Russia: A Nation In Progress

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The Russian state has shifted from monarchy to totalitarianism and now, in theory, a democracy. Liah Greenfeld argues that Russian national identity first emerged in the 18th century as a result of shifts in the Empire. During the Soviet period, this identity was repressed in favor of Soviet nationalism, which was unable to withstand glasnost and perestroika. Yeltsin was unable to lead Russia into a true democracy, and the state was weakened. Putin’s main objective has been to restrengthen the state. His administrative and electoral reforms, as well as his restrictions on media and civil society, reflect the centrality of the state and continuity with Soviet structures. He prioritizes history as means of strengthening the state by creating a cohesive narrative juxtaposed with Western ideals. Ukraine and Chechnya are case studies of narrative history and state centrality. I draw upon Putin’s transcribed speeches and meetings, articles from Russian and English newspapers around the world, reports from Human Rights Watch, first-person accounts from journalists, and historical accounts of Russia, Ukraine and Chechnya.
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Introduction

Russia is a case study which has been dissected repeatedly over the past hundred years, a large, sprawling territory which at different times has symbolized different things. Pre-Soviet times, it was an Empire with an autocratic regime, known for the ways in which it appeared to fall behind the West despite its large span. After a violent regime change and civil war in which international parties intervened, it became a temporary ally, seen as less daunting than the threat of fascism in Germany, Spain and Italy. Then, for several decades, it became the only other major power in the world, locked with the West in continuing battle for ideological dominance.

These transitions were accompanied by internal developments which were just as jarring. In its pre-modern state, the Russian Empire was not concerned with the assimilation of peoples, content in most cases with mere subjugation. However, as the Russian Empire grew under Peter the Great and Catherine the Great, the Western influence on these rulers caused a shift. As Catherine sought to edify and educate her subjects to promote a new sense of nationhood, nobles struggling to reorient themselves in a rapidly changing society. Liah Greenfeld argues that the Russian elite turned to nationalism as a source of identity due to insecurity. This insecurity was the envy, or ressentiment, caused by the relative developmental inferiority of Russia in comparison to the West.¹ By nationalism, Greenfeld means an “order-shaping sociopolitical perspective,”² a form of identity which preceded the state and is central to its integration and

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² Greenfeld, “Etymology, Definitions, Types,” 255.
construction. Nationalism, in Greenfeld’s formulation, is “the set of ideas and sentiments which form the conceptual framework of national identity.”

During the transition to the Soviet Union, the new leaders, Vladimir Lenin and Josef Stalin, sought to neutralize the kind of ethnic nationalisms that had previously been tolerated for instrumental purposes. Although they too began by expressing tolerance, as Stalin took the reins, the regime shifted to a policy of repression that hoped to squash ethnic nationalism and replace it with Soviet nationalism. The hope was to create hyperbaric chamber of sorts, forcefully neutralizing the negative implications of nationalism within its borders while retaining territorial control over disparate peoples. In effect, ethnic nationalisms were disregarded in favor of population transfers of thousands of people as Stalin thought necessary.

After Stalin died, half-hearted leniency toward ethnic nationalism appeared to develop, only to regress to violent repressions in Hungary and Czechoslovakia. Only with the leadership of Mikhail Gorbachev were there movements toward pluralism through glasnost and perestroika. New opportunities to explore nationalism, particularly for Russians who voiced their distaste for what had been done to the legacy of Russia. This also meant new chances for ethnic tensions to bubble up, as they did between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Gorbachev’s reforms went far enough to open the door to a new future, but stopped short of full democratization—what had been achieved, however, was the undermining of the system itself, as it fell apart by 1991 despite attempts to save it.

Boris Yeltsin was the first president of Russia, and his succession watched carefully around the world. Many were uncertain in which direction Russia would go. Writing during Yeltsin’s time as President, former Deputy Spokes and Press Officer for the USSR Sergei Grigoriev

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posed that what was to come was a “neo-Imperialist” Russia, spurred on by the “nostalgia” that remained for the former Soviet Union. He wrote of individuals such as Vladimir Zhirinovsky, who is still active in politics today, and who at the time used rhetoric of “sword and fire” and the reconquering of former Soviet Union territory with military action. For their part, the Communists wanted reintegration via popular referenda; still another faction, the centrists, wanted a “Russian Monroe Doctrine” to reassert the nation’s place in politics. On a more instrumental note, Grigoriev spoke of the ways in which Russia hoped to use the former satellites in its own territorial, economic and geopolitical interest. He invoked the seemingly cyclical nature of Russia’s national character: “The nature of the Russian Empire set out by Peter…became part of the genetic code of the Soviet State.” What needed to happen, then, was to break free, essentially, of this “hypertrophy of imperial thinking.”

And yet, Yeltsin’s regime proved a disappointment. Corruption, economic stagnation, and Yeltsin’s own shaky commitment to behaving in the manner of a democratic leader soured the Russian people. His political and military failures in Chechnya only served to reinforce the loss of his image as Russia’s new hope – this despite the Western-aided campaign that won him reelection. His reliance on the West was thus considered yet another detriment, and perhaps not undeservedly so.

In this context, Vladimir Putin’s succession had no choice but to respond to the problems of his predecessor. As such, much debate occurred (and continues to occur) about Putin’s motivations; whether he is truly a nationalist attempting to act in his country’s best interest, a

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6 Ibid, 10.
7 Ibid, 15.
megalomaniac creating a cult of personality, a shrewd pragmatist relying on tried and true methods of mobilization, or all three.

Marlene Laruelle argues that the lack of true representative democracy in Russia does not indicate lack of popular legitimacy for Putin, and that in fact he is well liked and appreciated for his image as “determined an uncompromising.” Her interpretation, then, as she makes explicit, is a cult of personality. He presents his vision as vision of “patriotism” rather than nationalism, which is always extremist and a term reserved for the minorities. What he proposes is not ideology, but the natural desire of Russians to have an authoritarian state.\textsuperscript{8}

Marcel H. Van Herpen presents a much more unflattering view of Putinism, which he suggests is a cross between the authoritarian prestige mission of Bonapartism, the vanity and personal enrichment clauses of Berlusconism and a kind of fascism. However, his characterization asserts that Putin does not have “clear ideology,” and that it is built “post hoc.”\textsuperscript{9} His suggestion, then, is megalomania, but with a pragmatic view of the kind of ideology that supports his actions.

I argue that Putin’s central concern is the state. He frequently cites Russian nationalist philosophers Nikolai Berdyayev and Ivan Ilyin, whose essential tenets advocate for a leaning towards authoritarianism, away from democracy, which was seen by Ilyin as a Western import detrimental to the Russian character. Berdyayev’s conservatism and emphasis on Orthodoxy represents Putin’s consistent appeal to Russian tradition and history. Through his centralization of the administration of the state, his enforcement of law against the oligarchs created in Yeltsin’s time, and the outright statement of the role of media as a buffer of the state, not as a

\textsuperscript{8} Marlene Laruelle, \textit{In the name of the nation: nationalism and politics in contemporary Russia} (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009), 25.
free critic, Putin seeks to re-strengthen the state in ways that echo Soviet structure and methods. At the same time, the use of tsarist symbols and constant reference to Russian tradition and history as distinct from the West, and in need of protection and rectification in the face of threats and misrepresentation, are equally important to Putin’s state strengthening mission. Thus, these two disparate and conflicting periods of history are combined into a cohesive narrative of Russian strength, juxtaposed with the designs and the incursions of the West. This is Greenfeld’s ressentiment in action.

Putin also speaks out against ethnic nationalism, vocal in his distaste for any disturbance to state power, whether through regional parties or Russian nationalist extremism. In reality, however, this extremism is pervasive. It is a collectivistic-ethnic nationalism, not a collectivity of individuals who make up a nation but a unitary group who are thought to have in common ethnic characteristics including language and religion, and who are therefore distinct. Ethnic Russians are considered to be the only legitimate members of the state by these nationalists, and migrants and non-ethnic Russians frequently the target of attacks. Legal and judicial provisions to combat this are, as yet, weak.

Two particular case studies, which make up the concluding chapter of this thesis, illustrate Putin’s philosophy of the state and of history. Chechnya, where a long history of repression of the Chechens gave way to two wars after the break of the Soviet Union, and Ukraine, where a strange interdependence led to finally invading territory in 2014 under the guise of protection of rights.

Thus, nationalism as Greenfeld defines it, and particularly the concept of ressentiment, are useful tools to analyze the progression of regimes and the changing of the populace along with them, seeing the failures of the leaders reflected in developments in society and continual

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challenges in moving from totalitarianism to a nominal democracy that in reality hosts several problems of its own.
Chapter One: The Origins of the Russian Nation

Russia: a pre-modern state, but not a nation

The accumulation of territories under Russian rule is distinctively premodern, as the basis for inclusion in the state was strategic rather than a sense of common culture or identity. Elites prioritized cooperation with non-Russians over cultural and social homogeneity, unless there was reason to believe enforcing Russification and removing autonomy was necessary to ensure stability.

As such, the first “state” was a commercial endeavor between Russian elites and others in the 9th century, and was by definition premodern. Russian elites were harnessing the military power of Vikings to control resources and trade. Muscovy began to build an empire and expand borders in order to fulfill an “imperial mission” to gather the “lands of Rus,” territory that had its capital in Kiev and encompassed what is now Belarus, Moldova, Poland, Romania, Russia, Slovakia and Ukraine. However, conquering on an imperial mission did not mean that these lands were Russian – in fact, they were distinctly not so, part of the empire only through political administration. This administration was central, from Moscow, and it was characterized by its pragmatism and flexibility. The Russian rulers cooperated with non-Russian elites, using coercion only where necessary, and any adaptation to Russian social patterns was gradual.

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11 Philip Longworth, Russia: The Once and Future Empire from Prehistory to Putin (St Martin’s Press, 2005), 27.
13 Ibid, 38.
Ivan the Terrible’s expansionism and centralization, recalled during WWII as an example of Russian fortitude, was an expansion of territory and state power, not nation-building.\textsuperscript{14}

In order to maintain power in this premodern system, then, the priority of the Russians was gaining loyalty, not excluding people based on ideology or ethnicity.\textsuperscript{15} This is not to say that there was no resistance to integration on the part of the conquered peoples, or that Russian rule was benevolent in its decision not to enforce Russification. Non-Russians integrated into the empire did in fact resist assimilation, and the Russian permissiveness of the resistance was purely a matter of pragmatism.\textsuperscript{16} The resistance of non-Russians did not pose a challenge to the Russian nobles’ sense of their identity; their allegiance was to the tsar and their estate, and their dealings primarily with elites of other cultures. Any idea of greater nationhood was not as yet a consideration.\textsuperscript{17}

**Foundations of nationalism and the challenges of imperialism**

How, then, did the outward expansion of Russia relate to the internal struggle of the Russian himself? Greenfeld proposes that there are two figures whose policies were fundamental in the shaping of Russian nationalism, that is, the formation of a unique cultural identity around which to organize Russian society: Peter the Great and Catherine the Great

Peter the Great was, by the end of his rule, a very accomplished man, but the anxiety of the nobles was not high on his priority list. What he wanted from his subjects were “slaves,” men who were efficient in their servitude. He adopted the bits of Western learning which were practical to him and required it of them; Greenfeld argues that Western ideas gradually

\textsuperscript{14} Longworth, *Russia*, 106.
\textsuperscript{15} Kappeler, *The Russian Empire*, 158.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid, 161.
\textsuperscript{17} The exception to the noninsistence on Russification is Transcaucasian and Middle Asian expansion. Russian elites regarded these peoples with a feeling of superiority; although Russians were backward in comparison to the West, they were at least more “civilized” than the Asiatic peoples, or so their mission creed went.
permeated his language and turned it from slavery into citizenship, but that the gradual evolution appears to be unintentional.\textsuperscript{18} In the early years of his reign, Russia was the “personal domain of tsar,” the “gosudarstvo,” but it became the impersonal state of the Muscovite people, and referred to by Peter as “OUR” state. However, in practice, there was no Muscovite people, and nobles were slaves, not citizens.\textsuperscript{19} Greenfeld points out that the term “fatherland” appears firstly only under special circumstances, for example when Peter was attempting to frame the issue of Ukrainian revolt in 1708 as an issue of concern for the people regarding their fatherland and the Russian state, and then gains wider use as an impersonal term.\textsuperscript{20}

In practice Peter did not make distinction between himself and his state. This confused even the subjects, who volleyed between his language of the state and their own internalization of their servitude to him, which I argue was the reason that the external Empire and world system became their attempt to locate their Russian identity. Regardless of, or perhaps recognizing this confusion (although it is doubtful that it bothered him much), Peter certainly insisted on the recognition of his tireless work and its implications for Russian pride.\textsuperscript{21} To make matters more chaotic, the Manifesto on the Liberty of the Nobility of 1762 declared that nobles did not have to serve any longer, but to opt out was essentially a betrayal, especially of someone to whom they owed much.\textsuperscript{22}

In practice, Peter’s actions were full of contradictions. His military, navy and administration employed great deal of foreigners, which indicate that ability for its own sake was the priority.

