin’s controlled democracy. What stands out in the graphs in Figure 5 is the weak support for a Western-style system, with only Georgians in Abkhazia showing more than 20% support for it in 2014; what support that had existed for it in Transnistria (20-30% in 2011) had shrunk dramatically by 2014 in the face of Smirnov’s defeat and the initial popularity of his successor, Shevchuk.

Looking to the future of the de facto republics requires a consideration of alternatives to the relatively stable internal situation at the present. The two alternatives are reintegration with the parent states (Azerbaijan, Moldova, and Georgia), or joining Russia through some sort of referendum. Russia has shown no sign of encouraging such a move since the significant costs of supporting weak economies and strong opposition from the Western-supported regional states suggest a postponement or denial of appeals from the regimes for such a dramatic move. This has been the case for Transnistria, but it has not stopped Shevchuk from trying to revive the issue. Residents of Nagorny Karabakh are split almost equally on keeping the current arrangement or joining Armenia (Figure 6).

Elsewhere, both South Ossetia and Transnistria show overwhelming preference for joining Russia, given the geopolitical and economic vulnerability of both states. The Ukraine crisis increased the numbers to about 75% in each of the three main groups in Transnistria who express this preference as the best long-term option. For Abkhazia, the nature of local political control predicts the preference. The Abkhaz show a strong majority for the current system, from which they profit in terms of almost complete control. (Only

15% of members of the parliament are non-Abkhaz and the president is always Abkhaz).²⁴ Of the other groups, ethnic Russians prefer unity with the Russian Federation, while about half of Armenians and Georgians opt for the current system. For Georgians, this is their best realistic option or least bad choice, since unity with Russia would almost certainly preclude the eventual return of the republic to the parent state.

Residents of the de facto republics recognize their vulnerability to the decisions of external actors, especially the great powers, and their interest in international politics is high. However, the daily grind of making a decent living remains paramount, with unemployment and poverty ranking highest in their lists of problems facing the respective republics. While the security issue has been temporarily resolved by the Russian guarantees, high levels of migration and dependence on pensions and other Russian subsidies indicate chronic economic troubles. All except Transnistria have seen huge depopulations since the last Soviet census of 1989 due to ethnic displacements after the wars and migration motivated by unemployment. Support for the local regimes remains contingent on their legitimacy in the eyes of the citizens that is dependent on security guarantees and material well-being.²⁵ Russian support is thus central to their existence and future stability.

Conclusions

The Russian government today sustains a diverse geopolitical archipelago of annexed territory (Crimea), recognized de facto states, unrecognized de facto states, and emergent de facto states in its near abroad. To this list, we might add Chechnya, where the Russian government cut a deal with a local warlord that has allowed it to become an exceptional “inner abroad” territory within Russia. While Moscow keeps these diverse places afloat with federal largess, they are mostly troubled inheritances rather than full creations of the Putin regime.

Despite nearly a quarter century of existence, the four post-Soviet de facto states still sit in a gray geopolitical zone, subject to the nature of great power relations. Without Russian guarantees, they would come under severe pressure through economic blockades and even military attacks. Russian backing now precludes any significant change in the status quo of the de facto republics and current interactions with their parent states. But any

dramatic changes in Russia itself would have immediate repercussions on the small territories that depend on it. The local military forces are substantial and well-armed and undoubtedly motivated to defend their territory. It is Russian troops and bases, however, that will determine the outcome of any further conflict in three de factos (Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Transnistria), just as Russian geopolitical interests strongly influence the Armenian/Karabakhi-Azerbaijani peace process. The vast majority of the residents of de facto republics prefer this uncertain but relatively secure arrangement to any other alternative.

Acknowledgements

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THE NOTION OF EURASIA: A Spatial, Historical, and Political Construct

Marlene Laruelle

One tends to speak of the collapse of the Soviet Union as a one-time event, or a series of events stretching over six months in 1991, from the failed putsch in August to the Belovezh agreements of December 8 and Mikhail Gorbachev's final speech on December 25. But we have difficulties conceiving of the "collapse" as *the process of collapsing*, meaning that it not only collapsed a country, but a *world* in itself, something that took place over years if not decades. If one sees the collapse as a *process* and not as an *event*, then one understands better the sometimes surprising, or at least unforeseen, inheritances of the Soviet system: for instance, when recent surveys reveal that a large part of the population of the their states displays very high levels of homophobia, making their public opinion more similar to Russian popular views on that issue than to those in the rest of the European Union,¹ or when young Islamists of Central Asia suggest that Communism was applying, in a secular way, the Islamic ideal of social justice.² Perceptions and behaviors remain one of the most understudied legacies of the Soviet experience because we tend to over-focus on formal politics and economics, and on events over processes.

The term "post-Soviet" expresses in part this difficulty at catching what remains of the Soviet decades, but also at comprehending how each of the post-Soviet countries approaches the changes it has to face. What commonality, which divergences, which dynamics? Solutions are probably not terminological: A term cannot encompass all the ongoing processes. However, both in parallel and in competition with the notion of "post-Soviet," some other terms have emerged, pretending to a broader catch of the ongoing changes in the region. Take, for instance, "Eurasia." Some observers use the term for lack of a better one to describe the post-Soviet region without making reference to its "Soviet" element, considering that appealing to the Soviet past

does not make sense anymore in capturing today's evolutions. Others use the term in the conviction that "Eurasia" brings some light into our analysis.

The word comes with several strengths. First, "Eurasia" is a geographical term, but, intrinsically blurry, it allows us to describe the post-Soviet world, as well as to reduce it to a smaller space—for example, the five members of the Eurasian Economic Union (Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Armenia)—or to elongate it to the whole Europe-Asia interplay. It therefore helps to inscribe the post-Soviet political, economic, strategic, and social changes into the broader discussion of the emergence of new regionalism. Is "region-ness" a useful concept for social scientists to comprehend how the different regions of the world are evolving? Does the term aid policymakers by giving legitimacy to mechanisms of regional cooperation or the emergence of new regional institutions? With the end of the Cold War, class-based explanations of world affairs have been largely replaced by culturalist arguments, often leaning on geopolitical, Huntington-style, interpretations. In that sense, unlike "post-Soviet," the term "Eurasia" offers more complex ways to approach the contents and the size of the region it is meant to define.

