

November 19, 1993

RUSSIA AND HER NEIGHBORS: CREATING A U.S. POLICY TOWARD EURASIA

INTRODUCTION

Boris Yeltsin's decision to call new parliamentary elections and the ensuing armed revolt by hard-line communists and ultra-nationalists demonstrates the fragile state of Russian democracy. The rampaging crowds and burning Russian Parliament building reveal how political, social, and ethnic conflicts are endangering democratic and free market reforms in the former Soviet Union. Even though Yeltsin won an important victory over his hard-line opponents, these confrontations threaten to destabilize not only Russia, but many other countries in the region. Today, over one hundred conflicts are raging throughout the former Soviet Union, from Moldova in the west to Tajikistan in the east, from Estonia in the north to the Armenian enclave of Karabakh in the south.

These conflicts are a direct concern to the United States. They could, in fact, threaten any number of American security interests in Eurasia. These interests are to:

- ① Prevent a nuclear attack on the U.S. or its allies, either intentionally or unintentionally, with the weapons from the arsenal of the former Soviet Union;**
- ② Keep weapons of mass destruction out of the hands of terrorists or rogue political factions;**
- ③ Curtail the proliferation of such weapons not only throughout the region but outside it as well; and**
- ④ Prevent the emergence of a Russian hard-line military threat to Europe, Turkey, and the Middle East.**

With interests as important as these, the U.S. must develop a policy for the entire region of the former Soviet Union, and not for Russia alone. In short, the U.S. needs a Eurasian policy—one that recognizes the singular importance of Russia, but which nonetheless does not lose sight of the larger regional context governing such issues as democratization, market reforms, and arms proliferation in the successor states of the former Soviet Union.

In order to help control the many conflicts in the former Soviet Union and to help stabilize the region, the U.S. should:

- ✗ **Exclude the possibility of U.S. troop involvement in U.N. peacemaking operations in Eurasia.** American troops should not be sent to play a U.N. peacemaking role in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).¹ U.N. and U.S. peacekeeping commitments are already mired in crises in Somalia, Haiti, and elsewhere. Peacekeeping or peacemaking operations in Eurasia would be even more difficult than in Somalia or Haiti. The conflicts are bloodier, the politics and geopolitics much more complex, and the region more inaccessible.
- ✗ **Prepare plans for capturing or destroying nuclear weapons that may fall into hostile hands in the former Soviet Union.** The U.S. intelligence community and special forces have to be ready to act if a rogue political player or a terrorist group attempts nuclear blackmail or an unauthorized launch against targets in Eurasia or North America. These plans should be prepared in cooperation with the Yeltsin government and other friendly regimes in the region.
- ✗ **Start negotiations toward a multilateral security framework in Eastern Europe and Eurasia that will enhance the security of Russia and Ukraine.** Such a framework may facilitate their future integration into NATO.
- ✗ **Clarify to the Russian leadership that the U.S. will not endorse a unilateral application of a Russian "Monroe Doctrine," or violations of the sovereignty of other CIS countries.** To restore peace in the CIS, Russia should act in multilateral organizations, such as the U.N. and the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE),² with full respect for human rights, international law, and the sovereignty of its neighbors.
- ✗ **Encourage democratic and market reforms in the Newly Independent States (NIS) of the former U.S.S.R.** Technical assistance programs aimed at creating a professional class of market specialists should be expanded. Democracy training and institution-building should be further implemented throughout the former Soviet Union, and not merely in Russia.
- ✗ **Facilitate the resolution of disputes between Russia and Ukraine, if requested.** Impartial U.S. mediation could help to avoid disputes between Moscow and Kiev. Washington might also help to settle disagreements over territory, the division of naval fleets, and the ownership of nuclear weapons and other armed forces.

1 The Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) is a Moscow-centered union of the former Soviet republics, with the exception of the Baltic states. Newly Independent States (NIS) is a term used to identify the former Soviet republics that chose not to join the CIS. But with all the NIS members except for Moldova having joined the CIS, and with Moldova poised to join, the two terms are often used interchangeably.

2 The CSCE includes all of the European states, the U.S. and Canada. It evolved from the 1975 Helsinki process, which united all European countries, U.S., and Canada in an agreement on inviolability of borders and protection of human rights.