\textsuperscript{18} Greenfeld, \textit{Five Roads}, 192.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid, 195.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid, 197.
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid, 198.
over hiring a fellow Russian. This is not quite a contradiction when considering that all of these individuals were most likely judged by their use to him in achieving his goals. The contradiction comes when it is considered that he ordered a call sent out to Balkan Orthodox peoples to unite against the Turks by appealing to common Christianity, an unusual emphasis on religion as a marker of identity in a situation when it might, conveniently, help him the most. Peter was infamously harsher on Ukraine than other holdings, but this was a response to Ukrainian elites who could challenge his power. In Livland and Estland (present-day Latvia and Estonia), the native nobility was maintained (although obligated to serve on same terms as Russians), religious tolerance was practiced, and administrative concessions and privileges were given to those nobles – provided that they spoke Russian. These territories, as we have noted previously, were “badly needed” assets and treated as such to the extent that it benefited both parties. His lasting achievement, creating St. Petersburg, remained as a symbol of imperial power and militarism, setting the tone for Catherine’s rule. The Empire was synonymous with Russian pride. 

Greenfeld argues that Catherine was a believer in national patriotism, where Peter was obviously more concerned with his own power. She really believed in national patriotism, Greenfeld states, else she would not have based her claim to Russian throne on it when it was alien to most Russians – and, of course, given her contempt for Russia. Unlike Peter, Catherine believed herself an extension of the polity. Her desire was not to enslave her subjects, but create an enlightened nation. Greenfeld argues that her de-emphasizing the word “slave” when referring to subjects and her beginning the 1785 Charter of Nobility with an ode to the people

23 Gladys Scott Thomson, Catherine the Great and the Expansion of Russia, (Published by Hodder & Stoughton for the English Univ. Press: 1947), 64
24 Longworth, Russia, 158.
25 Thomson, Catherine the Great, 111.
26 Ibid.
27 Greenfeld, Five Roads, 200.
28 Ibid, 201.
displayed her commitment to nationalism, but it was more so her careful actions that showed her desire to establish a strong Empire and a cultivate a respectable Russian people – and in fact the inseparability of those two goals. Catherine ruled based on rationality and enlightenment, which meant a policy of religious toleration and little assimilation where possible and strategically viable.29

A “natural autocrat,”30 she was able to use strategy while effecting measures that reflected a genuine desire for an Enlightened Russia. Her tactics in imperial rule demonstrated the deftness of her politics. She used the Russian Orthodox Church (and Russia’s Christianity) as a tool because it was important in Russia, despite not being particularly devout.31 When she abolished the Ukrainian hetman and appointed a governor-general for Ukraine, she framed it as the only recourse in the face of rights that were “antiquated and irrational.”32 Thus, she associated her actions simultaneously with Western philosophies of nation-building, and elements of primordial identity – Religion, and in the case of Turkey, Slavic identity33 – to legitimate her decisions. Ironically, for someone so enamored with Western policies, she followed closely the French Revolution, which made her uneasy and simultaneously more inclined to rule with authority.34

The Charter of Nobility of 1785 exemplified the balance she attempted to strike between adept politician and visionary. The charter, firstly, devolved some powers to nobles, including that of assembly, but they remained under the thumb of their governors. State service, as it was

29 Longworth, Russia, 186.
30 Thomson, Catherine the Great, 64.
31 Ibid, 124.
32 Longworth, Russia, 186.
33 Thomson, Catherine the Great, 132
34 Ibid, 276.
previously, was stated to be voluntary but intended to remind nobles they deferred to her.\(^{35}\) In the vein of her rationalist and strategic policies, the Baltic Germans were chastised for sticking to traditional institutions, which was considered an unenlightened practice and an affront to her rule.\(^{36}\)

Catherine, building on Peter’s legacy, expanded the empire, and it was through this expansion that arguably the more important work of her nation-building lay than her decisions of vocabulary. Her actions reflected a self-awareness of the contradiction between imperial imposition of authority and the ideals she intended to emulate and a genuine attempt to balance the two, despite the inherent difficulties of linking autocracy with enlightenment.

Peter and Catherine the Great were ambitious rulers whose policies added new territories to the empire. However, their rule highlighted a central problem of Russian society. While they continually reminded their noble subjects (for peasants were not in the realm of being considered citizens in their own right) of the positive effects of their policies on the expansion of the Empire, claiming that the whole of Russia was strengthened and that the nobles owed their success to their sovereign, More and more, it became clear that the Empire from which they were meant to draw their identity was backward, developmentally lagging, and could not possibly hope to embody the Western ideals that they had been operating on. I argue that the imperial system in itself could be considered an “order-shaping” mechanism for the nobles, who gained their identity not only from their service but the belief that their service translated to real-world results on which they could base an identity: their service to the tsar contributed in some way to the vastness of the Empire and gave them The failure of this mechanism to live up to

\(^{35}\) Peter Neville, *Russia, the USSR, the CIS and the independent states: a complete history in one volume* (Gloucestershire: Windrush, 2000), 100.

\(^{36}\) Longworth, *Russia*, 186.
expectations created a problem for the Russian nobles whose identities within Russia were in flux and could no longer be counted on.

The changing status of the nobility

Before exploring the development of Russian identity, it is important to understand the nature of Russian society and the social organization which was being challenged.

The Russian elite was a service elite. It contained two groups: dvoryane and boyars. Boyars had a hereditary estate, dvoryane did not and were dependent on the prince; they could not leave the court. Dvoryane faded into oblivion and were replaced by the sluzhilye liudi po otechstvu. The status of nobles depended now on the sovereign being happy with their service, a source of insecurity and anxiety. To make matters worse for the nobility, their ranks expanded out of necessity, despite the aristocracy fighting it – although they were at the mercy of the sovereign. The distinction between hereditary and service states was gradually eliminated, changing the position of the nobility as land owners.

Peter the Great, Greenfeld argues, “domesticated” the nobles, forcing them to change hair and dress. During his reign, the relationship of status to service, not heredity, was solidified. At the same time, Peter’s Western rhetoric had been internalized by nobles, who started to think of themselves as freely serving a great Russian state. There was, of course, a disconnect between what they learned and reality. Neither Peter nor Catherine were willing to give up their autocracy, despite the attempts Catherine made to reconcile Empire and her vision of enlightenment. But once learned, these Western ideas could not be unlearned This effectively showed that Catherine’s line of thinking was untenable. There was a clear crisis of identity to

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37 Greenfeld, Five Roads, 204.
38 Ibid, 206.
40 Ibid, 213.
41 Ibid, 214.
which nationalism began to be seen as an answer: it guaranteed an identity and elevated the
service nobility from their current state.

The West: from a model to an enemy

In the early stages of nation-building, Greenfeld states that the West was accepted as
incontestable model. It was not seen as a threat; the nobles were proud of Russia and believed it
European. They were proud of Peter. They talked of the land and the people, using what
Greenfeld calls “civic terms” that glorified Russia. 42

It soon became clear that Russia was not as they believed it to be; the external concept of their
identity did not match what they had internalized. Rather than considering the West as a model,
denial and shame caused the nobles to claim that perhaps Russia was too unique to be understand
in this way. Thus began the ressentiment.

The inclusion of non-nobles in this mission for identity was only made possible by Peter’s
establishment of secular schools. Ironically, the definition that was propagated by these schools
was of a democratic bent, sourcing the nation as the people. By learning these concepts,
developing a Russian history, and creating a standard literary Russian, these intellectuals hoped
to serve Russia. 43 Their approach was an inward one, a contrast to the rulers who wanted them to
draw their pride from the Empire and the success of their sovereign. The nobles appropriated the
work of these intellectuals, which involved trying to find a source for national pride – and
finding that the past was not “sufficient” to recreate it; unsurprising, as there was no nation to
speak of. 44 Greenfeld describes their tactic by saying that they “marketed the rejection of the

42 Ibid, 223.
44 Ibid, 247.
west,” meaning liberty, equality, individualism, and reason, on the basis that Western variants of these were not “real.”  

45 So, what was real?

The Russian answer was to look even further inward, literally, to defining the nation by what was found in the abstract concept of the “soul,” which was in fact restrained by individual reason.  

46 In the absence of a history, then, and with the lack of outward strength from which to glean greatness, turning inward into self-reflection, and attempting to cleanse all that had been internalized from the West, was the only recourse.

Since it was the elite who were searching for this national identity, it was only natural that they considered themselves the prophets of it.  

47 The peasant, to whom neither they nor their sovereigns had paid any attention until this point, was now a symbol of the nation through their suffering.  

48 The nobles rejected the common individual, glorifying the community and uncommon to create a collectivistic, authoritarian identity.  

49 This was a completely new way of seeing the world – after the disappointment of the Empire and other attempts to define Russianness, and perhaps because of those attempts, the final result was to create something that could not be refuted, or dismembered, or found lacking: an identity based on an innateness that was particular to Russians.

Greenfeld details the not-quite-conflict between Slavophilism and Westernism. Both, she says, were different sides of the same issue, and therefore not in contest with each other.  

50 Slavophilism was self-admiration, but not conservative – at the same time, they did not believe Russia needed to develop. They regarded the Church, Eastern Christianity, and Peasant

46 Ibid, 255.
48 Ibid, 260.
49 Ibid, 261.
50 Ibid, 262.
Commune as examples of the “unity of multiplicity” that characterized the empire, a union of people who care for the “general accord” and have “renounced egoism. Westernizers rejected rotting state of West, and saw Russia as its future. Revolution was the only way to catch up with the West and simultaneously destroy it. Because Russians are unhampered by Western law and “common sense,” they are free. Greenfeld states that these two viewpoints were essentially the same as they had the same goals; however, they can also be understood as a dichotomy between an outward-looking and inward-looking form of identity. Westernizers wanted to project Russian power and greatness onto a failing West, and Slavophiles were content to remain as they were and saw all that Russia needed as existing within it. In a sense they personified the challenge of creating a Russian identity in the wake of the disappointment of the Empire.

**The dawn of Soviet Nationalism**

The development of nationalist identity and the challenges that nationalism posed to the empire became evident in the latter half of the 19th century, with the changing relationships between the Empire and the nationalities within it.  

Poland and Ukraine exemplified this shift. In the Partition of Poland, 1793-1795, Polish elite were allowed to keep their cultural distinctiveness, and even existed as a “foreign body” within the empire. The Duchy of Warsaw, an entity with special status, was established in 1815, but it lost this status by 1830 after an uprising and was subsequently aggressively integrated and Russified.