Yet "Eurasia" is not only a geographical term, but also a historical one. It roots the current changes into a *longue durée* of several centuries. In that other sense, "Eurasia" competes with and challenges "post-Soviet": The latter limits itself to the seventy years of Soviet experience, while the former claims centuries of interaction between Russia and its neighbors. "Eurasia" covers not only the long expansion of the Russian Empire under the Romanov dynasty, but claims to go back to early history, with the great migrations from Asia to Europe of the Huns and the Mongols. "Eurasia" thus precludes and bypasses "post-Soviet." It also inscribes the region into the new discipline of world history, looking at interactions and exchanges that transcend the classical regional approaches of area studies. On that, "Eurasia" is close to the concept of Silk Roads, which also goes throughout history, claiming a certain continuity of frame between early centuries and the contemporary period, with the same mixture of historical arguments and geographical, pan-continental, ones.³

The Serpentine Meanings of "Eurasia"

The term "Eurasia" is thus a revealing example of the constructed character of spatial definitions. It emerged in the nineteenth century to define the Eu-

ro-Asian continent. In 1829, the German geographer and naturalist Alexander von Humboldt (1769-1859) revolutionized the use of topographic maps, indicating the height as well as the spatial distribution of landforms, and pioneered vegetation maps. Invited by Tsar Nicholas I to Russia, Humboldt visited the whole country, reaching the Yenissei River and Turkestan—he is the one who conceived of the term “Central Asia.”⁴ He also appears to be the first to have coined the term “Eurasia” to label Russia’s continental landmass and the continuity between the European and Siberian plains, while continuing, conventionally, to dissociate the European regions of the country up to Urals, and the Asian parts to the east. At the end of the century, the Austrian geographer Eduard Suess (1831-1914) challenged this division in his book *Das Antlitz der Erde* (1885): According to him, Europe and Asia are, geologically speaking, only one continent, as they share the same tectonic plate. The term “Eurasia” then moved from geology to culture and race, to describe children of ethnically mixed couples, and was in widespread use, for instance, in identifying those born from French-South Asian couples by the French administration in colonized Indochina.⁵

However, the term was destined to another fate in Russia itself. At the end of the nineteenth century a new school of geographers emerged that considered the Russian Empire as a unified territory, a specific entity. This perception of the empire as a proper third continent was investigated—without use of the term “Eurasia” per se—by Vladimir Lamanskii (1833–1914), Vasilii Dokuchaev (1846–1903), and the economist Petr Struve (1870–1944).⁶ They insisted on the continuity of some geographical features from the European to the Siberian regions, but also on the specificities of human geography, population patterns, etc., with the goal, whether openly stated or not, to justify Russian domination over conquered people, its civilizing mission in Asia, and its *Sonderweg* compared to other European countries.

In the early 1920s, in exile in Europe, a group of émigrés, led by Petr Savitskii (1895–1968) and Prince Nikolai Trubetzkoy (1890–1938), was the first to bring together all these scattered elements into one encompassing, articulated, logically constructed and highly sophisticated principle, that of Russia as Eurasia.⁷ For the founding fathers of Eurasianism, Russia *is* Eurasia in the sense that Russia’s geographical and cultural features are intrinsically those of the whole of Eurasia: The differences between the center and its peripheries should be abolished, as they are all part of the same natural entity.

Eurasianism aims therefore at justifying the naturalness of Russia's imperial structure. Eurasia would be unified by shared spatial features—a dialectic between forest and steppe, geographical symmetry and geometrical rationality—and by similar anthropological, linguistic, and cultural criteria. Hence the political conclusion is that all Eurasian peoples share the same destiny and should therefore live under the same state structure. The second conclusion is that Eurasia is not the *overlapping* of Europe and Asia but a third continent, dissociated from the two others. As stated in one of the manifestos of the Eurasianist movement, "Russia's culture is neither a European nor an Asian culture, nor is it the sum or mechanical combination of elements of the one or the other."⁸

Eurasianists were the first to coin the term "Eurasianism," *evraziistvo*. The suffix *-stvo*, in Russian, is used to define something abstract: It could be better translated as Eurasianness than as Eurasianism. For Eurasianists, *evraziistvo* means simultaneously the fact of being Eurasian (*evraziistvo*), the science of Eurasia (which could have been *evraziovedenie*), and the political project or ideology of Eurasian unity (which could have been *evraziizm*). But the last two neologisms have not been forged and have left an open semantic space, with one term only to designate three different meanings. Similarly, the Russian language does not distinguish between Eurasia geographically and Eurasianist ideologically: Both are expressed as *evraziiskii*. A Eurasian, in the sense of a person who lives in Eurasia or was born of a mixed Euro-Asian union, and an ideologue of Eurasianism will both be called *Evrasiitsy*. Terminological ambivalences are therefore the norm in discussing what Eurasia "means."

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the term "Eurasia" reemerged as an easy solution to define intuitively the post-Soviet space. It also aroused a revival of Eurasianism, with sufficiently distinct features that one has to speak about *neo*-Eurasianism to dissociate the current ideology from the interwar one. Neo-Eurasianism is so diverse in itself that the plural is necessary to respect the diverging doctrinal contents of the term.

Neo-Eurasianisms have a complex relationship to classical Eurasianism, and the impression at first glance of a simple continuity of an ideology from the emigration to the post-Soviet period is debatable. The dissident historian Lev Gumilev (1912-1992), the only promoter of Eurasianism in the Soviet

Union itself, then more recently the Moscow State University philosophy professor Alexander Panarin (1940-2003), and the fascist geopolitician Alexander Dugin (b. 1962), as well as theorists of Turkic or Kazakhstani Eurasianism, often speak harshly of the original Eurasianists. Very few of them see themselves as disciples of the old masters, who they more often consider, at best, to have only partially anticipated their own, much more accomplished ideas. Neo-Eurasianism's views on history and geography are less sophisticated than those of the founding fathers. And none of the Russian exponents of neo-Eurasianisms share with the founding fathers an exaltation of the East and a call for a Slavic-Turkic unity, nor does neo-Eurasianism express any particular sympathy for the cultures of Central Asia and Mongolia.⁹ They have thus lost one of the central criteria of classical Eurasianism, that of calling for a miscegenation of Slavic-Turkic cultures in favor of a more ethno-nationalist narrative.

Neo-Eurasianisms are diverse in space. The implosion of the Soviet Union also imploded narratives on the theme of Eurasia. They are to be found in present-day Russia, but also in some of the other post-Soviet republics, in particular Kazakhstan, where it functions as an official doctrine for a state that presents itself as an encounter between East and West, Europe and Asia, Russia and the East, and which places Kazakhs on a pedestal as the brilliant legacy of their country's location at the crossroads of worlds.¹⁰ Using the model of a *matrioshka*, which served so well to describe the federal character of Russia, many neo-Eurasianisms are also present in Russia itself: In autonomous republics, some political figures and scholarly groups elaborate their own local versions of neo-Eurasianism. They inflect it with local topics and wield it as a tool that allows both for claims of local national identity and of fidelity to the Russian state. Tatarstan has been at the forefront of this trend, followed by Yakutia-Sakha, and multiple local variations are taking shape in Bashkortostan, Buryatia, Tuva, Kalmykia, and so on.

