Nationalism and identity in the former Soviet Union

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Abstract

Nationalism is useful in consolidating state identity and bolstering state-building, but in the form of ethnic nationalism, it can undermine the integrity of the state. This paper examines the effect of non-Russian and Russian nationalism in the former Soviet Union. It finds that although Russian nationalism evokes more fear outside Russia than non-Russian nationalism, the violent conflicts in the former Soviet Union have been caused by the latter rather than the former. Non-Russian nationalism also threatens the integrity of the Russian Federation. The author concludes that although the Soviet Union was unique, the political use of nationalism anywhere following rapid change and economic dislocation can rapidly turn nationalism from a positive means of self-identification to a virulent ethnic exclusion of others which leads to conflict.

1. Introduction

Since the end of the Cold War in 1990 and the disintegration of the last European empire in 1991, the size of the international system has grown at an unprecedented rate. While some of the new members are old established states that have regained their sovereignty and independence, a considerable number are newly created entities that have never before experienced independent statehood. Political leaders have made active and instrumental use of nationalism both in countries that have re-established their independence, and in new states. This is a perfectly natural -- perhaps, even a necessary -- phenomenon. Nationalism is useful to establish (or re-establish) the identity of a state, to consolidate that identity, and to separate the state from other states so as to bolster the process of state-building. But nationalism must be used carefully if it is to remain positive. If it takes the form of ethnic nationalism, it can be a divisive force in a multi-national state. And it can undermine the integrity of the state when it is manifested by national minorities that feel threatened by the way in which the political elites of the dominant nation attempt to exclude them.

In the new, post-Cold War international system there are a number of cases where the viability of a state is threatened by the demands of national minorities for their own independent sovereign statehood. Moreover, demands for autonomy appear to be infectious, spreading from new states to old, the struggle for Abkhazian independence seemingly

related to calls for, say, a separate Scottish parliament. Furthermore, in both new states and old, there appears to be a revival of an exclusive nationalism that aspires at best to prohibit certain groups from full participation in the political and economic life of the state and at worst to exclude them from the state or from life itself. As a result, the much heralded 'new world order' has been disorderly, conflict-ridden and violent in many new states, and the constitutional order of some old states appears to be under threat. Dealing with the rise of nationalism, the drive for autonomy and the demands for national separatism are among the greatest challenges that politicians and analysts will face in the 21st century.

Nowhere is this process more alarming than in the former Soviet Union, where more than one hundred and twenty nationalities live in close proximity, often geographically inseparable from one another. In a number of cases, nationalism has already led to violent conflict. In others, the continued existence of an integrated state appears to be at risk. This paper will concentrate, therefore, on the rise and effect of nationalism in the former Soviet Union. It will begin with a brief overview of the different perceptions of non-Russians and Russians when the former Soviet Union disintegrated. It will then examine the rise of non-Russian and Russian nationalism in the Soviet Union, before turning to the effect that nationalism has on the international relations between former Soviet republics and on their relations with the external world. The final section of the paper will consider whether the rise of nationalism in the former Soviet Union has wider implications for the 21st century. It will conclude that whether nationalism in the former Soviet space is the result of the unique conditions of democratization and the transition from socialism, or whether it is a sign of a more general international problem, it will constitute a challenge which will need to be met into the 21st century.

2. Non-Russian and Russian perceptions of the disintegration of the Soviet Union

When the Soviet Union disintegrated in December 1991, most of its non-Russian citizens acclaimed the simultaneous destruction of two empires, the Soviet and the Russian. They had little reason to regret the passing of either. Although their more immediate concern was to free themselves from the shackles of the USSR, many of them had been colonized well before the revolution in October 1917 and they had bitter memories of the Russian empire as well as of the Soviet Union. When the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics was established in 1922 the brief independence that some of them had enjoyed after the October revolution

ended and there was no doubt in their minds that the impetus for the formation of the USSR came from Russia.[1]

In any case, to non-Russians, Soviet power seemed indistinguishable from Russian power. The highest positions in the Soviet government and the apparatus of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) were held predominantly by Slavs, and particularly by Russians. Many Russians who lived in the other fourteen republics of the USSR were skilled workers or political functionaries. They seemed, therefore, to enjoy privileged status and to be relatively affluent. The Russian language, as both the lingua franca of the Soviet Union and the language of the political elite, dominated over other languages. Anyone with professional or political ambition had to master Russian. As far as non-Russians were concerned, therefore, there was irrefutable evidence that the Russians were the ruling nation in the Soviet Union. Non-Russians blamed Russians for their own inferior status within the Soviet Union and for their lack of freedom. As a result, when they declared sovereignty and independence before and after the abortive coup in August 1991, most of them were proclaiming their liberation both from the USSR and from Russia.