- X Support the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Moldova and urge a withdrawal of Russian military forces from the Pridnestrovye region.** The U.S. should encourage President Yeltsin to begin dismantling the anti-reform communist bridge-head in Pridnestrovye, a self-styled republic carved out of Moldovan territory that provided shock troops for the anti-Yeltsin revolt.
- X Link aid to Russia to progress on Russian troop withdrawals from the Baltics.** The Russians completed withdrawal of their military forces from Lithuania on August 30, 1993. However, the pullout of Russian troops from Latvia and Estonia was stopped in June despite a CSCE agreement signed by Russia in 1991. To ensure prompt withdrawal of the Russian troops from Latvia and Estonia, the Clinton Administration should continue supporting congressional legislation requiring the reduction of aid to Russia if the President fails to report on significant progress of the troop pullout. In addition, the U.S. should offer its good offices to the Russians and the Baltic states to expedite the withdrawal. To assure Moscow of U.S. impartiality, Washington should also monitor the plight of Russian speakers in these countries, who claim discrimination.
- X Support the role of the CSCE in settling the conflict between Azerbaijanis and Armenians over the enclave of Karabakh.** The CSCE has proven to be the most effective framework for settling the Karabakh conflict, as it keeps Iran, which is not a CSCE member, out of the negotiations between local and regional players. In a final settlement, the status of Karabakh could be resolved either by creating an autonomous Armenian enclave inside Azerbaijan, a confederation between Karabakh and Armenia, or by transferring Karabakh to Armenia. Whatever the final outcome, the U.S. must balance its long-term interest in good relations with Turkey with recognizing the historical aspirations of the Armenian people.
- X Prevent escalation of the Christian-Muslim war in the Caucasus by maintaining a dialogue and fostering cooperation between all sides, especially with Russia and Turkey.** The U.S. should cooperate with its long-term ally, Turkey, and with Russia as well, to prevent their entanglement in a major military confrontation in the Caucasus over Karabakh.
- X Support a CSCE role in settling ethnic disputes in Georgia and inside the Russian Federation.** Georgia is plagued by separatist movements in Abkhazia and Southern Ossetia. Russia is experiencing similar problems in the Chechen and Ingush republics. While international support will be needed to restore Georgian sovereignty, Russia is capable of coping on her own with separatists inside the Russian Federation. However, U.S. troops should not be committed to any peacekeeping operation in Georgia or in Russia.
- X Propose an international peace conference on Tajikistan, without committing U.S. troops to U.N. peacekeeping operations there.** The U.S. is interested in preventing the destabilization of Central Asia. Washington also is opposed to the spread of Islamic fundamentalism. Therefore, the U.S. should support the Russian initiative to assemble an international peace conference within the next three to six months to end the civil war in Tajikistan.

- ✘ **Provide economic aid and technical assistance to the private sector and to genuine reformers, not to government structures, in Russia.** Leading reformers in Moscow have complained that Western assistance has been squandered, embezzled, or misused by bureaucrats to undermine Yeltsin's reforms. Emerging private sector enterprises and entrepreneurs, not government-owned structures, should be identified as the key recipients of aid. Such an aid strategy will maximize the effectiveness of Western assistance and will contribute to the success of economic reform. Russia's market and democratic reforms are important guarantees of a more benign policy toward her neighbors.
- ✘ **Propose the negotiation of a free trade treaty with Russia.** Trade, not aid, is the key to solving Russia's economic problems. A prosperous Russia will be less likely to revert to its imperialist past.
- ✘ **Press for economic and political reform in Ukraine.** Only through economic growth can genuine independence and prosperity of Ukraine be reached. The current internal, foreign policy, and economic crises in Ukraine are a result of too little reform and a plummeting standard of living. These crises undermine the Ukrainian commitment to independence, encourage pro-Russian forces in Kiev, and make Ukraine appear easy prey for imperialist forces in Russia.