Ukraine, meanwhile, was incorporated due to strategic importance. It was initially allowed to keep its autonomy, but as it gained importance, this was abolished, and social and linguistic

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51 Ibid, 265.
52 Kappeler, *The Russian Empire*, 237.
53 Ibid, 257.
assimilation followed. 1863 marked a period of intensified Russification both for Ukraine and Poland.\textsuperscript{54}

It must be noted however, that there was no consistent policy at this point designed to create a uniform society. Modernization necessitated standardization, but this was easier said than done and not done evenly across the empire. With the abolition of serfdom, industrialization, urbanization, agriculture commercialization and expansion of education, the empire became more dynamic.\textsuperscript{55} The social and national mobility afforded by this development affected both non-Russians and Russian elites. Non-Russian nationalism, as well as Russian, was clearly on the rise. The state was no longer as dependent on collaboration of non-Russians, but not as able to do without them, making continued cohesion even in the face of these forces critical. Asiatic areas were not as much of a problem, having retained colonial character due to low development and exclusion of the indigenous population in government.\textsuperscript{56} At the outbreak of WWI, the multiethnic empire experienced a surge of patriotism which quickly turned sour,\textsuperscript{57} followed by surge of uprisings in 1916 by non-Russians.\textsuperscript{58} These were steamrolled by the arrival of Vladimir Ilyevich Lenin on the scene.

In transitioning to the Soviet Union, the Marxist-Leninist elites found themselves employing contradictions with regard to nationalism, claiming to support self-determination under the assumption that it would soon become unnecessary and be superseded by a Soviet Patriotism. When this did not occur, Stalin began the familiar rote of enforced Russification, and even after his death, Soviet Nationalism lived on.

\textsuperscript{54} Longworth, \textit{Russia}, 68.
\textsuperscript{55} Kappeler, \textit{The Russian Empire}, 318.
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid, 320-323.
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid, 235.
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid, 352.
In the February Revolution, all citizens were granted civil rights and liberties, as well as national and cultural rights.\textsuperscript{59} There was an explosion of national movements in 1917 in which Bolsheviks came down on the side of self-determination.\textsuperscript{60} Lenin released a “Declaration of rights of oppressed nationalities”, claiming that The Soviet Republic is a…free and voluntary union of working classes of all nationalities of Russia.” However, his party quickly subordinated self-determination to class struggle.\textsuperscript{61}

This was even more evident during the Civil War between the White and Red Armies, when many minorities tried to establish independence, but were crushed by the Bolsheviks.\textsuperscript{62} Stalin attempted to create the Transcaucasian Federation and failed, contradicting the support of self-determination; this was reinforced in 1921 by the brutal conquest of the Menshevik Republic of Georgia, and the redrawing of borders of several states regardless of demography along lines of “language and nationality.”\textsuperscript{63}

Self-determination was officially replaced with the policies of equality among all peoples and universal political and cultural rights, which was accompanied by continued cooperation with non-Russian elites and tolerance of non-Russian cultures. This policy was meant to defuse tensions and win over the non-Russian populations, but it contributed to nation-building rather than neutralizing it in favor of Soviet unity, which was, the Soviets believed, the ultimate fate of nationalism.\textsuperscript{64}

By the 1930s, cooperation and accommodation of nationalism in the republics gave way to demanding strict adherence to “Soviet patriotism.” Stalin warned of the dangers of nationalism

\textsuperscript{59} Ibid, 355.  
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid, 361.  
\textsuperscript{61} Ibid, 364.  
\textsuperscript{62} Neville, \textit{Russia, the USSR, the CIS and the independent states}, 184.  
\textsuperscript{63} Kappeler, \textit{The Russian Empire}, 371-372.  
\textsuperscript{64} Ibid, 373.
while at the same time beginning to enforce Russian nationalism and culture across the satellites, which he presented as a Soviet identity. In an attempt to eliminate the frustrations of the satellite states, Soviet patriotism strove to create an identity that was satisfied by identifying with the Soviet Union but also emphasized the value of the worker so as to appease the individual.

Stalin’s death marked the beginning of “Destalinization,” a disavowal of his totalitarian brutality marked by some decentralization and expression of tolerance toward the recognition of individual nationalities. The caution with which the elite proceeded, however, affirmed that this was neither a constant nor a truly significant change. In fact, 1956-1974 marked years of repression for minorities, reinforcing the idea that “Soviet” identity, which was really Russian identity, was not to be challenged. The “bourgeois nationalism” of the liberal West was indeed considered a threat to Soviet identity and would not be tolerated.

Conclusion

Thus, Russian nationalism had its origins not with the formation of the state, but in the nobility of the 18th century, who were disoriented by the changes that accompanied the expansion of Empire. In the search for a Russian identity, then, the West became a foil for Russia, not to be emulated but rather contrasted with the West as superior. Ressentiment became the basis of Russian nationalism. However, with the violent overthrow of the monarchy in the 20th century came the imposition of a new system. The Soviet leadership sought to first accommodate, and then repress the nationalisms of the peoples of the Soviet Union, hoping to replace it with Soviet nationalism that transcended ethnicity. This took the form of more intense repression and Russification under Stalin. Even after his death, however, the tolerance that was shown to

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65 Ibid, 379.
66 Longworth, Russia, 272.
67 Neville, Russia, the USSR, the CIS and the independent states, 231.
68 Ibid, 236.
nationalist sentiment gave way to repression. This state of affairs would not be challenged until
the leadership of Mikhail Gorbachev, and his reforms of glasnost and perestroika, revealed the
cracks that lay in the foundation of Soviet nationalism.
Chapter Two: Reforming a Relic

By the late 80s, it became obvious that the delicate balance that the Soviet Union had struck, the Soviet nationalism that was meant to propel the people into the future as one strong nation, was failing. Gorbachev’s policies of glasnost and perestroika attempted to rectify the economic situation, which he saw as a source of insecurity, as well as create opportunities for party pluralism and more open discourse on the nature of politics. These measures, tempered as they were with insistence on keeping collective ownership and resisting devolution, served only to catalyze already weakening Soviet nationalism and reignite periphery nationalisms that were meant to have been extinguished. Several crises in the late 80s demonstrated once and for all that there was no real Soviet nation, not even in the imaginations of the people, despite Gorbachev’s best efforts.

Glasnost and perestroika

_Glasnost and Perestroika_, as conceived by Gorbachev, was meant to lead to an openness of economic and political decision making, as well as a degree of pluralism.\(^{69}\) What instead happened, however, was the opportunity for civil society, public dialogue and political change. _Glasnost_ allowed for a proliferation of ethnic nationalisms and discourse, while _perestroika_ provided a space for political maneuvering that had not been present under the previous system.

The implementation of _glasnost_ led to a proliferation of public discourse about nationalism and new ways of organization. Whereas in previous years nationalist writers had faced strict censure from the government regarding any dissemination of works criticizing the Soviet system

\(^{69}\) Martin McCauley, _Gorbachev_ (Harlow: Longman, 1998), 90.
and its realities, such as the horrors of forced collectivization, glasnost permitted a public shared discussion about identity and politics.\textsuperscript{70} The truth of the Stalinist period became a point of open discussion.\textsuperscript{71} Anatoly Rybakov’s “Children of the Arbat,” written in the 1970s, was published in 1987, along with the follow-up “1935 and Other Years.” These books detailed the Stalinist purges, show trials, the nightmares of collectivization and the starvation of peasants that resulted from Stalin’s policies.\textsuperscript{72} Once-banned works by writers both living and deceased began to be published. The range of “permissible authors, subjects, styles and genres” in all kinds of media, challenging the domination of Marxist-Leninist ways of thinking.\textsuperscript{73}

Glasnost also allowed for the growth of civil society. In the Russian federation, one article from the Wilson Quarterly in 1990 put the total of informal associations at 60,000, not including non-political groups.\textsuperscript{74} These groups represented the Russian people, newly imbued with the opportunity to explore the meaning of an identity that was not ascribed from above. This involved, particularly, looking back at history and lamenting the loss of Russian culture. It also, unfortunately, meant an opportunity to reinterpret history in less than tasteful ways: with the increasing dialogue came the increase of anti-Semitic rhetoric purporting to explain the decline of Russia. In trying to define the Russian character, many advocated a rejection of Western capitalism and ideology, for reasons ranging from its alienness to Russian culture to the uncertainty of the future if reforms were attempted.\textsuperscript{75} For others, it was Russia’s very backwardness that was to blame. Still others felt that was the culprit was communism itself, and

\textsuperscript{71} Ibid, 197.
\textsuperscript{73} Brudny, \textit{Rebuilding Russia}, 198.
\textsuperscript{74} Nicolai N. Petro, “Russian Nationalism: Toward a New Russian Federation,” \textit{The Wilson Quarterly} 14:3 (1990), 115.
\textsuperscript{75} Ibid, 117.
that Russian tradition had been contaminated, echoing the complaints of the Slavophiles.\textsuperscript{76} There was no consensus, and this was perhaps the point; the order-shaping function of Soviet nationalism was completely undermined as alternatives began to be imagined. Nationalism was no longer the tool of the elite, but a weapon in the hands of individuals. This became evident even to the enemies of the Soviet Union in the West, where one headline in the New York Times regarding the burgeoning conflict Armenia between Armenia and Azerbaijan perfectly summed up the problem: “Volatile Mix of Empire and Glasnost.”\textsuperscript{77} In fact, there was no mix – once the hyperbaric chamber that Soviet nationalism had created was opened, the decay of the Union was irreversible.

Against the backdrop of increasing ethnic nationalism as a result of \textit{glasnost}, Gorbachev’s \textit{perestroika} policies sought to introduce democratic reforms and improve the economic status of the Soviet Union, which was facing massive difficulties. Gorbachev “wished to move on,” from centralized economy, but did not want capitalism; at the same time, he wanted democracy, but knew that “real democracy could only be achieved under socialism.”\textsuperscript{78} He would not, however, concede to devolving powers to republics, or to privatization of property.\textsuperscript{79} This was an attempt to balance two principles that could not, in reality, coexist; one could not maintain a nationalism that depended on collective identity and centralized control and at the same time open up to individualist interpretations of social organization and popular discourse.

Gorbachev’s \textit{perestroika} meant a degree of economic and political decentralization, which quickly became untenable and only lead to more instability. Economic reforms focused on the increased independence of the republics as far as production management. Directors, managers,

\textsuperscript{76} Ibid, 118.
\textsuperscript{78} McCauley, \textit{Gorbachev}, 96.
\textsuperscript{79} Ibid, 110.
foremen, works councils and elected general assemblies of workers in enterprises were introduced. At the same time, the policies did not permit the ownership that made such management actually valuable to local owners, and the Party and Gorbachev continued to be staunchly opposed to such reform. This perpetuated the alienation of local governments from the center, as they were unsure how to handle these new responsibilities. As the budget deficit continued to grow, the economy felt the strain of the continued resistance to price reform while the central controls were “gradually dismantled.” Workers began to strike: in 1980, 400,000 miners went on strike for two weeks. The government eventually agreed to meet with the strike committees, leading to the signing of a deal permitting the independent marketing of coal and the freedom of coal miners from the government. Strikes were legalized again in October 1989. The government was proving to the republics that discourse about reform that would benefit all was simply not true to the reality, and that the central system could no longer meet the needs of its citizens

Gorbachev also instituted political reforms. He proposed “free, multicandidate elections to local soviets, secret ballots, guaranteed freedom of press, speech and assembly.” The proposal to introduce political pluralism in general was rejected. At the 19th party conference, he stated that “free competition of intellects” was “a fundamental tenet of perestroika.” He reorganized the Party, clearing some of the “deadwood” from the leadership. He created a “Congress of People’s Deputies,” the first body with nationally contested elections. This Congress was then to elect a “Supreme Soviet,” a “replica” of the former Supreme Soviet which was not elected. While this reform was “bursting forth,” however, the Party was losing influence in major cities.