Neo-Eurasianisms are also diverse in their thematic foci. In many of the Russian Federation's autonomous republics, the Eurasianist motif is inflected by the theme of ethnicity; it is used to celebrate the unique character of the ethnic group (*etnos*), as well as its harmonious integration into a larger political ensemble. This gives a central place to the Gumilevian prism, and in this case, indigenous neo-Eurasianism is contrasted with ethnically Russian neo-Eurasianism, the latter often being judged chauvinistic or purely

imperialist. In Dugin's neo-Eurasianism, on the contrary, Eurasia is seen as a Russian-style formulation of the "Third Way." Like the German Conservative Revolution of the interwar period, this Third Way refutes both liberalism and communism, aiming to be a version of fascism "with clean hands," absolved of the crimes of the Second World War. Eurasianism thus twists between celebrating Russia's multiethnicity and religious harmony, and embodying a Russian interpretation of fascist principles.

Last but not least, the term "Eurasia" has been reappropriated by the Kremlin for institutional projects aimed at regional integration. For years, the presidential administration limited itself to speaking about Russia as a "Euro-Asian country" (*evro-aziatskaia strana*), never using the adjective of Eurasian (*evraziiskii*). Things changed in 2011 with Vladimir Putin's pet project of a Eurasian Union—an old scheme flagged by Kazakhstan's president, Nursultan Nazarbayev, in 1994, but updated to fit current tastes by the Kremlin. As Fiodor Lukyanov stated, the launch of the Eurasian Union project is understood by the Kremlin as the "end of the post-Soviet era."¹¹ However the political and economic foundations of the new project remain uncertain. Moreover, so far the Eurasian Union is, strictly speaking, still only an aspirational project: The recreation of some supranational institutions is backed mostly by Putin and the Kremlin, with little enthusiasm from other countries. The Eurasian Economic Union, launched in January 2015 based on the previous Customs Union, is a different project, which includes several member states: Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Armenia. Seen from Moscow, Minsk, Astana, Bishkek, or Yerevan, it is each time imbued with a different color. The Kazakh case is the most divergent, as it has its own ideological genealogy, separated from the Russian one, and based on Nazarbayev's personal legitimacy. Last but not least, the member states are not the only ones that offer an interpretation of the Eurasian Economic Union: The Eurasian Commission, the first genuinely supranational post-Soviet body, has its own institutional practices and dynamism that often contradict the objectives of member states.¹²

Beyond Multiple Meanings, One Core Doctrine?

Do all these neo-Eurasianisms and their derivatives share the same fundamental premises? Two can be pointed to, which constitute probably the only unchangeable core of an otherwise polymorphous ideology.

The first one is that Russia is not a classic nation-state in the sense that the Russian nation and the Russian state do *not* totally overlap, leaving open problematic interstices: Part of what should be included in the nation (whatever its definition) is to be found outside the state (Russian-speaking diasporas), and some elements that are not automatically part of the nation are inside state boundaries (internal others such as the ethnic minorities of the North Caucasus). Hence the apparent contradictions of Russian official narrative about celebrating the country's multiethnicity but calling for the defense of Russian "compatriots" abroad, and some paradoxical policy choices, such as having the paramilitary troops of the infamous Chechen president, Ramzan Kadyrov, defending the Donbas secessionists who fight on behalf of the "Russian world."¹³

The second is that Russia claims its right to participate as a legitimate actor in several regional theaters. It wants obviously to be considered as a genuine European power. On several occasions Russian officials have unequivocally supported the thesis of Russia's Europeanness. Speaking in 2011 in Washington, DC, the minister of foreign affairs, Sergey Lavrov, defined Europe, the United States, and the Russian Federation as "the three pillars and three branches of European civilization."¹⁴ In the early 2010s, with the polarization of European public opinion over the issue of LGBT rights, and the Kremlin's discourse on morality, a broad path opened up for Russia to officialize its status as an "alternative Europe" by adopting a posture as the savior of authentic European Christian values.¹⁵

Simultaneously, Russia plays the card of having an important Muslim minority¹⁶ to build links with the Islamic world. In a 2009 speech, then president Dmitry Medvedev announced that, owing to its large Muslim population, "Russia does not need to seek friendship with the Muslim world: Our country is an organic part of this world."¹⁷ And last but not least, Russia hopes for recognition and integration in the Asia-Pacific region, and invested a great symbolic weight in hosting the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit of 2012 in Vladivostok. As stated by Putin in an interview to Chinese media in 2000, "We know that Russia is a European and Asian country. We bring European pragmatism and Eastern wisdom. That is why Russia's foreign policy will be balanced."¹⁸ Since then, a close relationship with China has been cultivated by the Kremlin as one of its main strategic flagships.

The word “Eurasia” has thus found a prominent place within an uncertain terminological vacuum, a situation in which the term offers a malleable-enough notion that can be adapted to shifting contexts and different realities. Under that label, one may express a geopolitical principle, i.e., Russia’s claim to be the “pivotal” state and “engine” of the post-Soviet world, and its right to oversee the strategic orientations of its neighbors. But the term can also be used to designate a philosophical principle, i.e., Russia’s status as the “other Europe,” an already old notion expressed by Slavophiles in the first half of the nineteenth century. In this latter case, Eurasia is above all a *mirror* of Europe and the West, a *response* to what is perceived as a challenge that would undermine Russian-ness, and an *alternative* to what is seen as the deadlock of liberalism as ideology and the West as a civilization. Lastly, the term “Eurasia” also points to a third dimension, that of memory, mourning, and commemoration. Through it Russian society can understand the imperial and Soviet experiences: It enables, in a complex and painful process, to make peace with the lost past, to close these historical chapters, and at the same time integrate them into a national grand narrative.¹⁹

And it is probably the way that the term can inhabit the juncture of these different dimensions that explains its success and its instrumentalization by the Russian authorities. Indeed, when Vladimir Putin launched his Eurasian Union project, his speech articulated several dimensions.²⁰ He proclaimed that reintegrating the post-Soviet space under its leadership is Russia’s “natural” geopolitical destiny and that the country cannot be denied this vocation. He stated that the European Union has been a successful model to follow and that Russia should offer an “EU-like” construction to Eurasia, but also increasingly engage in a discourse criticizing liberal principles and call on Europe to remember its “true” (read: conservative) values. And, last but not least, he accelerated the previous trend of rehabilitating Russia’s Soviet and, to a lesser extent, imperial past, the hope being that the citizens’ pride in their country and its legacy would be replicated as support for the regime.