Russians, on the other hand, celebrated the collapse of only one empire when the USSR disintegrated, and that empire was the Soviet Union. Most Russians believed (and they still believe) that Russia had been exploited by the Soviet Union and that they had suffered disproportionally under Stalinism. They certainly did not hold themselves responsible for the crimes and injustices of Soviet socialism. Neither did they identify themselves with the rulers of the prerevolutionary Russian empire. On the other hand, they did not, as a rule, think that Russia had exploited its colonies. On the contrary, like many other former imperialists, Russians believed that Russian imperialism had been a uniquely benign and civilizing phenomenon. And although they did not consciously wish to recreate the Russian empire, they were used to thinking of Russia as a vast country which included non-Russian areas. As a result, they soon began to regret the disappearance of the Russian empire that had preceded the Soviet Union. Russian attitudes to the end of the Soviet and Russian empires are, therefore, based on perceptions that are very different from those of the majority of non-Russians.

Russian and non-Russian nationalism interacted with, and exacerbated, one another to bring about the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Moreover, the interaction did not end when the USSR ceased to exist; the two kinds of nationalism continue to influence one another.

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1 The independence of the Baltic states lasted until their annexation by the Soviet Union on the eve of the Great Patriotic War. Bessarabia, which had been captured by Romania in 1918, and Western Ukraine and Western Byelorussia, which were ceded to Poland in 1920, were reincorporated into the USSR at the end of the Second World War.

Non-Russian nationalism is, in part at least, aggravated by Russian nationalism. Russian nationalism and the problem of Russian identity are, in turn, a response to non-Russian nationalism. Before examining how this interaction affects the relations between Russia and the other successor states, it might be useful to consider separately how non-Russian and Russian nationalism originated and developed.

3. The origins and development of non-Russian nationalism

Nationalism was the precipitating cause of the collapse of the Soviet Union. But contrary to present conventional wisdom, it had only recently become a disintegrative force. Although there were manifestations of nationalism within the USSR, and particularly in those areas that were incorporated into the Soviet state during and after the Second World War, they occurred relatively infrequently and were easily suppressed. After the 1950s, however, little coercion was required. The CPSU was an effective centralising and unifying force. It was only well after Gorbachev began to introduce economic and political reforms that nationalism became a threat to the integrity of the state. Indeed, the first serious indications that nationalism might become an intractable problem occurred between two of the nations that formed the USSR (Armenia and Azerbaijan), not in clashes between the central government and the governments of the titular nations of the fifteen republics which eventually dissolved the Soviet Union.

The constitution of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, adopted in 1924, was federal in form, if not in substance. In theory those units of the federation known as 'union republics' (there were fifteen of them in the 1980s) had the right to secede from the USSR, although the constitution offered no guidance as to how this right could be exercised. The delegates in one of the two chambers of the legislative assembly, the Council of Nationalities, represented national entities (irrespective of consciousness of national identity) in proportion to the size and ascribed status of the national group. The 'Stalin' constitution that replaced it in 1936 was similarly, to use Stalin's own depiction, 'national in form but socialist in content'. In other words, the republics constituting the federation had virtually no political or economic power. The Soviet Union was highly centralized in the way that it functioned and all effective political power was held by the hierarchical, tightly organized and centralized CPSU.

Although the Soviet Union was federal in name only, the representation of national minorities in the central government encouraged a sense of national identity. Other aspects of Soviet policy had the same

effect. For example, administrative divisions in the country were, wherever possible, on the basis of nationality. As a result, within some of the fifteen republics there were both non-nationally delineated administrative districts and regions (where there was no discernible national minority) and 'autonomous republics', 'autonomous areas' or 'national areas' (the exact title depended on the size and geographic distribution of the eponymous national group). Although they did not enjoy any real autonomy, a sense of separateness and difference on the basis of nationality was inculcated in the people who lived in these areas. The Soviet style of government, which was to co-opt local elites to represent central government, and to train national cadres for local government, similarly fostered a sense of separateness. Consciousness of ethnic identity was enhanced by the Soviet policy of supporting national cultures, providing a written language where necessary, funding the publication of national literature and providing primary education, at the very least, in the local language. Paradoxically, therefore, and despite its avowed internationalist ideology and its strictly centralized system, Soviet rule 'genuinely promot[ed] and encourag[ed] national consciousness of diverse ethnic groups' (Mirsky, 1997: 2), creating nations in cases where there had previously been little more than a sense of clan identity (for example, among Abkhazians, Khirghiz). At the same time, the aspirations of established nations (for example, Estonians, Armenians) remained unfulfilled.