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80 Ibid, 105.
81 Ibid, 131.
82 Ibid, 110.
83 Ibid, 115.
Gorbachev’s reforms were aiming to introduce pluralism and reinvigorate the system; what instead occurred were indications that there were cracks in the foundation.

Several crises in the late 1980s demonstrated the depth to which Soviet nationalism had failed; it became abundantly clear that there was no collective of people who considered themselves equal to one another. Bloody ethnic conflicts flared, demonstrating that Soviet nationalism was no longer the main ideology, if it had ever been. Ineptitude in managing serious crises further showed that the central state could no longer handle the administration of its vast territories.

Ethnic conflict and separatism became a serious issue. The 48th anniversary of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact in August 1988 inspired protests among the Baltic states, fueled by resentment over what was seen as their involuntary annexation. Estonians protested to restore Estonian as the dominant language.\(^8^4\) In Armenia, conflict between the Armenians and Azerbaijanis over the territory of Nagorno-Karabagh, which at this point had been ongoing since the land had been made part of Azerbaijan in 1923, erupted. The Supreme Soviet rejected the proposal of Armenia to incorporate the territory, and demonstrations continued. Violence between the two republics escalated. Gorbachev resisted any suggestions of annexation, thinking of the Baltics.\(^8^5\) In Uzbekistan, violence against Turks escalated – this population had been deported there in the first place by Stalin.\(^8^6\) Evidently, Soviet nationalism was no longer holding against the tide of public demonstration and emotion that glasnost had permitted.

Even more detrimental to the system were the crimes that were now public discourse. The killing of Polish police officers in the Katyn forest, long purported to be the work of the Germans, was revealed to have been carried out by a Soviet agency. Because of glasnost, the

\(^8^4\) Ibid, 127.  
\(^8^5\) Ibid, 128.  
\(^8^6\) Ibid, 131.
extent of the radiation that had occurred after the Chernobyl was revealed to be much greater than had been confessed; and many more people had been affected by it than had previously been believed. The people in these areas had not been warned, nor had they been allowed to measure the radiation themselves. This could only be a blow to the idea of a Soviet nation, where everyone was equally valued – if the elites valued the people, such secrecy would have been unconscionable. Thus, glasnost and perestroika introduced public discourse and reinvigorated nationalist sentiment long believed to have been defeated. The reforms attempting to introduce a degree of economic and political openness only served to demonstrate that the system had become weak and that it would perhaps not be feasible to reform only halfway. The Union was at a crossroads, and the question was whether it would be able to survive in the new climate.

**The future of the union**

It was clear now that continuing the party line was untenable, but where to go next? Gorbachev and Boris Yeltsin were at opposing ends of the question, with Yeltsin supporting devolution and Gorbachev balking. The referendum on the future of the Union represented the conflict between a desire to maintain the scope of the Union in some form and the recognition of the fact that national identities could no longer be ignored. In the end, the Union was dissolved, leaving only sovereign states behind.

At the 28th Party Congress, in 1990, Gorbachev managed to get a majority approval to establish a presidential system against a backdrop of increasing tension within the Party between radicals and conservatives. He became the first president of the Soviet Union, but he was not democratically elected. A Presidential Council and Council of the Federation, consultative

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87 Ibid, 131-132.
88 Ibid, 131.
89 Ibid, 160.
bodies representing the republics, was also established. There was, however, no strong executive to enforce Gorbachev’s decisions. ⁹⁰ Boris Yeltsin was elected the first president of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic. It was then declared sovereign. This event, already massive in its implications, only led to more questions. While Gorbachev wanted to strengthen central institutions, Yeltsin wanted more devolution to the republics. ⁹¹ At this point, however, Gorbachev was unable to carry out his desires. This was hardly surprising. The ethnic violence and turmoil that had plagued the previous year had only made it too clear that the genie was not going back in the bottle. The Soviet Union, from its inception, relied on the assumption that identity could simply be reconstituted; but once it had been demonstrated that Soviet nationalism could not shape society as it had promised, there was no going back.

It was decided to hold a referendum on the future of the Union in 1991. The 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? ⁹²

The language of the referendum question itself is extremely telling. It puts forth as a possibility the language of individual freedoms and rights which had previously been deemed unsuited to Russia’s people. It also concedes that the Soviet Union as a source of identity was no longer sufficient, and perhaps never had been. In proposing “equal” and “sovereign” republics, terms that in Greenfeld’s definition are reserved for the characteristics of a nation, it in effect admits that Soviet nationalism was no longer the source of these qualities – they could come only from the republics, which were ethnically defined. What is also significant is that despite the acknowledgement of the inevitability of devolution into republics, the suggestion of a framework

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⁹⁰ Ibid, 166.
⁹¹ Ibid, 173.
⁹² Ibid, 207.
of collective identity through federation is there – this was noted during a Congressional hearing on the implications of the referendum for democratization.\(^{93}\)

The referendum results only made it more difficult to retain the Union as it was. While 76 percent were in favor, in Russia, almost as many people were in favor of a president as of the union. In Lithuania, 94 percent wanted independence; in Georgia and Armenia, the vote was for restoration of sovereignty.\(^{94}\)

As the future became increasingly grim, a coup to get rid of Gorbachev was hatched, and, due to its inept planning, failed. In August of 1991, Gorbachev resigned as general secretary of the Party and asked local soviets to “take over Party property.” A “Union of Sovereign States” was established that was meant to replace the current system.\(^{95}\) In reality, there was no such successor to be had.

In December 1991, the USSR ceased to exist and was replaced by the Commonwealth of Independent states, a union of sovereign states without any centralization of government. As the Russian nationalists who had been wary of liberalization had feared, the dissolution of the Union led to economic collapse. At the same time, ethnic Russian minorities in the former states of the Union were now viewed as “aliens in another state.”\(^{96}\) The existence of these minorities, still in place today, and the concept of their potential alienation, would become a quintessential part of the narrative of Russian nationalism. For the moment, however, the question was this: was it now time for Russia to play catch-up, or resist an “imposed” liberal order?\(^{97}\)

\(^{93}\) Referendum in the Soviet Union implications for democratization: hearing before the Subcommittees on Europe and the Middle East and on Human Rights and International Organizations of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, House of Representatives, One Hundred Second Congress, first session, March 13, 1991.

\(^{94}\) McCauley, Gorbachev, 207.

\(^{95}\) McCauley, Gorbachev, 240.

\(^{96}\) Longworth, Russia, 310.

\(^{97}\) Laruelle, In the name of the nation, 15.
It is no surprise that a great deal of concern surrounded the dissolution of the Soviet Union. A headline in the New York Times in August of 1991 read “SOVIET TURMOIL: Collapse of an Empire; Soviet Politicians Agree the Union Is Dying But There Is No Accord on What's Ahead,” 98; “Where are the Prophets?” queried an article in Le Monde, in December of that year. What hope, the article questions, could be given to the newly-liberated people? What would the newly democratizing countries look like?99 The world watched anxiously as the Union appeared to destroy itself from the inside.

Boris Yeltsin became the first popularly elected Russian president in 1991. It remained to be seen how he would meet the challenge of reconstructing Russia, now without its satellites and with the challenge of building a new economy and political system where the basis for both, either through the free market or civil society, had been stifled. It was evident now that centralization would not work, but what would replace it, and how, was not nearly so clear.

The failure of liberalism

Yeltsin promised a break from the tyranny of the Soviet Union and a prosperous future, but without institutions, capitalism simply distributed wealth into a very few hands, recreating the inequality of the past. The populace became disenchanted as Yeltsin appeared to be making decisions that contradicted the promise of democracy, culminating with his dissolution of parliament, And to make matters worse, the West appeared to support Yeltsin. Such a reversal of previous regimes, when the West was the enemy of all, including the leader, only reinforced that what had resulted from Yeltsin’s takeover was not a democratic path to a better life and a better

Russian nation, but a state in which the supposedly democratic leader did not represent his people and was interested only in exercising his own power. Yeltsin resigned following the ignominy of conflict with Chechnya and continued economic failure,

The economic situation in Russia post-independence was dire. Tax revenues had collapsed due to the dismantling of the central planning system, while inflation rose – prices were up by 2,600 percent in 1992.\textsuperscript{100} GDP fell by a cumulative 40-50 percent.\textsuperscript{101} With the input of the International Monetary Fund, the government set about to implement reforms. The liberalization of the economy, with the goal of establishing a free market, had several components. These were the partial remove of price controls, the privatization of business and the sale of government property. These measures were intended to resolve the problems of funding and inflation that plagued Russia post-independence, but instead concentrated the ownership of property into the hands of elites and created an oligarchy.

Lacking a state-run economy, and adhering to the IMF plans for liberalization, the government introduced price liberalization for most businesses; however, gas, electricity, and housing prices remained subsidized.\textsuperscript{102}

Privatization of business occurred in three phases: spontaneous, voucher privatization, and cash sales. Spontaneous privatization, in 1989-91, occurred as individual businesses “turned themselves into private legal entities.”\textsuperscript{103} In the “voucher privatization program,” citizens received vouchers to bid for shares in state enterprises, newly registered as private. Workers and managers were given the option to buy shares of their own firms. In most cases, however, this led to situations where managers bought up shares from their employees, concentrating the

\textsuperscript{101} Ibid, 7
\textsuperscript{102} Ibid, 5
\textsuperscript{103} Ibid, 4.
ownership into a small group of people. Many firms also simply swapped shares with other companies or regional governments. In the third wave of privatization, the government decided to sell its property. The government was unwilling to sell to foreign investors; at the same time, Russians did not have the capital to pay cash for property. Given this, the government instated the infamous “loans for shares” program. Shares in “leading oil and metals companies” would be exchanged for loans from Russian banks. This process was fraught with corruption: prices were artificially low, and “affiliates of the bank” tended to “win” the auctions. Much of the money given in loans even appeared to come from the state.¹⁰⁴ What resulted from this was the rule of the oligarchs, who bought up all the industries, monopolized the economy and were only serving their own interests.¹⁰⁵ These oligarchs backed Yeltsin and the state, bankrolling his campaigns and using resources at their companies to skew coverage in his favor.¹⁰⁶

Throughout all this, the democratic institutions of Russia, although nominally in place, did not appear to be working as expected. Yeltsin focused on exercising executive power, while the legislature was “outmaneuvered” and government staff were changed “at the whim of the president.” Liberalization occurred not through the enforcement of the legislature but by “presidential decree.” The prime minister post was confirmed by the legislature to be a Soviet holdover, not his reformist opponent.¹⁰⁷

Yeltsin went further when he realized the legislature would continue to oppose his economic and political reforms, dismissing parliament via unconstitutional decree in 1993 and sending in the army. In his decree of dissolution, Yeltsin stated that the “security of Russia and her people”

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, 8.
¹⁰⁷ Rutland, Business and the State in Contemporary Russia, 10.
was more important than “formal compliance with contradictory regulations created by the legislature,” and that his actions were taken to “protect” democracy, freedom, and reform. The “paralysis” induced by legislative stonewalling was making it impossible, he said, to maintain “elementary order.” The speech was a tacit admission of the failure to establish a functioning democracy. Elections for a new parliament provided a win for the opposition. At the same time, a referendum was introduced for the adoption of a new constitution that had not even been finished, or seen by the voters – it passed, and its effect was to increase the president’s executive power. Yeltsin took additional care to hold on to his power, playing interest groups against each other and using bribery to co-opt officials.