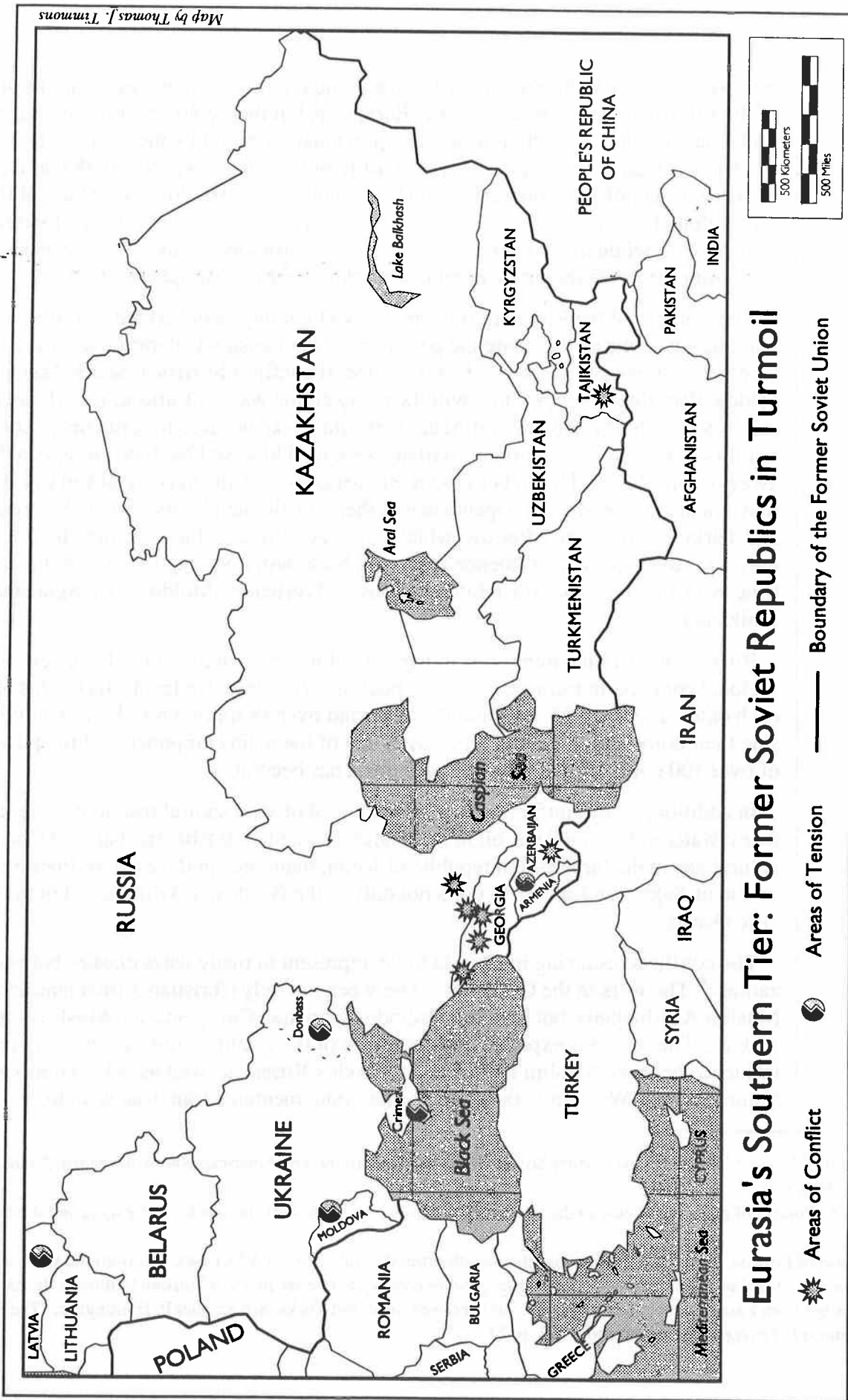
THE RETURN OF HISTORY: THE POST-COLONIAL CRISIS IN EURASIA

After the U.S.S.R. crumbled in December 1991, multiple conflicts erupted between the peoples of the former Soviet empire. Centuries-old animosities flared up in the immense political vacuum that emerged after the failed August 1991 coup. The Communist Party, with its local cells in each village, factory, and office, lost its power. The Soviet military, unable to put an end to ethnic conflicts, started a painful transformation into the separate armies of Russia and other republics. Control over weapons and ammunition became extremely weak, and generals, officers, and soldiers began selling arms to the highest bidder. The Moscow-based central economic planning agency, GOSPLAN, ceased to exist. Republics and regions started to erect prohibitive tariff and customs barriers, keeping local products at home.