These constitutional arrangements have had serious consequences in the post-Soviet period. On the one hand, the governments of newly independent states, invariably composed almost entirely of members of the dominant nation, have attempted to create integrated unitary states by abolishing the nominally autonomous status of areas within their borders. This is what happened in Georgia and Azerbaijan, for example. On the other hand, '*matryoshka*' nationalism has become a common phenomenon.[2] In other words, the political elites of the nations which previously enjoyed quasi-autonomy (for example, the Abkhazians and South Ossetians in Georgia, the Armenians in Nagorno-Karabagh) have either demanded full sovereignty and independence from the state in which they are located, or have aspired to be part of a different state (the Russian Federation, in the case of Abkhazians and South Ossetians; Armenia, in the case of Nagorno-Karabagh). But even when autonomous status has been enhanced by a new post-Soviet constitution, as in the Russian Federation, some national groups have demanded even more autonomy (for example, Tartarstan), or complete independence (for

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2   The term comes from the wooden Russian doll (called a *matryoshka*) which, when you open it, reveals a smaller doll inside, which itself contains an even smaller doll.

example, Chechnya).

The negative and destructive aspects of the Soviet system, and most particularly of Stalinism, served to consolidate the sense of group or national identity established by the constitutional arrangements, the administrative divisions, and the government practices of the Soviet Union. The political elites of the territories incorporated into the Soviet Union during and after the Second World War were executed or disappeared into the labour camps of Siberia. Stalin became convinced during the war that various national groups had cooperated (or would collaborate) with the occupying German forces. He deported the groups he suspected and abolished their autonomous republics. The Meskhetian Turks in Georgia, the Tartars in Crimea and Germans in the Volga region were removed en masse to Central Asia. The Karachai autonomous area and the autonomous republic of Chechnya-Ingushetia disappeared from the map of the North Caucasus during the war, while the Kabardino-Balkar autonomous republic was transformed into the Kabardin autonomous republic.[3]

During destalinization Nikita Khrushchev exonerated most of the deported peoples and some of them were permitted to return to their historical homelands. The autonomous republics which had disappeared were resurrected.[4] However, in some cases their borders were not identical with those which had existed before the deportations. The Karachai, for example, were now united with the Cherkess in an autonomous republic and, although Chechen-Ingushetia was re-established, some of its former territory remained in Ossetia. Moreover, on their return home, the deported people frequently found that other people had been settled on their lands and in their homes. In some cases they now constituted the minority population, although the area still bore their name. Thus Khrushchev's rehabilitation of the deported peoples further enhanced the sense of shared suffering inflicted by the terrors of Stalinism. It also created the conditions for conflict during the last few years of the existence of the Soviet Union and in the post-Soviet period, when territorial claims and counter-claims began to be made and rejected, and when attempts to redress the population imbalance resulted in 'ethnic cleansing'. A sense of grievance against those (usually Russians) who had settled in the territories of deported peoples, sometimes against their will, is a further legacy of both Stalinism and of Khrushchev's attempt to make amends for it.

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3   For an early account of these events, see Conquest (1972).

4   Not all deportees were granted the right of return, however. The Meskhetians remained in Uzbekistan, while the Crimean Tartars and Volga Germans only received the right to return home or to recover their confiscated property much later.

It is clear, therefore, that the Soviet authorities practised contradictory policies, fostering national consciousness on the one hand, and, at the same time, repressing national minorities. The irony, however, is that the effects of these policies were only fully realized as a result of Gorbachev's reforms. The introduction of *perestroika* in 1985 unleashed wave after wave of nationalism. One aspect of the policy of *glasnost'* was the encouragement of the dissemination of a more accurate account of the history of the Soviet Union than had previously been admissible. The recovery of the past fuelled a sense of shared identity among groups which had suffered at the hands of Soviet power. *Glasnost'* also legitimized criticism and permitted freedom of expression. National grievances began to be aired. When democratization allowed the emergence of a more pluralist, less centralized political system, political groups began to be formed for the first time since 1917. In a vast majority of cases they were organized on the basis of national identity and, in promoting nationalist issues, they soon began to challenge local communist authorities. In the period preceding the disintegration of the Soviet Union nationalism became so popular that any political leader (including, in many cases, local communist leaders) wishing to gain local support had to espouse nationalist sentiments. Some of them, particularly in areas incorporated into the Soviet Union during and after the Second World War, began to adopt secessionist platforms.[5]

Secessionist tendencies were not, however, confined to the largest, established nations after which the union republics of the USSR were named.[6] All fifteen union republics were multinational, and many contained national minorities intent either on improving their status, or on gaining their own separate independence. The national assertiveness of the minorities within the fifteen new states established by the disintegration of the Soviet Union undermined the authority of the governments elected to steer them through the difficult transition to democracy and independent statehood.