Yeltsin was marked with ignominy by the prolonged, violent conflict with Chechnya. Particularly damaging for the faith of the people was an attack on a Southern Russian hospital in 1995. The incident left 100 dead and many more taken hostage; many of the hostages being released, but the failure to retrieve the rest was a point of embarrassment. Military officials and political analysts, as well as prominent newspapers such as Izvestiya and Sevodnya, openly criticized the lack of coordination of rescue operations, the inadequacy of supplies provided to the soldiers on the mission, and the confusion of seemingly inaccurate information that was coming out about the crisis. For example, Russian officials had stated that rebels had “murdered village elders and hanged six Russian soldiers; neither turned out to be true. Neither was it true, as was announced when the assault was launched, that all the hostages had been killed by the

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110 Rutland, Business and the State in Contemporary Russia, 11.


112 Longworth, Russia, 308.
rebels. The mishandling of the Chechen crisis only added to the unfavorable environment and the “pain, impotence and shame” surrounding the failures of Yeltsin’s administration.

Despite his growing unpopularity, the West continued to prop Yeltsin up, offering him professional support for his re-election campaign in 1996, which, unsurprisingly, he won. Although there was recognition of the fact that Yeltsin’s government was leaning toward authoritarianism by that point, and the support of the West was in question, there was one problem, according to a diplomat stationed in Moscow: “We don’t have any alternative. If we put up sanctions against Yeltsin now, we would just strengthen the other side of the political spectrum.” At that point, then, the decision appeared to be between a familiar but worsening situation and an unknowable quantity.

The West acted on this quandary accordingly. Some years after the election, Time magazine published an astonishingly in-depth article detailing how Western political consultants who had previously worked for Bill Clinton were brought in via a Russian émigré businessman, Felix Braynin, who was close to some of Yeltsin’s top aides. The winter before the elections, Time notes, Yeltsin’s approval ratings were “in the single digits,” but he was “arguably the best hope Russia [had] for moving toward pluralism and an open economy.” More than 60% of those asked “believed Yeltsin was corrupt; more than 65% believed he had wrecked the economy.” In the end, however, by positing Yeltsin as a better alternative than upheaval, the American consultants were able to push Yeltsin to victory despite his unpopularity.

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114 Ibid.
115 Longworth, Russia, 309.
It is a mark of how badly his administration failed that his economic policies were referred to as a “crime against national security” by anti-Communist newspapers that had previously supported him.\(^\text{118}\) Despite being the head of state, he was not trusted to protect it or the people; he had done nothing to resolve the anxieties of the population or to prove that democracy was viable in Russia. Not only had he been ineffective, but his leadership had been, in the eyes of the people, a detriment to Russia. In 1998, a series of protests brought 615,000 people out to voice their dissatisfaction with Yeltsin. Some were fearful of Western influence as a plot against Russia; some merely angry at the failed economic reforms. One man bemoaned the loss of the standard of living under communism: “Yeltsin told us that everything would be better in this free-market system…We saw how people lived better in the West and we believed Yeltsin,” but instead they were now beholden to the West and much worse off. Many were disgruntled at the “loss of status” of Russia. The Communist Party Leader, Gennady Zyuganov, called for Yeltsin to resign and stated that the president was “a stone blocking everyone's way. He does not guarantee anything but corruption and theft.”\(^\text{119}\)

Another problem facing the country was the status of the significant Russian minorities in other states, particularly the Baltics. The reports of discrimination faced by Russian minorities that began to flow in from former satellites only accentuated the ways in which it seemed that the Russian people had been truly abandoned.\(^\text{120}\) For example, in Estonia, which had an ethnic Russian population of 30 percent in 1989, Russians could not gain citizenship – despite Russian insistence that it be unconditional, the Estonian government policy remained: knowledge of

\(^{118}\) Longworth, Russia, 312.


\(^{120}\) Longworth, Russia, 310.
Estonian was a requirement, and most Russians did not know the language.\textsuperscript{121} The counter to the criticism was the Estonian need to assert ethnic history on its territory, as well as the legacy of Soviet oppression.\textsuperscript{122} This was also the case in Latvia, where ethnic Russians were 85 percent of the nation’s non-citizen population. In both countries, Russian military presence was imposed to “protect” these minorities, claiming their rights were being violated. Yeltsin spoke out harshly against the “humiliation” of ethnic Russians in Latvia and stated that the country had the “responsibility for the protection of civil, political, economic and cultural rights of our compatriots,” framing their citizenship law as a violation of these rights.\textsuperscript{123} Meanwhile, Latvians were frustrated with the situation, arguing that Russians seemed to be operating on the basis of “Communist privilege” which no longer applied.\textsuperscript{124} Although troops withdrew from the Baltics by 1995,\textsuperscript{125} there continues to be concern over Russian military presence continuing in the Baltics.\textsuperscript{126} 

Yeltsin was forced to step down in 2000, to be followed by “designated successor,” Putin; his early resignation came packaged with immunity from prosecution, “three-quarters of a presidential salary, a personal staff, medical care, a government dacha, and benefits for his immediate family.”\textsuperscript{127}

Conclusion

After the failure of Gorbachev to preserve the Soviet Union, and the disappointment and corruption of Yeltsin’s regime, any successor to Russia was faced with a myriad of problems. The corrupt state of the Russian economy and the presence of oligarchs who held exorbitant amounts of wealth was a major obstacle. So too was the lack of faith of the Russian people in the government, and a so far negative experience with democracy. The status of Russia and its pride was a major concern of the Russian people, who felt that Yeltsin had betrayed their country. In effect, any leader who would hope to succeed would have to address these failures, as well as the lingering nostalgia for the Communist regime. Vladimir Putin, through his policies of recentralization and consistent emphasis on the importance of honoring Russian history, combines elements of both the Soviet legacy and the pre-Soviet days of glory in an attempt to reconstruct a national narrative of a strong Russian state. Thus, reframing of certain symbols and aspects of history such as Stalin’s legacy and Russia’s involvement in World War II, as well as frequent reference to the wisdom of Russian philosophers, has been Putin’s way of resolving these problems. However, as we shall see, in reality, ethnic tensions, rising extremism, and the ultimately undemocratic nature of the regime are juxtaposed with attempts to strengthen the state, posing a question of whether Russia will reach the level of democracy it was hoped Yeltsin would usher in.
Chapter Three: Putin Reinvigorates the State

Part I: Putin the reformer

Putin came into office following Yeltsin, whose regime, meant to indicate a turn to freedom and increased democratization, instead resulted in corruption and increased unease. His policies are a direct response to the dissatisfaction of the Russian people, an effort to recreate an image of strength and power from years past. His recentralization of the government and reemphasis on the deference of business and media to the state are a championing of statism that leans away from open democracy. At the same time, Putin’s public response to questions of freedoms and rights demonstrates the desire to project an image of the welfare of the citizen and a vision of Russia that is not concordant with its realities. The Russian state at present does not represent one in which freedoms are guaranteed; the population reports high levels of distrust, as well as fractionalization between ethnic Russians and migrants or citizens of other ethnicities. These problems appear to be systematic, affecting the application of principles of justice and the functioning of the government vis-à-vis its citizens. Thus, Putin’s drive to recreate a Sovietized image of power and strength through the use of cultural representations and reorganization of government is out of step with the reality of Russia, resulting only in a decrease of democratization and a disenchanted public.

Putin’s philosophy: statism, history and tradition

Putin’s inaugural speech in 2000 introduced him as the official successor to a maligned leader. Speaking of his new “responsibility” to the Russian people, he echoes Yeltsin’s words
from his last speech in the Kremlin: “take care of Russia.” This was a “patriotic affair,” “the first time in the entire history of our state, for the first time in Russian history” that power was handed over in a “most democratic and in the most simple way.” The move to a new regime, then, was a “test” of the strength of Russia’s constitution. Putin emphasized that the future of Russia was the movement towards democratic state, a “free society.” A successful Russian democracy would be one in which “the authorities elected by the people work in their interests, defend Russian citizens everywhere, including both inside and outside our country, and serve the society.” At the same time, citing the Kremlin’s historical significance as the “heart of the city,” Putin declares the need to heed the past. 128

“Always remember those who created the Russian state, championed its dignity and made it a great, powerful and mighty state,” he says. “We shall hand down to our descendants all that is best in our history - all that is best.” He wants Russia to be a “free, prosperous, rich, strong and civilized country.”

Putin ends his inaugural speech with the following statement:

I consider it my sacred duty to unite the people of Russia and to gather citizens around the clearly-defined tasks and aims and to remember, every minute of every day, that we are one nation and we are one people. We have one common destiny.

Thus, in his first speech as the new leader of Russia, Putin addressed what he knew to be the fears and hopes of the Russian people, emphasizing rebuilding, and moving forward, as well as the importance of the past. By “accepting” the responsibility for the fate of the Russian people, he positions himself at the helm of a specific task. He makes clear that Russia’s past, taken at its best, demonstrates Russian greatness, and that he is the one who will move Russians forward into a great future. The importance of these pronunciations lies in his own interpretation of his

role, as well as the presentation of “history” and the “future” as compatible elements. The Kremlin is the heart of the city, regardless of whether that city lies in Imperial Russia or the Soviet Union or a newly democratic Russian Federation— the evident strength and historical legacy of the Russian state is the object of admiration, as well as the people within it. A democracy, then, is meant to be conceptualized as the next step in a fluid continuity of history, with all of the development and modernization that befits it.\textsuperscript{129}

Putin’s veneration of the Russian state and its history is strong. He often cites historical figures from various time periods of Russian history to support his views, and considers the curation of an accurate Russian history to be one of the foremost tasks of the government and its people. He frequently cites Ivan Ilyin, a religious and political philosopher who lived from 1883-1954. Ilyin was considered an “enemy of the Bolshevik state.” An avid nationalist, he “did not reject” fascist ideology; he decried the West, which he saw as aiming to attack the unique strength of the Russian state with propaganda regarding “democratization.” Democratization was incompatible with the Russian state, according to Ilyin, due to its ethnic and cultural diversity and geography. The solution, then, would be authoritarianism, the only way to impose order that at the same time would allow freedom.\textsuperscript{130}

An illustration of the manner in which Putin cites Ilyin’s ideas in the context of contemporary Russian society is Address to the Federal Assembly, when discussing, the need to revise restrictions on businesses. He cites the following quote:

He who loves Russia should wish freedom for it; above all, freedom for Russia as such, for its international independence and self-sufficiency; freedom for Russia as a unity of Russian and all other ethnic cultures; and finally, freedom for the Russian people, freedom for all of us: freedom of faith, of the search for truth, creativity, work, and property.

\textsuperscript{129} Ibid.
Freedom, in this case, entails the “freedom of enterprise,” private property, and the rejection of the “presumption of guilt” of businessmen. The “overwhelming, absolute majority,” Putin says, want to be a “benefit to Russia.” Their value, in other words, is emphasized to be their service to the state, and the “freedom” that is then meant to be allowed is the freedom from prohibitive restrictions and the need for more transparent inspection processes. Putin makes clear that the “well-being of Russia” is paramount; the exercise of freedom by “patriots” should not be constrained. 131 This is but one example, and his use of Ilyin as well as the influence of Ilyin’s ideas will continue to be illustrated throughout this chapter.

Putin also cites the philosopher Nikolai Berdyayev, particularly citing his conservative ideas in the service of his views against the West. Berdyayev was exiled from Russia in 1922, writing from the west until his death in 1948. He wrote extensively about Russian nationalism, more concerned with the Russian national character and Orthodoxy than any particular political form. 132 Putin invoked Berdyayev in an Address to the Federal Assembly in 2013, discussing the importance of “tradition,” “moral values and ethical norms,” “traditional families, real human life, including religious life.” He quotes Berdyayev as saying:

the point of conservatism is not that it prevents movement forward and upward, but that it prevents movement backward and downward, into chaotic darkness and a return to a primitive state.

This conservatism was, as many noted, a reaction to the Western backlash over the persecution of LGBT individuals in Russia, particularly the passing of a law against “gay propaganda” ahead of the Sochi Olympic Games. 133 Thus, invoking Berdyayev, Putin addressed the values

dissonance that appears to exist between Russia and the West, specifically by contrasting
Russian tradition and religion to Western norms.