But what is the role of *Eurasianisms* in this Eurasia? If the founding fathers of Eurasianism were all republished with large print runs at the beginning of the 1990s—as were all the great authors of the Russian Silver Age—and the interwar émigré culture was reintegrated into the national pantheon, they have enjoyed only success *de prestige*. In the Kremlin’s circles, the preference is to refer to Ivan Ilyin, Nikolai Berdiaev, and Konstantin Leontev, rather

than Trubetzkoy or Savitskii, who are not on Putin's communication gurus' list of "must-read" authors. In the autonomous republics and in Kazakhstan, the scholarly circles that celebrate Gumilev are much more interested in his concepts of *ethnos* and *passionarity* (a Russian term used to define people with a strong will to initiate massive changes), than in that of Eurasia, and do not return to the founding fathers. Dugin borrows his entire repertory from the German Conservative Revolution, and from the French and Italian New Right, rather than from Eurasianist émigré circles. As for the high senior officials in charge of the Eurasian Economic Union institutions, they derive inspiration from founding European texts such as those by Jean Monet, or from Beijing's rhetoric of Chinese-style harmonious development, but not from Eurasianism. Dugin has not been given any official status since the coming into force of the Eurasian Economic Union; he is not a member of the Public Chamber and he even lost his position at Moscow State University since the onset of the Ukraine conflict.

Eurasia and Post-Soviet: Parallelisms and Competitive Meanings

The term "Eurasia" attained greater visibility largely for want of something better: It expresses, conveniently and in a rather intuitive way, the historical space of Russia and its "peripheries," and a certain, fast-moving geopolitical reality. The term contains a fundamental terminological ambiguity: Is it Europe *and* Asia, or *neither* Europe, *nor* Asia? "Eurasia" tends to conflate the space that Russia has historically dominated and the whole Euro-Asian continent. Subtractions and additions of territories falling under its label are thus multiple: Are the Baltic states Eurasian or European? Is Mongolia Eurasian or Asian? Is Kazakhstan Eurasian or Central Asian? Is Ukraine a divided country, fractured by a "civilizational" line of divide between Europe and Eurasia? Can a country be in two different regional categories, or is the choice mandatory—and definitive?

Even in its restricted meaning of being a median space for Russia and its neighbors, the term "Eurasia" does not inspire consensus. It provokes debate on who does or does not belong to it, and it is challenged as being Eurocentric—those standing at the eastern doors of the European Union—and Russocentric—those that are part of the Russian orbit, and are not "authorized" by Moscow to join other regional groupings. Moreover, today's Russia is founded on a fundamental ambiguity, which is a nostalgia for empire and

the fear of diversity. Russian society presents high rates of xenophobia—for close to a decade, all opinion surveys confirm that, irrespective of the question put, about two-thirds of citizens would like to see a reduction in migration levels from the former Soviet southern republics, even if this number decreased with the Ukrainian crisis.²¹ Can Russia be a xenophobic empire? What are the cultural implications, especially for the country's growing Muslim minority and the many naturalized migrants who now consider Russia as their second homeland?

To these complexities should be added the use of "Eurasia" by the scholarly community, distraught by the impact of the collapse of the Soviet world on its own thinking. As Mark Von Hagen already discussed in a landmark article of 2004,²² the term "Eurasia," though ill-defined, symbolizes the end of the discipline of "Soviet Studies" and the transformation of academic thinking. It reintegrates the region into current social science trends and offers a new paradigm, with rich discussions over notions such as empire and nation-state, borders and boundaries, diasporas, Russia's self-colonization and Orientalization. The term also shows some of its limits: In the name of rehabilitating the *longue durée* of the region, some American expert circles with an anti-Russian agenda have brandished "Eurasia" as a way to announce the long-awaited disappearance of Russia's strategic interests—a biased understanding of the region that is contributing to misjudged decisions by Washington.

The term "Eurasia" has also replaced "post-Soviet" in many North American, European, and Asian academic institutions and international organizations, as a way to describe the region without referring to the Soviet legacy. This utilization contributes academic legitimacy to the term, in parallel with its re-appropriation by the Kremlin. Paradoxically, it is used both to describe Russia *and* the new states, as well as the new states *without* Russia. In this way, it is given adjectives ("Central Eurasia") to encompass all the "others" of Russia, both external others—Central Asia, South Caucasus, Mongolia—and internal ones—North Caucasian, Tatar, Bashkir, and Siberian cultures. It therefore exists, academically speaking, as an entity of which Russia is not really a part.

Should we be displeased by the confusion between the use of "Eurasia" as an academic concept and its development "on the ground"? In countries such as the Baltic states and Ukraine, being studied academically as part of a Eurasian Department raises concerns, as it would lead people to suppose

that the political destiny of these countries is to stay dependent on Russia's good will. However, it is naïve to hope for scholars to exist and produce in an ivory tower isolated from external influences: The 2014 Ukrainian crisis has demonstrated the deep political divisions of the academic community, going from John J. Mearsheimer seeing the West responsible for the Ukrainian crisis to Timothy Snyder declaring Russia a fascist state. The multiple and contradictory use of "Eurasia" reflects its post-modern character: Knowledge is contextual and constructed. The term is at the same time plural in the many interpretations it raises, and self-referential.

The term "post-Soviet" shows obvious limits, too: When do we think the post-Soviet societies will stop being "post-Soviet," and will there be a *post-post-Sovietism*? What could be the criteria chosen to confirm the entry into this post-post-Sovietism? Changes of regime? Probably not, as the patronal systems that dominate the whole region are not in the process of linear transition from authoritarianism to democracy.²³ Generation replacement? Not sure, as the current young generation has no direct memory of the Soviet Union, even though it remains partly shaped by it through family education, and what is called post-memory—the indirect memory one has of events that were not personally experienced but which have been transmitted by one's parents. Cultural changes such as the loss of the knowledge of Russian in the other republics? But migration flows are reintroducing the need to master Russian in many of the southern republics, showing social mechanisms that have nothing specific to the region.