Non-Russian nationalism undoubtedly strengthened the centrifugal forces which caused the USSR to dissolve. But the primary cause of the disintegration of the country was the nationalism of Russia, the largest, dominant nation, rather than the determination of smaller nations to secede from the Soviet Union. Let us, therefore, turn now to the origins

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5   Georgia was the one exception to this generalization. Although the republic was incorporated into the group or USSR when the Union was formed, its nationalist government was amongst the first to demand full independence.

6   It is important to stress that nationalism and the drive for secession were by no means uniform throughout the fifteen republics of the Soviet Union. Some republican governments resisted independence until it was thrust upon them when the Soviet Union disintegrated.

and development of Russian nationalism.

4. The origins and development of Russian nationalism and the Russian identity problem

While some of the fifteen republics would certainly have declared independence once the new confederal treaty proposed by Gorbachev in 1991 made it possible, the entire USSR would probably not have disintegrated if Russia itself had not declared sovereignty in 1990 and had not ceased paying into the central budget in 1991. Boris Yeltsin and his followers used Russian nationalism in their struggle against Gorbachev and the central Soviet authorities.[7] Yeltsin made common cause with the nationalists in other republics, recognizing the right of the Baltic republics to independence in January 1991, for example, immediately after Soviet troops had tried to crush the Lithuanian separatists, and supporting the Georgians when they rejected Gorbachev's new federal treaty in March 1991.

It is unlikely that Yeltsin was a genuine Russian nationalist. By 1990 nationalism had become quite widespread at a popular level in the RSFSR, however, and it was a convenient vehicle for him to use in his election campaign for the Russian presidency. He established a number of Russian republican institutions, for example, insisted that Russia should have sole control of its natural resources and industries, and declared that Russia would never give up Kaliningrad or the Kurile Islands.[8] The nationalist tone of his pronouncements sowed the first seeds of doubt in the minds of non-Russians about the willingness of a Russian government to give up other territories which had formed part of the Russian or Soviet empire.

The declaration by the Ukrainian government of Ukraine's sovereignty and independence in the wake of the coup in August 1991 precipitated a belated understanding by Russians of the consequences of supporting the separatist aspirations of non-Russians. It seemed (and still seems) inconceivable to many Russians that Russia and Ukraine should be divided after 300 years of union. Yeltsin's response was to threaten that Russia would unilaterally redraw its borders with republics that withdrew from the Union if necessary, so as to incorporate areas in which the majority of the population was Russian. Yeltsin's statement immediately

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7   For a discussion of the instrumental use of the 'Russian idea' against Gorbachev, see Steele (1994: 235-248). The RSFSR became the Russian Federation after the Soviet Union ceased to exist.

8   While Kaliningrad was not a disputed territory, Japanese demands for the return of the Kuriles had long prevented Russo-Japanese rapprochement. Yeltsin's election campaign coincided with Gorbachev's visit to Tokyo in spring 1991, when there were rumours that the islands would be returned to Japan in return for economic assistance. For a more detailed account of Yeltsin's political platform in 1990 and 1991, see White (1993, Chapter 5).

aroused fears, particularly in Estonia, Ukraine and Kazakhstan where there were large Russian minorities across the border, of a resurgent Russian imperialism.

Russians seemed unaware of these fears. Nor did they understand the resentment non-Russians felt about Russia. They were convinced that the economic well-being of the RSFSR had been sacrificed to subsidize the other, less well-developed republics in the USSR and they did not believe that elites in the other republics did not know this.[9] Once the Soviet Union had disintegrated in December 1991, Russians also found repugnant the idea that the 25 million Russians who lived outside the Russian Federation had now become national minorities.

The problem was that, despite their dislike of the central Soviet government, most Russians found it difficult to conceive of Russia without an empire. In part this was because of the way in which they perceived the identity of their state. The historical origins of Russia were conventionally traced to Kiev Rus', which made the independence of Ukraine particularly painful.[10] But the problem was deeper than the location of Russia's origin. For Russians the identity of Russia and the idea of Russian statehood had always been closely associated with the Russian empire. The Russian empire and the Russian state developed simultaneously, and there had never been a Russian nation-state. When the Tsarist statesman, Sergei Witte, proclaimed that 'ever since the time of Peter the Great and Catherine the Great there has been no such thing as Russia; only a Russian empire',[11] he included, as many Russians today still do, 'Little Russians' (Ukrainians) and 'White Russians' (Belorussians) in his depiction of the central Russian state. For Witte, Russia consisted of all the Slavs in the country, while the empire comprised the non-Slav areas which had been colonised by Russia.[12]

The historic association of statehood with empire is an integral part of the way most Russians perceive Russia's identity. Many reformers found it almost as difficult as the extreme nationalists to accept the loss of some areas which had previously been part of Russia. At the end of 1991, therefore, a new identity and a new role had to be found for Russia, and

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9   Disputes about the distribution of costs and benefits between the metropolitan country and the colonies are common in the aftermath of all empires and they are rarely resolved to everyone's satisfaction. More important than the facts and figures, however, is the absolute conviction of both Russians and non-Russians that they themselves were the losers.