The juxtaposition of Russia and the West, as we have seen, has a long history in Russia.
Through the continued emphasis on the importance of “accuracy” in the factual discussions of
Russian history, Putin has made it clear that maintaining the narrative of the strong Russian state
is a priority. He met with prominent academics and history teachers from the Institute of Russian
History, Institute of General History and the Archaeology Institute in November 2014; at the
time, the Ukraine crisis, which we will discuss in more detail further on, was under way.\footnote{Ukraine crisis: Timeline, \textit{BBC News}, November 13, 2014, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-26248275.} The
purpose of the meeting, in his words, was to emphasize the importance of combating the
“attempts to rewrite history and shape it to particular geopolitical interests.” The impetus, given
the timing, was to discuss the status of Crimea, whose history, Putin says, is greatly intertwined
with Russia’s, invoking spiritual connections such as the place where “Prince Vladimir was
baptized, subsequently baptising Rus.” This was a direct response to the Western interpretation
of the crisis, which suggested that Russia’s incursion on Crimea was illegitimate and violated its
sovereignty. Moreover, Putin discussed the perception of the Soviet Union at the time of the
Second World War, arguing that Russian casualties and contributions are not adequately
portrayed and must be further studied. He further stated that the “the real events of World War I”
are misrepresented, again to the detriment of the Russians. He agreed with contributors that it
was essential to “reconstruct” Russian history, meaning “Muscovite Russia, the Great Patriotic
War, the War of 1812, and so on.” Thus, the desire to revive a cultural heritage that he believes
to have been misrepresented is, in Putin’s view, the purview of these academics in connection
with the state, and to have been unsuccessful in connecting the Russian people, particularly
youth, with an “objective” narrative of the past is “a failure on the part of the state authorities.” A cultivation of a narrative of Russian history that is free from what he sees as the “recoding” of the West is thus part of the work of reinvigorating the Russian state.\textsuperscript{135}

Despite the emphasis on the primacy of the state, which Putin draws from a philosophical and historical background, Putin is avidly against the development of a “single state ideology,” stating that “any country that aspires to develop effectively and to be competitive in the world today must have a contest of opinions.”\textsuperscript{136}

In January of this year, Putin gave an interview to a German newspaper in which he stated that the West and Russia “never re-established a relationship of trust following the Soviet Union’s collapse.” He is quoted as saying,

“Twenty-five years ago, the Berlin Wall fell, but invisible walls were moved to eastern Europe. This has led to mutual misunderstandings and assignments of guilt. They are the cause of all crises ever since.”

“We've done everything wrong.”

Despite the attribution of misunderstanding as mutual, he also stated that the expansion of NATO demonstrated a desire not to improve relations but to secure “a complete victory over the Soviet Union.” Similarly, then, the sanctions against Russia following the annexation of Crimea were intended to harm Russia, not help Ukraine.\textsuperscript{137} The relationship with the West, then, involves not only a clash of ideas and perceptions of history, but a geopolitical conflict as well.

Drawing on historical and philosophical Russian traditions, then, Putin sees the power of the state as central to the promotion of a well-ordered and successful society. This state, further, is meant to give freedom to individuals, rather than suppress them in the manner of a totalitarian

ideological state. We will now turn to the ways in which these philosophical and political ideas, and this emphasis on history, can be found in Putin’s nation-building and state-building activities, and the ways in which in fact, reality may be separate from the vision that Putin promotes.

**Recentralization of the state**

Putin’s administrative reforms demonstrate a commitment to recentralization and reaffirmation of the authority and power of the state, a construction of a “vertical of power.” Putin’s reforms have reduced the asymmetry of Russia’s federalism and the autonomy of the regional governments, as well as enforced the compliance of regional laws with federal. Institutional recentralization is ongoing to continue to narrow the “vertical” of power and reduce its execution outside of the central government. Putin addresses these reforms as necessary to promoting a strong state and national stability, as well as protecting the rights of citizens. At the same time, however, regional and opposition leaders have pointed out the undemocratic nature of these reforms and objected strongly to them, enforcing the point of view that Putin’s strengthening of the state comes at the expense of those not in line with his own ends.

Putin’s decree in May of 2000 reorganized the state, which had previously been an asymmetrical federation. It established seven federal districts, each to be staffed with a Presidential Representative, and abolished the position of regional representative. During Yeltsin’s administration, even though they were appointed by him, the regional representatives were considered to be either “too dependent” on regional governors, prone to “going native,” co-opted by regional elites they were meant to be monitoring, or effectively redundant compared to

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139 Ibid, 723.
regional authorities. Putin’s decree made it clear that PRs were to be “directly subordinate to the President…and accountable to him.” These representatives, now fewer in number, were connected directly to the central government through their addition to the Security Council. Their contact with the President thus increased, reducing the risk of regional influence. The districts themselves “cut across” existing inter-regional associations, leaving some regions “unhappy” as their economic ties to other regions were disrupted. Putin further stated that the PR’s role was “to 'return to the federation the federal functions of those organs which operate in the regions',” and the “organization of work to ensure the realization by bodies of state power of the main directions in internal and external state politics, as defined by the President.” Thus, this reorganization was intended to reinforce a system in which the state reasserted its influence and control in the regions, at their expense.

Putin also reformed the upper house of parliament. This government body “approves presidential proposals on the introduction of martial law and states of emergency, authorizes the deployment of Russian troops abroad, appoints constitutional and Supreme Court justices, and appoints and dismisses the country's prosecutor general.” Previously, regional executive and legislative members served on the Council on a part-time basis; these were elected members of their regional governments. Per Putin’s reform, however, these executives were to send representatives who would work for the FC full-time, losing their “privileged positions” in federal government and “weakening” their ability to defend their interests. Based in Moscow

140 Ibid, 722.
141 Ibid, 723.
142 Ibid, 727.
143 Ibid, 724.
145 Ibid, 728.
146 Ibid, 729.
on a permanent basis, these representatives are distanced from the influence of their regions.\textsuperscript{147} Putin’s degree on the reform of the Council “suggested that it was by definition a consultative body subordinate to the President, with limited power.”\textsuperscript{148} At the time, this reform met with considerable pushback from leaders who believed it was detrimental to the representative capabilities of the Council, a serious problem given its important responsibilities. Sergei Yushenkov, a liberal pro-reform politician, stated that this reform “[transformed] the Federation Council into a chamber of puppets.” (Yushenkov was shot dead in 2003.)\textsuperscript{149} Nikolai Fyodorov, a representative from the Chuvashia region, declared that the bills weakened the upper chamber as representative of the regions, as “strong regional power” appeared to be “unacceptable” to the Kremlin. Even though the Duma passed the bill with an amendment stating that executives could only be dismissed due to a serious crime, critics believed that these reforms “[cleared] the way” for anyone who “fell out of favor” with the government.\textsuperscript{150} The federal government also retained the right to “suspend the powers” of a regional body if it was determined there was a “misuse of federal subsidies”; in the case of debt, the federal government would take over financial administration of the region. This state of affairs made governors “very nervous.”\textsuperscript{151}

In 2004, a new law was introduced that further reduced regional autonomy by revoking the right to elect regional governors. The law, which was introduced in the aftermath of a terrorist attack in Beslan, allowed Putin to appoint regional governors, who had to be confirmed by the regional legislatures. However, if his choice was rejected twice, he reserved the right to “dissolve

\textsuperscript{147} Ibid, 730.
\textsuperscript{148} Ibid, 731
the rebellious legislature and appoint his own choice as acting governor.” The move was compared to the appointment of local Communist Party bosses by the Kremlin during the Soviet Period.152 Vladimir Tikhonov, the governor of the Ivanovo region, decried this as a “step back” in democracy, “undemocratic” and “unconstitutional.” He was unconvinced of the connection of regional governors to the problem of terrorism.153 In addition, the measure countered division of powers and the status of the government as a federation in general.154 Murtaza Rakhimov and Mintimer Shaimiev, The leaders of Bashkortostan and Tatarstan, who had been in power before the collapse of the Soviet Union and gained Putin’s support, were in favor of the measure. They cited corruption and illegitimacy of current governors as evidence of its necessity. Both, however, were noted to have resorted to manipulation of the political system themselves.155 The law was reversed in 2012 by then-President Dmitry Medvedev, who reintroduced elections for regional governors – after removing several unpopular or “unsuccessful” governors from their posts.156 In 2013, Putin again reversed the decision, reintroducing his ability to select candidates. In the event a regional legislature chooses to forgo direct elections, it can choose “from a list of three candidates handed down by Putin.”157

Thus, the recentralization of power and removal of regional autonomies reflected Putin’s desire to reinvigorate the state. Regional leaders and reformers saw these measures as counter to

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democracy and a step back to authoritarianism in the style of the Soviet period. Putin clearly intended to reaffirm the strength of the state against regional authorities that he could not control, regardless of objections to the undemocratic nature of these reforms. True to Ilyin, then, democratization took a backseat to the primacy of the state.

Furthering this reaffirmation of state power, state charters and constitutions were revised to reduce the “large space,” namely the autonomy that had been granted to the regions and local government in the federalized system. This process was described as the “harmonizing” of federal, regional and local law. In practice, however, it is less harmonization and more unilateral enforcement of compliance with the federal government. In June 2000, Putin proposed a bill entitling the President to “issue a warning against a regional assembly if it is established by a 'suitable court' that it has contradicted the constitution.” In the case of a second strike, the President would be allowed to submit a request to dissolve the assembly. Regional executives, upon a second offense of constitutional violation, could be dismissed by the President and replaced by an appointee of his choosing. As mentioned above, the bill the Duma passed was amended to make the suspension of the executive more difficult and meant to occur only in the event of a serious crime; however, the attitude towards reform demonstrated by Putin’s bill proposal was not isolated. He also “issued a series of decrees ordering regions to suspend legislation which contradicts the federal constitution… acted unilaterally to suspend some regional laws.” Rather than an indication of harmonizing, then, these actions reflected a desire to unilaterally create a “vertical” of power reflecting the primacy of the state.

This process of “harmonizing” is ongoing. For example, in 2013, speaking to the Federal Assembly, he justified a proposal to “amend the Constitution and to unite the Supreme Court and

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158 Laruelle, *In the name of the nation*, 19.
159 Hyde, “Putin's Federal Reforms,” 733.
Higher Arbitration Court.” In doing so, he invoked what he presented as the two mandates of the constitution: “the supreme value of rights and freedoms of citizens and a strong state.” The unifying of courts was intended to reduce the “legal uncertainty” created by disparate judicial systems, which threaten the stability of the government. The consolidation of the court and subsequent strengthening of the Russian state “strengthen the guarantees protecting a crucial constitutional principle, the equality of all before the law.” Although this may appear contradictory, given the clear lack of concern over whether an issue is democratic or not observed in the stripping of regional powers, it reflects the principle demonstrated in Putin’s discussion of business. The rights of citizens are important insofar as they reflect a dedication to improving the state. If democratization hinders the ability to centralize effectively, as it evidently did in regional politics, then the importance of the state clearly outweighs the provision of democratic rights.

“Cleaning up” business-state relations

In addition to being reminiscent of Soviet-era centralization, Putin’s choice of staff reflects continuity with the Soviet Union. Important positions in both public and private sector are staffed by Putin’s Soviet-era contemporaries. He had several appointees from a “narrow circle” of acquaintances from within law school, his history in the St. Petersburg city government, and the KGB. They received such positions as Procurator General, Deputy Prime Minister, head of Russian Railways, and state-controlled corporations such as Transneft.\textsuperscript{160} Coming from a common Soviet background, these men shared a system of values, belief in the supremacy of the state and a resistance to democracy and liberal values. It also, in the world of business, meant a highly personalistic and targeted view of who would stay and who would go.

\begin{footnote}{\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{160} Brian Taylor, \textit{State Building in Putin’s Russia: Policing and Coercion after Communism} (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 60.}}

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As we have seen, after Russia declared independence, it inherited an economic problem from a formerly concentrated economy. The sale of government property resulted in the concentration of wealth in the hands of the few and created an oligarchy and an environment of corruption.