Many of the current social and cultural changes in the region would probably benefit by being studied through more globalized lenses. Migration, for instance, is a worldwide phenomenon, and the Central Asia-Russia migration is perhaps not intrinsically different from the Central America-United States or the Maghreb-Europe one, even if comparative studies are still lacking. Yet, the fact that Central Asians are going en masse to work in Russia and not in China or the Emirates demonstrates the reality of a post-Soviet unity, a "post-Soviet mental atlas" that is still meaningful and socially embedded in everyday life. Another example: the globalization of Eurasia's Islam, with young people of Muslim background traveling to other parts of the Islamic world, being trained at home by proselytizing groups, and following the same cultural trends—from discussing Islamic fashions to halal habits. However, here too, these globalizing trends do not preclude the emergence of a Eurasian Islam, with the

increasingly important use of the Russian language in mosques and the diminishing importance of the ethnic character of places of worship; the emergence of a considerable population of ethnic Russian converts to Islam; the establishment of Russian-speaking Islamic theological schools under state control; and the structuration of a dense Islamic web in Russian.²⁴ Increased interaction with the “external” world does not automatically mean the end of shared patterns among post-Soviet countries.

Last but not least, Russia’s ongoing identity changes would gain to be compared with the processes currently at stake in Europe. The development of an ethnic nationalism insisting on nativist slogans against immigration, the growing confusion between migrants, Islam and violence, the rise of far-right populist narratives and parties, the growing disillusion toward the European construction and the ability of Europe to implement a viable welfare state are evolutions shared by Western Europe, Central—formerly Socialist—Europe, Ukrainian, and Russian societies. Comparative studies, as well as the studies of “entangled histories” and “cultural borrowings” between the so-called post-Soviet space and the rest of the world would help untangle the current evolutions by promoting a kind of glocalism—a portmanteau of globalization and localization. In this context, the term “Eurasia” would probably embody this “glocalism” process with more plasticity than “post-Soviet,” yet scholarly investigation around a possible post-post-Sovietism would enrich our knowledge by focusing on long-term processes, and not short-term events.

Endnotes

1. See <http://www.humanrightsfirst.org/blog/homophobia-baltic-states-eurobarometer>.
2. Marlene Laruelle, ongoing research for the CERIA initiative on Islam in Eurasia at George Washington University, funded by the Henry Luce Foundation.
3. On the Silk Road concept, see Alfred J. Andrea and Scott C. Levi, "The Silk Road: Afro-Eurasian Connectivity across the Ages," *World System History* (2012), <http://www.eolss.net/sample-chapters/c04/e6-94-11.pdf>; and Alfred J. Andrea, "The Silk Road in World History. A Review Essay," *Asian Review of World Histories* 2, no. 1 (2014): 105-127.
4. See Mehmet Akif Okur, "Classical Texts of the Geopolitics and the 'Heart Of Eurasia'," *Journal of Turkish World Studies* 14, no. 2 (2014): 73-104.
5. Yves Denéchére, "Les 'rapatriements' en France des enfants eurasiens de l'ex-Indochine. Pratiques, débats, mémoires," *Revue d'histoire de l'enfance irrégulière*, no. 14 (2012): 123-141.
6. More in Patrick Sériot, *Structure and the Whole (Semiotics, Communication, and Cognition)* (Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton, 2014).
7. More on classical Eurasianism in Mark Bassin, Sergey Glebov, and Marlene Laruelle (eds.), *Between Europe and Asia. The Origins, Theories and Legacies of Russian Eurasianism* (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh University Press, 2015).
8. *Evraziistvo. Opyt sistematicheskogo izlozhenia* (Paris: Evraziiskoe Knigoizdatel'stvo, 1926), 32.
9. More in Marlene Laruelle, *Russian Eurasianism. An Ideology of Empire* (Washington DC: Woodrow Wilson Press/Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008).
10. See Luca Anceschi, *Kazakhstan's Foreign Policy: Regime Neo-Eurasianism in the Nazarbaev Era* (London: Routledge, 2017).
11. Fyodor Lukyanov, "The End of the Post-Soviet Era," *Russia in Global Affairs*, January 19, 2012, <http://eng.globalaffairs.ru/redcol/The-End-of-the-Post-Soviet-Era-15443>.
12. The literature on the Eurasian Union project is immense. See, among others, Richard Sakwa and Piotr Dutkiewicz (eds.), *Eurasian Integration: The View from Within* (London: Routledge, 2014); and "The Eurasian Project in Global Perspectives" (special issue), *European Politics and Society* 17, no. 1 (2016). See also Nate Schenkkan, "Eurasian Disunion," *Foreign Affairs*, December 26, 2014, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/armenia/2014-12-26/eurasian-disunion>.
13. Shaun Walker, "'We Like Partisan Warfare.' Chechens Fighting in Ukraine—on Both Sides," *The Guardian*, July 24, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jul/24/chechens-fighting-in-ukraine-on-both-sides>.

14. This same argument was set forth by President Dmitry Medvedev in his speech in Berlin in June 2008: "The end of the Cold War made it possible to build up genuinely equal cooperation between Russia, the European Union and North America as three branches of European civilization." Quoted by Igor Zevelev, "MacArthur's Igor Zevelev on Russia's Future," *MacArthur Foundation*, December 2009, <https://www.macfound.org/press/commentary/zevelev-russias-future>.
15. More in Marlene Laruelle, "Russia as an Anti-Liberal European Civilization," in Pål Kolstø and Helge Blakkisrud (eds.), *The New Russian Nationalism: Between Imperial and Ethnic* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 275–297.
16. About 15 million people of Muslim background, or about 11 percent of its population, and several millions of labor migrants. Moscow has the largest Muslim community in Europe: about one million Muslim residents and up to 1.5 million Muslim migrant workers.
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CONCLUSION: After Post-Soviet

Edward C. Holland

In his history of postwar Europe, the late Tony Judt titled the penultimate chapter “Europe as a Way of Life.” In it, he strikes an optimistic tone for the Continent and its political organization as a model for liberal internationalism: “In spite of the horrors of their recent past—and in large measure because of them—it was *Europeans* who were now uniquely placed to offer the world some modest advice about how to avoid repeating their own mistakes.”¹

The end of the postwar period was firmly established with the events of 1989-1991. But the conditions that made this rupture possible were found in the successes of the thirty years—in Jean Fourastié’s felicitous description, *les Trente Glorieuses*—that immediately followed World War II (1946-1975). And other events had a hand in the shift from postwar to what came after: the protests of 1968, the 1973 oil crisis, the malaise of the late 1970s, Solidarity, and Thatcherism, among many others. So while the end of the postwar period was abrupt, it was also gradual—an evolution away from a condition of recovery and rebuilding toward greater political and economic integration, first in Western Europe and, in time, the Continent as a whole. With the benefit of hindsight, we can clearly define what the postwar period in Europe led to: the transition to liberal societies oriented around the ideas of democracy and free trade.