10   Aleksandr Tsipko, a liberal political philosopher, argued that "without today's Ukraine, there can be no Russia in the old, real sense of the word", cited in Tolz and Teague (1992: 7).

11   Cited in Sergei Maksudov and William Taubman (1991: 26).

12   This is not unique to Russia. It is not uncommon, for example, for English people to use England and the English people when they mean Britain and the British people.

Russian nationalism was bound to become more prominent in this process. It was not just a matter of accepting that Russia had lost its empire, however, or of forging relationships with the non-Russian successor states. Russia's new role in the post-Cold War world proved problematical.

A central aspect of Russia's identity problem is the geopolitical question raised by the loss of empire. Is Russia part of Europe, or has it become an Asian or Eurasian power? From a strictly geographical point of view, it is further from Europe now than it has been for 300 years. A band of independent countries, most of which are turning their backs on Russia and facing, or even embracing, Europe, separate it from Europe. For some Russians, it is imperative that Russia is European: heirs to nineteenth century Westerners, these 'Atlanticists' (as they have been called) equate progress and prosperity with Europe. Others take a more Slavophile position, claiming that Russia's Eurasian identity offers it a unique 'bridging' role between East and West. The most extreme proponents of this view argue that Russia has a special mission in relation to the rest of the world. Moreover, since it is neither Western nor Eastern, it can choose a singular Eurasian 'third' path of political and economic development.[13] Claims that Russia has a distinctive role or a special mission have a distinctly nationalist undertone.

Apart from geographic considerations, Russia's status in the international system has become an increasingly important aspect of the problem of Russian identity. Russia is vast, but it is smaller now than it has been for many centuries except, perhaps, for a brief period during the Civil War from 1918-1920. Unlike the Soviet Union, it is not a superpower and most Russians accept this without any difficulty. But they find it less easy to accept that its status as a great power is not always recognized. There is considerable resentment that the leaders of other countries do not always accord Russia the respect they deem appropriate to its great power status. The fact that Russia is a great power is reiterated on every possible occasion[14] and much of Russian foreign policy is driven by the determination to achieve international recognition of great power status (Pleshakov, 1993: 17-26; and Pozdnyakov, 1993: 3-13). But it is not just politicians who are affected by Russia's diminished international status. Many ordinary people experience the loss of superpower status as a

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13   The terms Atlanticist and Eurasian, which echo a nineteenth century dispute between Slavophiles and Westerners about Russia's fate, originate from Sergei Stankevich, the Russian democrat who first voiced nationalist disquiet about the future of Russia (see *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 28 March 1992). His disquiet prompted a prolonged debate about Russia's identity. See Malcolm, Pravda, Allison and Light (1996). Stankevich has since fallen from favour (and is accused of taking bribes).

14   Many statements on foreign policy by President Yeltsin stressed that Russia is a great power.

national humiliation. A sense of national humiliation can fuel nationalism, impinge on Russia's relations with the external world and affect attitudes towards the other nations that formed the Soviet Union (whose perceived defection caused the diminution in international status).

Russian post-imperial identity problems and attitudes to non-Russians are compounded by the effects of Soviet historiography. Few would admit that they are influenced by Soviet historiography, yet the surprise Russians experienced when national hostility caused the first violent conflicts within the Soviet Union suggests that they had internalized Soviet myths about the benefits of empire and the friendship and mutual respect which existed among the peoples of the Russian Empire. Russians believe that, unlike other imperial powers, the Russian empire was benevolent. One prominent political scientist argues, for example, that the Russian Empire aimed 'not to effect economic expansion and not to plunder the peoples of the territories incorporated into Russia, as was the case with British, French, Spanish and Portuguese colonisation, but to meet an incontestable necessity...[which] lay in unifying the state, organising it and ensuring its security' (Pozdnyakov, 1993: 7).

During the war there was an urgent need to promote unity to ensure a united stand against Germany. What was required was a Soviet patriotism which would subsume separate nationalisms. The result was the propagation of a myth about the 'friendship of the peoples'. According to the friendship myth, Russians and non-Russians always enjoyed friendly relations in the Russian empire. Historians depicted the annexation of territory as a response to local demands for union with Russia. Thus the population of the Caucasus and Central Asia, according to Soviet history, was rescued from incorporation into the Turkish, Persian or British empires, while the undeveloped lands of Siberia were settled peacefully by intrepid Russian pioneers.[15] These accounts of Russian imperialism omitted any mention of conflict between Russians and non-Russians. They also extended the friendship myth to the relationships between non-Russians: pre-existing historical conflicts were either ignored or depicted as class struggles rather than as the national or religious disputes that they often were. There was no hint that Great Russian chauvinism ever presented a problem, though it persisted well after the revolution and was of great concern to Lenin.