By 1991, strong pro-independence movements were springing up in all the republics, with the exception of Central Asia. Independence was regarded as a panacea for all economic and social ills. High hopes were linked to ending Moscow's control, while the importance of economic ties to other republics was largely ignored. By the second half of 1991, the former imperial control mechanisms had disintegrated.

Diverse as they are, all the conflicts in the former Soviet Union can be categorized as fights over land and resources, struggles for independence, or clan warfare.³ Conflicts of this kind are not unusual in world history. After the decline of the British Empire, bloody

3 Emil Payin, "Types of Ethnic Conflicts in Post-Soviet Societies," manuscript, August 1993, p. 2. Payin, President Yeltsin's advisor on ethnic conflict, spoke at the Heritage Foundation on August 23, 1993.



Map by Thomas J. Timmons

wars were fought in the Middle East, Africa, and the Indian subcontinent in the aftermath of the European withdrawal. After the Europeans left their colonies, inter-ethnic wars broke out as ethnic and religious groups, previously pacified by their former European masters, struggled for dominance. The most famous of these was the 1948 war that led to the partitioning of India into Islamic Pakistan and largely Hindu India. Many of these post-colonial conflicts exist to this day. The threat of war between India and Pakistan is ever present, while many of Africa's wars can be attributed to unsettled business left over from the days when state boundaries were set by the Europeans.

The collapse of the Russian-dominated Soviet Union has unleashed a similar post-colonial crisis in Eurasia. All along the periphery of the Russian Federation are wars fueled by ethnic hatreds and fears. As the post-colonial conflicts in Africa, South Asia, and the Middle East simmer on, so, too, will the many ethnic wars in Eurasia. Hereditary enemies such as the Armenians and Azeri Turks may take decades to settle their scores. The traditionally dominant Georgians will not accept Abkhaz or Ossetian attempts to break away or join Russia. The Uzbeks, who see themselves as the masters of Central Asia, may not acquiesce to the independence of their smaller neighbors such as Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan. And Moscow, which dominated Eurasia for over three hundred years, may wish to exercise its influence in its own backyard, invoking its own Monroe Doctrine as justification for armed interventions in Azerbaijan, Moldova, Georgia, and Tajikistan.

Russia, and Russian minorities living in the former Soviet Union, play a key role in the regional conflicts in Eurasia. All of the post-Soviet states have territorial claims against each other. There are 25.4 million Russians and over 18 million non-Russians living outside their home states.⁴ Ethnic disarray is one of the main components of the powder keg of over 100 conflicts that post-Soviet Eurasia has become.

In addition, many conflicts are over the control of vital natural resources. Among them: water in Central Asia, oil in Azerbaijan, Tatarstan, Bashkortostan, and Chechnia, natural gas in the far northern republic of Komi, diamonds in the eastern Siberian region of Yakut-Sakha,⁵ and access to ports not only in the Black and Baltic seas, but in the Pacific Ocean.⁵

The conflicts occurring in Eurasia today represent in many ways clashes between civilizations.⁶ The wars in the Caucasus are between not only Christian Armenians and Muslim Azerbaijanis, but between Orthodox Christian Georgians and Muslim-supported Abkhaz. The region is experiencing the return of the centuries-old struggle for spheres of influence between Muslim Turkey and Orthodox Russia, as well as between modern, Sunni, and pro-Western Turkey and Shi'ite, fundamentalist Iran. Iran is an historic ally of

4 Paul Goble, "Ethnic Conflicts in the Former Soviet Union and Redefinition of American National Interests," manuscript, August 1993, p. 3.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 4. Control of ports and access to the sea is one of the sources of conflicts in Abkhazia, Crimea, and the Baltic states.

6 In the case of Eurasia, these fault lines run north to south, from the Baltics to the Black Sea, and from the west to the east, along the old Christian-Muslim frontier. In Europe, peoples east of the line are mostly Christian Orthodox. In Asia, the border is between Eastern Orthodoxy and Islam, and between Slavs and Turks. See Samuel P. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?" *Foreign Affairs* Summer 1993, p. 22.