As we have seen, Putin emphasizes the centrality of the benefit of the state in matters of business. Thus, in his efforts to tackle the corruption of the oligarchy, Putin has exercised discretion regarding those he pursues. His efforts are concentrated on those who appear to be a threat to him or those in his circle.

In 2003, Mikhail Khodorkovsky, CEO of the Yukos oil company, was arrested after being interrogated regarding charges of embezzlement; one of the complainants was Rosneft, a state-owned oil company which accused Yukos of “stealing” a share in another company.

Khodorkovsky protested the charges as unfair, stating that there was an “obvious lack of evidence” pointing to his guilt and numerous witnesses who testified as such. Many political leaders and critics were in Khodorkovsky’s corner, insisting that there needed to be a fair and open trial. European Union commissioner for external affairs Chris Patten reiterated this view, with many Western critics concerned about what they saw as a non-transparent process and a selective application of the law in a case where no allegations had been proved. Khodorkovsky was apparently also providing financial support to opposition parties such as Yabloko, and active in lobbying for Yukos’ interests in the Duma.

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with a history in the KGB, “picked off” Yuko’s oil subsidiary after the dismantling of the company.\(^{165}\)

The Yukos affair was emblematic of the state of affairs in Russia after Putin came into office. Putin gathered 21 of the oligarchs at a meeting at the start of his term, in which he made clear that the influence of the oligarchs in political affairs was to come to an end, and that he would “rid Russia of the oligarchs as a class.” There were two notable absences from this meeting, however: Boris Berezovsky and Roman Abramovich. Berezovsky and Abramovich had not only been in Yeltsin’s inner circle as leaders of the most powerful oligarch group, The Family; Berezovsky was credited with a hand in selecting Putin to succeed Yeltsin.\(^{166}\) (The two fell out and Berezovsky fled Russia, only to be killed while in exile.\(^{167}\))

Thus, Putin’s intent to crack down on oligarchs and reign in businesses was and is ostensibly about the state regaining control from corrupt businessmen serving their own interest; it is also marked with the continuity of the Soviet era and the service of those in Putin’s circle. The Guardian published a list of Russia’s biggest oligarchs in 2007. Their ranking listed as part of the profiles the relationship of these individuals with Putin, which ranged from “chummy” to “mixed” to “not good.” Khodorovsky was the unfortunate recipient of the “not good” label, as his location at the time was in a Siberian jail. Viktor Vekselberg, a tycoon in the aluminum industry, had a “mixed” relationship with Putin, characterized by both accompanying Putin on a trip to Luxembourg and public criticism from Putin for “failing to develop a gas field in Siberia.”

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Similarly, Mikhail Prokhorov was awarded an Order of Friendship from the Kremlin one year and arrested the next.168

Thus, Putin’s crackdowns were indeed selective. The souring, or potential souring, of relationship of oligarchs to Putin appears to be rooted in the extent to which they are believed to be either a threat to control of the state (as in the Yakos affair) or simply not contributing to the economy of Russia, as in the case of Vekselberg. Those who were part of Putin’s circle or in control of state-owned enterprise, or both, as Rosneft would have it, received different treatment and might benefit from the targeting of businesses under the guise of cracking down on corruption. The purpose, then, was again to reassert state supremacy over errant oligarchs and to maintain a vertical of power which was in turn dominated by a continuity of roles from Soviet times.

**The state and party politics**

Putin’s administrative centralization at the start of his presidency in 2000 was evidence of a pragmatic desire to undercut any real opposition development in a post-Soviet Russia. As mentioned above, his reforms were intended to reinforce his ability to control parliament and legislature and reduce autonomy of the regions. He further passed reforms to restrict party registration and intimidate the opposition.169 He placed a restriction on party registration, modifying registration requirements as the number of parties was deemed to be “too high.” It is now the dominant party, meaning the party within which influence groups must play out conflicts, restricting party politics as did the Communist Party of Soviet times.170

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169 Laruelle, *In the name of the nation*, 21.
170 Laruelle, *In the name of the nation*, 52.
Putin submitted a bill, which was passed by the Duma as an even harsher version, to reform the political party system. The reform bill stated that “a group would have to open branches in at least half of Russia's 89 regions, with no fewer than 100 members in each region and an overall minimal membership of 10,000…any branches opened in the remaining regions have at least 50 members.” Although statistics were scarce, the Communist Party announced a membership of 300,000, with parties like Yabloko estimated at the time to have between 5,000 and 10,000. Despite the possibility of growing membership, the majority of the 188 existing parties were believed to fall below the minimum requirement. For regional parties that were only relevant in certain republics, the risk was far greater. Another amendment banned corporate sponsorship and grassroots funding, with the option of receiving state funding available to any party that received more than 3 percent of the vote.

These reforms have led to some questionable practices by existing political parties. Concerns about the transparency of funding and the existence of shady “NGOs” and corporations through which parties receive funding have been brought up against all main parties at one point. Established parties are advantaged from the get-go, as smaller grassroots organizations without membership cannot receive subsidies or attract donations. As we will see, this is particularly a problem with United Russia, the President’s party.

Critics of election reform were highly skeptical of the claim by the Central Election Commission that this measure was intended to “clean up the electoral process.” A liberal deputy, Vladimir Ryzhkov stated that it would “push back” the development of “strong, influential

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Andrei Ryabov, a political analyst with the Moscow Carnegie Center, described it as a measure to outright close the party system to anyone outside of the Kremlin and created a “virtually unchangeable” political elite, with the ability to even form new parties significantly reduced. Putin’s priority, and of his government, was to reign in the power of political parties, reducing the chances of a threat to the state. In addition, regional parties were disproportionately disadvantaged by a rule stipulating membership limits, impacting their ability to organize and putting the balance back in the favor of more centralized parties. This continual reduction of regional capabilities played a large part in the rise of United Russia, the presidential party which currently dominates the political landscape.

United Russia was formed at the end of Yeltsin’s presidency, out of the desire to pool political resources to better ensure political transition. The Fatherland-all Russia (OVR) and Unity parties were merged after they faced off against each other in the 1999 elections, with Unity representing Putin and his backers in the Kremlin. The merger was intended to gather the extensive resources of the governors who had been supporting OVR. United Russia proceeded to expand its reach into the regions, an effort only bolstered by Putin’s elimination of regional elections. Regional executives saw their chances of influence as radically improved under the umbrella of United Russia. In this regard, United Russia is “a focal point for elite consolidation and a forum for conflict resolution,” indeed a mechanism through which the central party can both resolve regional conflicts and “impose solutions.” In this sense, then, it is a continuity of

177 Ibid, 519.
an old system of centralized party structure, with regions again supplicant to the authority of the centre. In addition, a spot on the party list has become well known to be associated with access to rents and influence on policy.

United Russia enjoys preferential treatment in elections, helping its dominance in the political landscape. In 2003, UR spent more than the legal limit on total spending just for media exposure; since the limit was raised in 2007, declared spending has only highlighted the gap between UR and other parties. Although state subsidies are meant to include free airtime and print space, UR has benefited from a media bias.178 During the 2007 Duma elections, United Russia received “from 57 percent to 62 percent of all prime-time political news coverage from Oct. 1 to Nov. 22,” with primetime defined as 6 pm-12 am. The Communist party received a 1.2 percent slice of prime-time coverage on NTV and 3.4 percent on Rossia television, compared to United Russia’s 19.1 percent on NTV and 20.2 percent on Rossia. The debates that are meant to be broadcast as part of the subsidy were broadcast at 7 am and after midnight, affecting their viewership – only 1.5 percent of the TV audience watched these debates.179

As we will see, media coverage is extremely important in Putin’s Russia, and not only for election season. The stories that are broadcast, the ownership of the networks, and the relationship of Putin to media conglomerates reflects the importance of the centralization of the state in all aspects of society. They additionally represent the desire to create a coherent narrative of Russian history and continuity with the past, regardless of the contradictions of this task.

Cultural nation-making: symbols, history, and the Russian narrative

Putin, as we have seen, places great importance on an accurate representation of Russian history. To this end, a robust narrative has been promoted combining both imperial and Soviet

military victories, events, and even figures, including the “rehabilitation of Stalin.” These efforts gloss over the fates of the other Soviet states subject to repression by a government centered in Moscow, emphasizing Soviet Russian achievements. They combine emblems of tsarist Russia with the Soviet past into a cohesive whole representing the history of the Russian people. The opening ceremony of the Sochi winter Olympics provides a perfect example of the construction of narrative out of disparate parts of history. This and other forms of media are used to project an image of a strong state with an equally strong leader. Just as the reorganization and reform of the state represents a centralizing tendency that has a continuity with the Soviet era, the emphasis on the greatness of Russia, regardless of its contradictions, reflects a veneration of the state above all. It is in this context that Soviet history can be invoked and used as evidence of the strength of the Russian state, separated from its ignominy.

The restoration of both Tsarist and Soviet symbols of the state, and their incorporation into a cohesive narrative, is central to a Putin-era strengthening of the Russian state. The Soviet national anthem, *Gosudarstvenny Gimn SSSR*, is still the national anthem, with words (and the title – it is now the *Gosudarstvenny Gimn Rossiyskoy Federatsii*, the State National Anthem of the Russian Federation) changed. = The other symbols of the state are the Byzantine eagle and the pre-revolutionary tricolor.¹⁸⁰ The many commemorative days on the Russian calendar are dedicated to the military glory of the imperial past going as far back as the Middle Ages, as well as the victories of the Red Army.¹⁸¹

The importance of the Orthodox Church in Russia is another aspect of culture with historical symbolism which has been reintroduced. Much like Catherine the Great, Putin has taken care to present himself as having a relationship with the Church. His inauguration “was marked by the

¹⁸⁰ Laruelle, *In the name of the nation*, 156.
¹⁸¹ Laruelle, *In the name of the nation*, 157-158.
ringing of church bells in the Kremlin. [Patriarch of the Orthodox Church] Kirill held a special prayer service for his “health” and “success in government,” in the Cathedral of the Assumption in the Kremlin. In the Novodevichy Monastery, the nuns sang psalms round the clock for Putin’s health.” He is “regularly accompanied by the hierarchs of the Church in religious garb at political events and is shown attending services on all religious holidays.” On Easter Sunday in April of 2015, his message to those celebrating Easter praised the church for “[playing] an enormous formative role in preserving our rich historical and cultural heritage and in reviving eternal moral values,” reaffirming the importance of the Church as more analogous to tsarist Russia before its persecution during Soviet times. The support from the Patriarch Kirill is no less complimentary; he referred to Putin’s presidency as a “miracle of God” which saved Russia from the “crooked twist” of history. In a speech at Moscow State University, Patriarch Kirill defended his support of Putin, stating that “clear and very definite support by the Orthodox Church for the institution of state authorities does not amount to an assessment of this or that politician or state figure by every representative of the church,” but that safeguarding the institution of power is a guarantee of a flourishing society. This closeness of the Church and Putin appears out of step with Putin’s Soviet connections, particularly as the Church was under heavy attack, led by the KGB, in Soviet times. However, in 1999, controversy arose when a document was discovered appearing to prove that Kirill was a KGB spy – although clearly unnamed besides a pseudonym, the details about the recruit, a young