After 1956 some of the historical distortions of Stalinism were exposed and corrected. But nationalist leaders or groups that had opposed the Bolsheviks were not rehabilitated during the period of destalinization

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15   For an elaboration of Soviet historiography of Russian imperialism, see Tillett (1969).

and the friendship myth remained intact (Suny, 1991: 421). The wartime deportations were blamed on the cult of personality and the deportees, it was claimed, enjoyed the friendship and assistance of the local population in their places of exile (Tillet, 1969: 315-317). When Soviet historians were invited to contribute to *perestroika* and undertake the real rewriting of Soviet history by 'filling in the blank spots', they were concerned with the recent past and paid little attention to the history of the Russian empire. As a result, it was only when a number of intractable conflicts flared up between non-Russians after 1986 that the myth of the friendship between non-Russians was finally shattered. And the myth of the friendship between Russians and non-Russians could no longer be sustained when people in the Baltic republics and Georgia appeared to be prepared to pursue their own independence even at the possible cost of bringing the whole reform programme to an end. It is fashionable now to criticise Western Sovietologists for underestimating the force of nationalism within the Soviet Union. But Soviet people themselves, whether Russian or non-Russian, were taken aback by the ferocity of the nationalist fervour which became increasingly evident after 1986.

The sense of Russian superiority implicit in the Soviet version of Russian history is still evident today in the Russian Federation. It is reflected at a popular level in an endemic and widespread racism which manifests itself as crude anti-semitism and a dislike of 'southerners' (frequently called 'blacks'). The prevalent belief that the crime, which has become so much a part of Russian life, is imported exacerbates the perception of Russia as the victim of the other republics. The view that Russian wealth has been expropriated in the past to subsidise the other republics is accompanied by a resentment of the perceived ingratitude of non-Russians.

Russians are thus curiously ambivalent about non-Russians. On the one hand, they do not accept responsibility for the behaviour of Russian or Soviet imperialists. On the other hand, they accuse non-Russians of being ungrateful for the past benefits they received from Russia and they find it difficult to adjust to Russia's more modest identity and role. This often makes them sound rather belligerent about the 'near abroad'.[16] Yet they fail to recognize that their ambivalence fuels non-Russian suspicions that Russia intends to reconstitute the Russian empire.

5. The effect of nationalism on the international relations of the former Soviet republics

16   The very term 'near abroad', used by Russian analysts to refer to the republics which were formally part of the USSR, as opposed to the 'far abroad', the rest of the world, encapsulates some of this ambivalence.

Perhaps the most surprising thing about the demise of the Soviet Union was the peaceful way in which it disintegrated. Although violent ethnic conflict had occurred in Uzbekistan in 1989, and had been intractable in Nargorno-Karabagh since 1988 and in Georgia since 1989, the Soviet Union was dissolved unconstitutionally, but without violence in 1991.[17] Nevertheless, nationalism has played an important role in their domestic and international politics and, given the fact that the fifteen new states that were established in 1991 are all multinational, it is not surprising that it is potentially a very dangerous force.

The first problem in which nationalism played a role was in the decisions which had to be made regarding citizenship. Some of the new leaders (for example, in Ukraine and Lithuania) invoked a territorial principle, granting citizenship to anyone permanently resident within the borders of the state. Others, fearful that the large minorities (usually Russian) living in their countries would dilute the national culture and eventually threaten the future existence of the nation, adopted ethnic criteria to determine automatic citizenship rights. Both Estonia and Latvia, for example, have imposed difficult residence and language conditions for non-nationals who apply for citizenship. In the case of Russia, the most multi-ethnic of the fifteen republics, a territorial principle was adopted. But the Russian government also offered citizenship to Russians living in other republics. Russian minorities resident in countries that have adopted ethnic criteria of citizenship tend, therefore, to have Russian citizenship. The defence of their rights and well-being is considered to be a vital national interest of Russian foreign policy.