Political and economic transformations frequently have this dual quality of gradualism and abruptness. Signal events are often—but not always—the product of incremental change. While an *ex post facto* evaluation of Western Europe in the postwar period suggests movement toward increasing economic interaction and political liberalism, at a moment in time during the process itself this trend was not fully apparent. Western Europe’s integration was a gradual process that began with the founding of the coal and steel community in 1951; forty-one years later, the Maastricht Treaty established a European union. Meanwhile, the Communist states in Europe’s east progressed and

regressed, depending on the structural conditions and party leadership in individual cases. That the Cold War order would unravel over a few months in 1989—starting with Hungary’s opening of its border with Austria in May—was generally unforeseen. In turn, the outcome in postwar Europe was obscured by any number of conditions, including not least the divisions of capitalism vs. communism in the Cold War.

This line of argument—about the gradual and abrupt nature of historical transitions and lack of clarity on the outcome until after the fact—also obtains for our understanding of post-Soviet. This volume has gathered a range of perspectives on issues of relevance to post-Soviet as an organizing idea. It does so at a time that is both definite and arbitrary; twenty-five years after the end of the USSR but also at a moment within the larger process of transition. The transformation from Communism is ongoing; it has also been diverse, depending on the country case. To reiterate one of our opening claims, post-Soviet is a condition that has affected all of the successor states, although the precise nature of these effects differs from case to case. And so the key events that suggest what comes next also vary from country to country: membership in NATO and the European Union for the Baltic States; the color revolutions in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan; the deaths of authoritarian leaders in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan; and Russia’s annexation of Crimea each come to mind as potentially defining the period after post-Soviet. The signal events that mark the transition to what comes next have yet to occur—or if they have occurred, we are still unsure about identifying them as such.

Reflecting this uncertainty, the chapters above have privileged the incremental over the immediate in developing their spatial genealogies, which we articulate as the lineages of ideas, institutions, and practices that vary through space and time and in turn define post-Soviet.² In part, this approach reflects an effort to underscore the idea that the transformation marked by post-Soviet continues today. The changes in post-Soviet space over the past quarter century have been gradual—and far from glorious—but instead are seemingly defined by their contradictions: reintegration, both political and economic, for some but not others; a growing divide between urban haves and rural have-nots; and the ambiguity of state definition for both recognized and unrecognized territories. Ultimately, our argument for the continued utility of post-Soviet as an organizing idea is about these contradictions, which we view as inheritances passed on from the USSR to its successor states.

The authors have offered a variety of ways around the ambiguity—both historical and geographical—that post-Soviet as an idea introduces. In summarizing the volume's contributions, we emphasize three points of consonance across the chapters. First, the inefficiencies of the planned economy—most prominently the construction of cities in the Soviet Far North and East (often built around gulag camps) and the allocation of labor—continue to influence the urban form, the movement of people, and the structure of the economies of nearly all post-Soviet states. Second, the state remains an equivocal concept. The *de facto* states on the southern and southwestern edge of the former Soviet Union have control over their territories—thanks to Russian patronage—but little legitimacy in the international system. At the same time, legal categories are centrally important for the state as formally organized; law is used in the state's management of religion as a specific example. Lastly, as considered most prominently in the chapter by Marlene Laruelle and the volume's introduction, the intellectual categories that attempt to define the region—post-Soviet but also Eurasian, post-Communist, and postcolonial—remain contested and subject to debate. At the least, their edges are frayed by the events and developments of the past quarter century. What results is a volume that argues that the process of breakdown is still in progress.

In their own ways, its chapters have offered suggestions about how to interpret this progress and potentially move beyond post-Soviet as an organizing concept. Each of the authors is uncertain about the future. Sergey Aleksashenko, for example, argues that the insularity of the post-Soviet economies, combined with their isolation from the broader trends of globalization and reliance on commodities (primarily oil and natural gas) to fuel their growth, creates a condition of future uncertainty. The same could be said for the *de facto* states, which occupy a geopolitical gray zone. As Gerard Toal and John O'Loughlin argue, drawing on their extensive survey work, the residents of the *de facto* states are themselves unsure of their future, one which they view as determined by the decisions of outside actors. In turn, any definite conclusion about the future of the economic and political forms that have replaced the Soviet Union can only be offered tentatively. And previous experience has shown that this gradual progress toward an expected outcome can be interrupted by a short-term trend or single event.

A second unifying idea is articulated explicitly in Alexander Diener's chapter on mobilities, with Soviet and pre-Soviet connections—such as Moscow as

metropole—contributing to the contemporary form of movement through space. The post-Soviet palimpsest applies broadly to the other topics considered here, even if those chapters do not formally adopt the same terminology. Post-Soviet cities, as described by Megan Dixon and Jessica Graybill, reproduce and replace Soviet practices both formally and informally, for example, through the management of urban space and public demonstration. Perhaps most importantly, there is no uniform spatial order that defines the cities in the fifteen successor states. The unified nature of the state serves as a commonality shared by most of these successor states, but is itself the legacy of Tsarist and Soviet-era legislation, as argued by William Pomeranz. And in Edward Holland and Matthew Derrick's contribution, religion represents another example of how the inheritances of the Soviet era have been refashioned to manage the diverse religious landscapes inherited in Russia and the Central Asian states. The layering of Soviet and pre-Soviet experiences onto the post-Soviet suggests a complex interaction of political and economic, social and cultural processes.

And, necessarily, we acknowledge the shortcomings of our approach. These chapters are intended as summaries of the key processes that come to define the term post-Soviet despite its ambiguity and uncertainty. The volume necessarily leaves out the individual, whose experiences are varied and powerful. The *sovoks* in Svetlana Alexievich's *Secondhand Time: The Last of the Soviets* underscore just how challenging the transition from Communism has been.³ Because personal experiences are so varied, generalizations are always challenging and often superficial.

Ultimately, post-Soviet is positioned as a heuristic device to critically evaluate prior attempts at regional definition. Even a quarter-century after Communism's end, the form that transition took has not resulted in institutional change; if anything the legacies of transition remain as salient today as they did in the 1990s. In turn, we hold open the relevance of the term post-Soviet to understanding Russia and its neighboring states as a geographic region. Our rejoinder to those who suggest that post-Soviet is no longer appropriate or that our approach is too general is to ask them to consider the similarities that still obtain across post-Soviet as geographic space—it is through the search for regional definition that we unite the contributions to this volume. Thus we must connect our analysis to events that occur and work to offer generalizations that are both necessary and necessarily imperfect.