Whatever principle has been adopted for the purposes of citizenship, all the new governments have followed practices which have become universal in new states: the local language has been adopted as the (usually only) official language and the language used for education; and steps have been taken to ensure the rapid promotion into positions of responsibility of people belonging to the majority nation. Since Russian was the lingua franca of the Soviet Union, people who lived away from their putative homelands tended to speak Russian rather than the local language. Even when Russians and Russian speakers enjoy legal equality and full civil rights, therefore, they perceive themselves as disadvantaged minorities. This has led to widespread emigration from some states, usually to the Russian Federation and it is, in part, to prevent further massive emigration that the Russian government extended its undertaking to defend the rights and well-being of Russian nationals to Russian *speakers* more generally, whether or not they are ethnically Russian.

17   The presidents of Russia, Ukraine and Byelorussia, meeting in a country house in Byelorussia on 8 December 1991, simply declared the USSR no longer in existence, presenting Gorbachev and the leaders of the other twelve republics with a fait accompli.

The defence of the interests of Russians and Russian speakers in the diaspora is frequently invoked as part of Russian political rhetoric and it has caused tension between Russia and the other successor states, but it has not been the basis of policy so far. Nevertheless, the frequent enunciation of this foreign policy goal is perceived as a threat by other governments. Moreover, if those Russians who do not migrate identify themselves more closely with Russia than with the country in which they live, the potential for conflict within those states, and between them and Russia, will remain considerable.

Although an inclusive, territorial principle of citizenship was adopted in Russia, non-Russian nationalism presents a threat to the integrity of the Russian Federation. In the case of Chechnya, which declared itself an independent country, attempts to suppress non-Russian nationalism brought about an extremely violent and destructive conflict. Although the war is over, a mutually acceptable solution to Chechnya's political status has not been reached. It is ironic that the pretext for the Russian invasion of Chechnya was the threat it presented to the integrity of the federation. Yet the ensuing war did more to undermine that cohesion than the *de facto* independence exercised by the Chechen leaders in the previous three years. The danger during the war was that the North Caucasus, a kaleidoscopic multinational part of the Russian Federation, would be destabilised. That danger will persist until all the conflicts in the Caucasus, north and south, have been resolved.

Nationalism presents other potential threats to the integrity of the Russian Federation. In his struggle with the first Russian parliament, Yeltsin used non-Russian nationalism in an attempt to defeat the Russian Supreme Soviet in much the same way that he had used it to defeat the central Soviet government. In the process he gave more and more autonomy to the constituent national republics of the Russian Federation. Non-national administrative areas, many of them far larger and wealthier than the national republics, responded by arrogating more power to themselves. When it became clear that the viability of the state was in danger, Yeltsin attempted to strengthen central federal power by proposing a new constitution which gave all federal units the same status and recentralized the state. The constitution was duly adopted, but the drive for decentralization and a looser state structure could not be halted. The federal government has had to sign separate agreements with each unit within the federation, ceding variable amounts of autonomy and control over local economic resources to regional governments. Although this has alleviated the centrifugal impetus, the desire of the periphery for more autonomy may continue to undermine the integrity of Russia.

Nationalism is important, too, in the party politics and electoral

process in the Russian Federation. Although the pinnacle of the success of the extreme nationalist parties appears to have been reached in the December 1993 parliamentary elections, the consequence of that success was to make the entire political spectrum adopt more nationalist positions. Moreover, the spectre of a coalition between nationalists and communists (the red-brown coalition) continues to haunt reformers within Russia and their supporters in the outside world.

Although Russian nationalism evokes more fear outside Russia than non-Russian nationalism, the violent conflicts in the former Soviet Union have been caused by the latter rather than the former. But these conflicts affect Russian policy, since they provide a pretext for Russia to intervene in the other republics. Thus Russian peacekeeping forces are active in Georgia (in both South Ossetia and Abkhazia), in Moldova and in Tajikistan.[18] Moreover, the conflicts have enabled Russia to put pressure on the governments of other states (for example, Georgia and Armenia) to permit the establishment of Russian military bases. In the case of Crimea, the nationalism of the Russians who form the majority of the population ensure intermittently tense relations between Russia and Ukraine.

Nationalism also affects the relations of the former Soviet Union with the outside world. Russian leaders have urged the governments of the rest of the world to recognize Russia's right to keep the peace in the former Soviet space. While explicit recognition has not been forthcoming, other peacekeepers with an international mandate have not been provided. In essence, therefore, Russia has the tacit consent of the international community to continue fulfilling a peacekeeping function, since it is in everyone's interests that the conflicts should not spread.[19] But Russian peacekeeping activities often appear, to non-Russians, to herald a resurgent Russian imperialism. In response, they put pressure on the West to provide security guarantees and to curb Russian expansionism. The plans to expand NATO are a consequence of their demands. With respect to direct relations with the 'far abroad', nationalism remains part of Russian foreign policy rhetoric but it has not been translated into action. The decision to expand NATO eastwards has given a great boost to Russian nationalists.

It is clear from these examples how important, and potentially dangerous, nationalism is in the politics and international relations of the former Soviet Union. Is this the result of the unique conditions of

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18   It should be noted, however, that the conflict in Tajikistan is a struggle between clans rather than an inter-ethnic conflict.

19   It should be noted, however, that Russian peacekeeping methods are very different from those generally applied by the international community. Moreover, non-Russians accuse Russia of fomenting conflicts to provide a pretext for intervention into the other former Soviet states.

democratisation and the transition from socialism in a multiethnic state, or is the rise of nationalism in the former Soviet Union symptomatic of a broader problem which will be one of the major challenges of the 21st century?

6. The implications of the rise of nationalism in the former Soviet Union for the 21st century

The former Soviet Union is huge, whether one considers landmass or the size of its population. It is also one of the most multiethnic areas in the world. Vast numbers of conventional and nuclear arms still exist in the former Soviet Union, most of them under conditions of minimal security. The ethnic disputes that have already occurred appear to be intractable, even in those cases where there is an uneasy cease-fire or where a peace treaty has been agreed. There are countless other potential conflicts in the area (for example, over borders and territory). The consequences of the transformation of a formerly tightly integrated, centrally controlled command economic system into fifteen independent market economies have been harsh for the great majority of the population. For all these reasons, even if the rise of nationalism in the former Soviet Union is unique, it cannot fail to influence the regional and international relations of Europe. It will continue to constitute a challenge which will have to be met into the 21st century, whether political leaders try to contain the problems, or whether they attempt to resolve them.

The Soviet Union *was* unique, of course, in many ways. It is inconceivable that the identical conditions that led to the collapse of socialism and the disintegration of the USSR could be repeated elsewhere. But the rapid change and economic dislocation that took place in the former Soviet Union are by no means uncommon, and no matter where they occur, the political use of nationalism can arouse the kind of popular fervour which rapidly turns nationalism from a positive means of self-identification to a virulent ethnic exclusion of others which leads to conflict, violence and the committing of atrocities in the name of the nation.

After the Second World War and until the 1990s it was conventionally believed that Europeans, at least, and perhaps all the inhabitants of industrialised countries, would never again be the perpetrators or victims of this kind of nationalism. Events in the former Soviet Union and the former Yugoslavia have proved that the conventional wisdom was convenient and comfortable, but incorrect. One of the greatest challenges of the 21st century, therefore, is to understand, and accept, that we are none of us immune, that we are all potential perpetrators and victims. Massive international efforts have been made in

the past fifty years to deal with the threat of nuclear war; little thought has been given, however, as to how to counter nationalism and ethnic hostility. Another challenge of the 21st century, therefore, is to find the means to prevent this kind of war, or to end it if it cannot be prevented.

Matryoshka nationalism might be unique to the former Soviet Union. But demands for autonomy, for national self-determination and for secession occur everywhere. Moreover, they are likely to increase as economic interdependence, the formation of larger and larger trading blocs and political unions -- all those phenomena conveniently called globalisation -- increase. One of the greatest challenges of the 21st century will be to devise the means by which ordinary citizens can participate in meaningful ways in the political and economic decisions that affect them without threatening the sovereign integrity of the states in which they live, and ways in which group as well as individual rights and identities can be exercised and expressed without impinging on the rights and identities of others.

It is clear, therefore, that although the rise of nationalism in the former Soviet space is, to a large extent, the result of the unique conditions of democratisation and the transition from socialism, the consequences are both unique and also symptomatic of more general international problems that will need to be addressed well into the 21st century.

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Özet

Sovyetler Birliği'nde milliyetçilik ve kimlik

Milliyetçilik bir ulusun kimliğini oluşturmakta ve ulus kurmakta yararlı olabilir ama bir ulusun bütünlüğünü de tehlikeye atabilir. Bu makale eski Sovyetler Birliği'nde Rus ve Rus-dışı milliyetçiliğin etkilerine bakmaktadır. Varılan sonuçlardan biri: Rusya sınırları dışında Rus milliyetçiliğinin Rus-dışı milliyetçiliğinden daha fazla korku yaratmasına rağmen, eski Sovyetler Birliği'ndeki sert çatışmalar daha ziyade Rus-dışı milliyetçilikten kaynaklanmıştır. Bu tür milliyetçilik aynı zamanda Rus Federasyonunu tehdit etmektedir. Yazara göre, Sovyetler Birliği her ne kadar eşsiz olsada, hızlı değişim ve iktisadî dağılma ve bozulmanın ardından milliyetçiliğin siyasî bir araç olarak kullanılması, milliyetçiliği hızla kimlik oluşturmak için kullanılan olumlu bir araçtan, çatışmalara yol açan etnik dışlamaya dönüştürebilmektedir.