The outstanding question—perhaps unanswerable—is what comes after post-Soviet? The tendency to define historical periods as following key events is widely practiced in the social sciences. The next quarter century will certainly offer greater clarity about what comes next—the “post-post-Soviet” if you will. Yet scholars are often hesitant to prognosticate. Those who studied the Soviet Union failed to predict the country’s breakup and were taken to task for this failure. Yet such critiques benefit from the clarity of hindsight and insufficiently acknowledge the challenge of making predictions before the fact. Stephen Cohen has forwarded a contrarian position as a rejoinder to the critique of Sovietologists: that the Soviet system could have been reformed up until the last moments of its existence.⁴ Even today a variety of interpretations hold sway in explaining these events. Scholars have endorsed the economy, the environment, the Soviet military failure in Afghanistan, the rise of nationalism, and Mikhail Gorbachev’s policies as contributing factors, and this is not an exhaustive list.⁵

At this moment, few would suggest a similar outcome for the Russian Federation, despite similarities with the Soviet state: a multiethnic federation, reliant on oil and natural gas for its economic well-being, and ruled by a leadership that is increasingly insular and untrusting of outsiders.⁶ The collapse of Russia—or even a political transition similar to those that have occurred through the color revolutions—seems unlikely while Vladimir Putin is on the political scene. And in such analysis, Russia, as the Soviet Union’s primary successor state, is an example of synecdoche—the part representing the whole. The variation across the former Soviet Union as discussed in the volume’s chapters further indicates the challenge of generalization.

In turn, changes in the other successor states introduce a further measure of ambiguity into the question of what comes after post-Soviet. While the strength of the ties that bind will likely weaken as we move further from 1991, the future form of regional and interstate connections is just now coming into definition. With the future not apparent, we have made an argument for post-Soviet as region. This is specifically an argument for continued similarity across the successor states through their shared historical and geographical legacies, and broadly an argument against the uniformity resulting from globalization. It is, in fact, this common experience with the Soviet state that offers any semblance of unity to this geographic region.

At the same time, we are not going back to the Soviet or any semblance of the Cold War order. The narrative of a new cold war suggests such a return to an ideological divide between West and East.⁷ But we are in a different time and a different political context. The Cold War was about the broad competition of ideologies. The ideological divide that separates Putin's Russia or the nascent Eurasian Union from those successor states that have opted to formally join or seek membership in European institutions is neither sufficiently distinct nor adequately coherent to represent an alternative to democratic capitalism as political economic form. A Russia-centered Eurasian model is not a viable alternative in the world-system, though this is not to downplay the real concerns that the Baltic states have about muscle-flexing by Putin's Russia, as evidenced in Crimea and Ukraine's east over the past two years.

If what comes after the post-Soviet is not defined by ideology, then perhaps historical or geographic changes provide an indication as to the future. The idea of generational change has often been foregrounded as key to wider societal transformations. The *soixante-huitards* came of age and initiated protests throughout Europe in the spring and summer of 1968. Those born after the Soviet Union's collapse have now reached a similar age; yet the conditions in which they have grown up are strikingly different from those of their European counterparts. The challenges of transition during the 1990s have left this group with a desire for stability rather than change; the journalist Anne Garrels finds a generation in the heartland city of Chelyabinsk that prefers the stability associated with Putin's system to the uncertainty that political change—or even democratic competition—could introduce.⁸

We are left then with the region as a way forward. The region is more than an abstract concept that gains its relevance through the need for spatial organizing and order. Rather, there are connections that exist or are built between actors in a region; the shift from one set of connections is a gradual process that evolves over time. And these connections are economic but also political and cultural. The post-post-Soviet has the potential to continue to fracture along the lines that have been sketched in the preceding quarter century. The regional linkages—between the Baltic States and the European Union, and Central Asia and China, to identify two prominent examples—suggest new regional forms and new geographies, which are both abstract in their organization and tangible in their connections. This trend within the

post-Soviet space suggests the need for more comparative research between the subregions of the post-Soviet space and other parts of the world. China and the Middle East are prominent examples.

Post-Soviet may be the last major geo-historical periodization in the history of the West. Capitalism is ubiquitous—no one is competing to replace it in the form of ideological struggle that existed in the Cold War. Without some major event—likely unforeseen, or at the very least difficult to predict—the economic order as established after the Cold War will obtain. We are all post-Soviet—as there is no counterweight to capitalism and open economies. And in another quarter century, perhaps no one will be post-Soviet—as new regional interactions and connections consolidate their current form.

Endnotes

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CONTRIBUTORS

Sergey Aleksashenko is an independent Russian analyst and nonresident senior fellow at the Brookings Institution. In the 1990s he was involved in Russia's reform process as a member of the "500 Days" task force, Deputy Minister of Finance and First Deputy Governor of the Central Bank. He then spent ten years working in Russian and international business as an executive and board member for a range of companies. He returned to academia in 2008, with interests concentrated in Russian economic and political analysis. Being a liberal political activist, he was squeezed out of Russia and lives currently in Washington, DC. He regularly publishes op-eds in Russian and international media. His recent publications include "Is Russia's Economy Doomed to Collapse?" (in *The National Interest*) and "The Russian Economy at the Start of the post-Putin Era" (in: Lipman, M. and Petrov, N. eds. *The State of Russia: What Comes Next* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

Matthew Derrick is Associate Professor in the Department of Geography at Humboldt State University. He earned a doctorate degree in Geography, as well as two master's degrees—the first in Geography, the second in Russian and East European Studies—from the University of Oregon. Drawing on multiple years of intensive fieldwork in Kazan, as well as other cities of Russia, his scholarship investigates the relationship between territory and group identity, in particular addressing how post-Soviet Russia's political-territorial transformation has influenced the social expression of religion in Tatarstan and other Muslim-majority regions of the federation. Included among the titles of his recent publications are "Territoriality and the Muslim Spiritual Boards of Russia," "Islam as a Source of Unity and Division in Eurasia," "The Tension of Memory: Reclaiming the Kazan Kremlin," and "Containing the Umma? Islam and the Territorial Question." He has spent the past two summers as a research fellow at the Kennan Institute, developing ideas that have contributed to the production of this volume.

Alexander Diener is Associate Professor of Geography and the Interim Director of the Center for Russian, East European, and Eurasian Studies at the University of Kansas. His research engages topics such as geopoliti-

tics, borders, identity, citizenship, mobility, and urban landscape change through an area studies specialization in Central Eurasia and Northeast Asia. He is the author or coauthor of three books, including *One Homeland or Two?* (Woodrow Wilson Center Press and Stanford University Press, 2009), and coeditor of three books, including *Urban Space, Place, and National Identity* (Rowman & Littlefield, forthcoming). Dr. Diener has held research fellowships at the Kennan Institute of the Woodrow Wilson Center, George Washington University's Elliott School, the American University of Central Asia, and Harvard University's Davis Center, and was the Regional Research Fulbright Scholar for Central Asia in 2011-2012.

Megan Dixon received her PhD in Slavic Language and Literatures from the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 1999 and her PhD in Human Geography from the University of Oregon in 2009. She is currently Instructor of Writing, Geography, and Environmental Studies at The College of Idaho in Caldwell, Idaho. She also serves as the Academic Coordinator for the First Year Experience. Her research interests have included Chinese migration to major cities in European Russia, as well as issues around urban development and citizen activism against urban megaprojects. In Idaho, she studies the response of local communities to economic and environmental change, particularly involving issues of water use. Recent publications include a chapter coauthored with Jessica Graybill in *Cities of the World*, Sixth Edition (2016), and "The Southern Square in the Baltic Pearl: Chinese ambition and 'European' architecture in St. Petersburg, Russia" in *Nationalities Papers* (2013).

Jessica Graybill received her PhD in Geography and Urban Ecology from the University of Washington in 2006 and is currently Associate Professor of Geography and Director of the Russian and Eurasian Studies Program at Colgate University. Her primary research interests are in urban and socio-environmental transformations, especially as they relate to the impacts on communities of resource extraction and climate change. Her focus in Eurasia is on the Far East and North and on the cultural and socioeconomic changes in shrinking cities in other contexts, specifically in multicultural and refugee-repopulated Utica, New York. She is past president of the Russian, Central Eurasian, and East European Specialty Group and current Vice President of the Polar Geography Specialty Group of the American Association of Geographers. She is a recipient of American Council for Learned Societies (2009-10) and Fulbright (2014-15) fellowships, both awarded for research

related to resource use, extraction, and climate change in the Russian Far East and North. Currently, she is a Co-Principal Investigator on two National Science Foundation grants (Arctic Frontiers of Resources and Sustainability, and Arctic Coast) and Lead Investigator on a Colgate-sponsored grant awarded to understand how all-terrain vehicle tracks on tundra impact social and ecological communities in the Russian Arctic. Recent publications include "Urban climate vulnerability and governance in the Russian North" (2015), "The suburban bias of American society?" (2016) and *Cities of the World, Sixth Edition* (2016).

Edward C. Holland is Assistant Professor of Geography in the Department of Geosciences at the University of Arkansas. He received his PhD in Geography from the University of Colorado at Boulder in December 2012. After completing his degree, he was a Title VIII Research Scholar at the Kennan Institute for Advanced Russian Studies, part of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington, DC. From 2013 to 2016, he was a Postdoctoral Fellow at the Havighurst Center for Russian and Post-Soviet Studies at Miami University. His research interests range across a variety of topics, including political violence, religion, and critical geopolitics and are generally focused on the Russian Federation. He has previously published on these topics in peer-reviewed journals in Geography and Russian area studies, including *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, *Europe-Asia Studies*, *Geopolitics*, and forthcoming in the *Annals of the American Association of Geographers*.

Marlene Laruelle is Research Professor of International Affairs and Associate Director of the Institute for European, Russian and Eurasian Studies (IERES) at the Elliott School of International Affairs, George Washington University. She explores contemporary political, social and cultural changes in Russia and Central Asia through the prism of ideologies and nationalism. She has authored *Russian Eurasianism: An Ideology of Empire* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), *In the Name of the Nation: Nationalism and Politics in Contemporary Russia* (Palgrave, 2009), and *Russia's Strategies in the Arctic and the Future of the Far North* (M.E. Sharpe, 2013). She has recently edited *Eurasianism and the European Far Right: Reshaping the Russia-Europe Relationship* (Lexington, 2015), and *Between Europe and Asia: The Origins, Theories and Legacies of Russian Eurasianism* (Pittsburgh University Press, 2015), coedited with Mark Bassin and Sergey Glebov.

John O'Loughlin is College Professor of Distinction, Professor of Geography and Faculty Research Associate in the Institute of Behavioral Science at the University of Colorado, Boulder. He received his PhD in Geography from Pennsylvania State University in 1973. He has been Principal Investigator on more than a dozen research grants from the National Science Foundation for research in the former Soviet Union since the early 1990s. The principal focus of his research in this region has been the understanding of geopolitical attitudes, ethno-nationalist aspirations, border studies and postconflict developments in the Black Sea/Caucasus area. His other current major interest, also funded by the National Science Foundation, is investigating the possible relationship between climate change and conflict in sub-Saharan Africa through research that blends large opinion surveys with ethnographic work in selected localities in Kenya.

William E. Pomeranz is the Deputy Director of the Kennan Institute, a part of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars located in Washington, DC. He also heads up the Wilson Center's Rule of Law Initiative. Prior to joining the Kennan Institute, Dr. Pomeranz practiced international law in the United States and Russia. Dr. Pomeranz holds a BA from Haverford College, a MSc from the University of Edinburgh, a JD *cum laude* from American University, and a PhD in Russian History from the School of Slavonic and East European Studies, University of London. His research interests include Russian legal history as well as current Russian commercial and constitutional law. His articles have been published in the *Russian Review*, *Review of Central and East European Law*, *Demokratizatsiya*, *Kritika*, *Problems of Post-Communism*, *Human Rights Brief*, and the *Russian Analytical Digest*. Dr. Pomeranz also has provided commentary and conducted press interviews with CNN, C-SPAN, *The National Interest*, Reuters, VOA, Bloomberg, and other media outlets.

Dr. Gerard Toal (Gearóid Ó Tuathail) is professor of government and international affairs in the School of Public and International Affairs at Virginia Tech's campus in Alexandria, Virginia. He received a PhD in geography from Syracuse University (1989). Besides numerous research articles and chapters, he is the author of *Critical Geopolitics* (Routledge, 1996) and coauthor of *Bosnia Remade: Ethnic Cleansing and its Reversal* (Oxford University Press, 2011). His latest book is *Near Abroad: Putin, the West and the Contest for Ukraine and the Caucasus* (Oxford University Press, 2017).