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Orthodox priest, appear to match those of Kirill’s life. The Church responded by stating that this document was a forgery. The finding, in addition, was not widely reported in Russia.\textsuperscript{186} Moreover, Kirill is not the only member of the Church facing these charges, which have never been adequately addressed. An anonymous priest, who declined to identify himself for fear of being “defrocked,” stated that “the Orthodox Church is one of the only Soviet institutions that have never been reformed.” This fate “befell another colleague.”\textsuperscript{187} Father Gleb Yakunin, who was a dissident during the Soviet era protesting for religious rights in the face of persecution, was elected to the Duma in 1988. There, he was able to access evidence of Church collaboration with the KGB, which he passed on through handwritten notes to a researcher at Keston College in Kent. The findings were published, and Yakunin summarily defrocked on the grounds of holding political office as a clergyman.\textsuperscript{188}

Thus, Putin’s relationship with the Church appears to be both a matter of tradition and history dating back to Tsarist Russia and, controversially, of Soviet-era political ties. In an infamous incident, the Church received backlash when it was noticed that a picture of the Patriarch had been doctored to remove the expensive watch he was wearing – but not its reflection. This was only one instance of the Church’s “lavish displays of wealth and power,” stemming from its relationship to the state and de facto involvement in politics through support of Putin. Further, the brand of watch, Breguet, had been worn by Marie Antoinette (as a pocket-watch) and Tsar Aleksandr II – a perhaps undesirable connection to tsarist Russia in the face of persistent rumors about the wealth of the Patriarch. The watch was first seen on his wrist in 2009, during a talk on

the importance of asceticism.\textsuperscript{189} The church also received criticism for its involvement in the Ukraine crisis, acting as a “soft power” intermediary in the face of rebels. Tellingly, Patriarch Kirill’s full title is “Kirill’s full title is "Patriarch of Moscow and All Rus,” a reference to the prior state of Rus which traces the roots of Russia to Kiev.\textsuperscript{190}

Also significant in the cultural-historical landscape of Russia is the “rehabilitation of Stalin” as a symbol of strength of the Russian state, an effort to highlight his achievements rather than his atrocities.\textsuperscript{191} Russian Orthodox priest Alexander Shumsky said in his speech at a Church conference in 2013 that Stalin was “no saint, but he was not a monster,” while others highlighted the victory over the Nazis, the laying of “groundwork” for the future, and the restoration of national pride as positives. In a poll conducted by Levada in that year “more than two-thirds of Russians agreed with the statement that "Stalin was a cruel, inhuman tyrant, responsible for the deaths of millions of innocent people." In the same poll, 47 percent said Stalin was "a wise leader who brought the Soviet Union to might and prosperity." In another poll, 49 percent said Stalin played a positive role, while 32 percent said it was negative. While Putin has not openly supported Stalin, he has stated that the Great Terror of 1937, the Stalinist purges, should not be a point of rebuke for Russia, as “worse things had happened in other countries.”\textsuperscript{192} Additionally, the Russian Military History Society, which was founded by Putin and receives state funding, paid for the installation of a bust of Stalin in Pskov. School textbooks and state television

\textsuperscript{191} Laruelle, \textit{In the name of the nation}, 190.
celebrate Stalin as a “great leader.” In the continuation of the primacy of the state and order above all that has become central under Putin, Stalin is used as a symbol of the very order and state strength that, according to Putin, Russia must aspire to.

As such, the conflation of tsarist symbols, institutions such as the Church which both hearken back to pre-Soviet tradition and represent the continuity of Soviet ties and corruption, and the reframing of history through the “rehabilitation” of Stalin, a leader known for his brutality and repression, all reflect a narrative that appears disjointed. Despite this, as we have seen, there is constant reference to a cohesive narrative of Russia, appeals to the Russian people on the basis both of the reverence of tsarist Russia and the achievements of Soviet strength. This is exemplified in the 2014 Sochi Olympics opening ceremony.

The ceremony starts off showing a little girl, fast asleep in her room. The book in her hand, an alphabet book, is zoomed in to present the ABCs (so to speak) of Russia, featuring: scenic Lake Baikal; the Sikorsky helicopter, developed in 1925 by Igor Sikorsky; Gagarin; Dostoevsky; Catherine the Great; Zhuvosky (the image is of Nikolai, a Russian 19th century scientist); the Russian Empire; Tchaikovsky; Kandinsky; the moon landing; Nabokov; the space station; the periodic table; the ballet; Sputnik; Tolstoy; khokloma, a wood painting handicraft; Chekov; Pushkin; “us”; “love,” and finally, Russia. All are presented as emblems of Russia as a nation, even though they represent disparate time periods and eras of history and indeed different regimes of state. The ceremony moves on to show pre-modern, agrarian Russia, cows grazing. Then, the frozen tundra, complete with reindeer and huskies – the diversity of the Russian landscape. Men and women march by in traditional garb. They make way for the singers of the national anthem and procession of athletes, and the presentation of the mascots. When we pick

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up, it is on a crew of hearty sailors, venturing forth onto new territory, building settlements in the harsh conditions of the north with excruciating labor. Further down the line, 18\textsuperscript{th} century captains and wigged aristocrats debate over maps. In the 19\textsuperscript{th} century, a modern city equipped with electricity is the backdrop of a love story – with a traditional clergyman overseeing. Construction workers in newsboy caps, signaling the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, walk past, laughing together and looking up at the high-rise. Further still, businessmen (accompanied by a woman) are shown to be negotiating the building of the arena itself. Then, the Russian troika, a traditional sleigh, flies past, an allusion to Gogol’s “Dead Souls.” A crowded of men in uniforms march in unison across a map while cannons blast and a map of Russia continually shifts beneath them, signifying military prowess. Noblewomen rush to join them, transitioning the scene into a ballet representing a scene from \textit{War and Peace}.

Then, a red hue overtakes the arena accompanied by fast-paced, ominous music – a steam engine and turning cogs representing the introduction of communism. Workers in white wielding sickles toil away with the words “always ready” and “pioneers” floating in the background; schoolchildren dutifully follow the instructions of a director, while others come by in helmets, carrying model rockets or dressed as astronauts, while more words, “pilot,” “cosmonauts,” etc, scroll underneath them. Together, they launch a spaceship. Uniformly dressed men and woman hurtle past each other frantically, hard at work; Then, a light-hearted scene of men and women dancing together and getting married (and of course, having Russian children – while “KIDS” is emblazoned beneath them. The little girl, who has been floating periodically into scenes, is then seen “letting go” of a red balloon as she moves into the future.\footnote{The Complete Sochi 2014 Opening Ceremony | Sochi 2014 Winter Olympics, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bKhvrii8Rs&ab_channel=Olympics.}
This representation is a construction of a coherent narrative; the history of the Russian nation is presented as fluid, from its premodern, quiet rural lifestyle to the elegance of the nobility and the hardiness of the Russian men in their quest to expand the territory (ostensibly under Peter the Great). The violent overthrow of the Russian tsar is, of course, not depicted; in portraying the Soviet period, the emphasis is not on repression or forced subjugation of peoples, but on achievements of science, technology, of hard work and family and the character of the Russian people. It is in this context, then, that Tolstoy, an avid supporter of the Empire, and the moon landing, achieved under Soviet rule, are put together as emblematic of Russia, no matter the contradictions that seem apparent in this view.

Thus, through the use of symbols and history from both tsarist and Soviet Russia, such as the retention of the national anthem, the promotion of the Church as central to Russian tradition, and the reframing of the narrative of Stalinism to emphasize the strength of the Russian state, Putin’s Russia is presented a coherent narrative of a nation. This is exemplified in the Olympic ceremony, which cherry–picks from Russian history to portray the premodern farmer, the 17th century soldier working for Peter the Great, the 19th century nobleman and the 20th century Soviet worker as the unified history of an ever-moving, ever-prospering nation. Although the Soviet period is behind, its legacy of strength, as well as the Empire’s glory and elegance, remain emblematic – guiding principles, as we have seen, in Putin’s own decisions regarding the Russian state.

**Part II: The reality of Russia**

Despite Putin’s desire to direct the narrative of nationhood, obvious differences exist between what is reality and what Putin is aiming to achieve by recreating Soviet norms. The recentralization of the state, as well as enforcement of deference to it by business, is countered
by distrust of these institutions and disenchantment on the part of the citizens, compounded by
the censure of dissent through media. In addition, ethnic Russians have demonstrated misgivings
about the inclusion of ethnic minorities as equal citizens, perceiving them instead to be outsiders.
Thus, ethnic nationalism which ran counter to Soviet desires, as we have seen, appears to be very
strong in Russian society, even though at large, there is dissatisfaction with the state as a whole.

**Distrust in the democracy**

During a “Direct Line” to the people, Putin gave this response to the suggestion that liberal
opposition has no place in society:

> Of course, we should take the opinion of the majority of people into account when taking decisions and shaping our
domestic and foreign policy. But we must never disregard the opinion of the minority who have a different opinion
of the developments taking place in the country and on the international stage, and we must take their opinion into
account and listen to what they have to say. But I cannot say that the government is deliberately trying to limit their
space.

That Putin would choose to answer in this way, particularly in juxtaposition with his previous
actions, demonstrates recognition of expectations. In a globalizing world in which liberal
democracy is considered to have “won” the ideological battle of the 20th century, the expectation
is that individual rights are valuable and that this is not a right negotiable by culture.195

He quotes Ivan Ilyin to this effect in his 2005 Address to the Federal Assembly, when
speaking about the importance of democracy (emphasis mine):

> “State power,” wrote the great Russian philosopher Ivan Ilyin, “has its own limits defined by the fact that it is
authority that reaches people from outside… State power cannot oversee and dictate the creative states
of the soul and mind, the inner states of love, freedom and goodwill. The state cannot demand from its citizens
faith, prayer, love, goodness and conviction. It cannot regulate scientific, religious and artistic creation… It should
not intervene in moral, family and daily private life, and only when extremely necessary should it impinge
on people’s economic initiative and creativity”

In reality, of course, despite Putin’s appeals to the contrary, Russia’s democracy is
questionable at best. Transparency International ranks it 119/168 on the Corruption Perceptions
Index, with a score of 29/100. It places last out of 28 on the “Bribe Payers Index,” which “ranks

the world’s wealthiest and most economically influential countries according to the likelihood of
their firms to bribe abroad.” It ranks 142/179 on the Press Freedom Index, and is in the 21st
percentile when it comes to voice and accountability.196 Public opinion in Russia demonstrates a
climate in which opposition is not welcome, and where egalitarianism is not a priority. In a 2008
survey, one in seven Russians reported that they or “immediate family members” had directly
experienced abuse by police officers, and 15 percent reported being “inappropriately stopped,
searched or detained” in the past two or three years.197 In 2004, 28 percent self-reported as
believing that the police serve the interest of elites above all others in Russian society.198 These
surveys are, according to Brian Taylor, consistent with NGO reports and expert evaluations,
suggesting that there is a real problem of lack of public trust in institutions.199 They are also
consistent with Transparency International’s data, which reports that 52% feel that efforts to
fight corruption are ineffective, and that police and civil servants are the greatest offenders. Not a
single institution scores below 3.1 on a corruption scale of 1-5, with police and civil servants at
most corrupt and religious bodies at least.

Repression of dissent

Another reality of Russia is the lack of tolerance towards dissent, and the emphasis on the role
of the state as central and superseding any rights to opposition or even activity thought to
undermine the state. This is seen through Putin’s restrictive attitude towards the media, the
internet, and civil society.

In Putin’s view, the role of the media is not to spread “mass disinformation,” which in
practice means anything seen as criticizing or potentially destabilizing the centrality of state

April 10, 2016.
197 Taylor, State Building in Putin’s Russia, 181.
198 Ibid, 180.
199 Ibid, 182.
power. At an annual news conference in 2013, Putin stated that: “There should be patriotically minded people at the head of state information resources...people who uphold the interests of the Russian Federation. These are state resources. That is the way it is going to be.” Thus, rather than a free instrument of expression as it is generally understood to be in the West, the media is meant to be an instrument of the state, and any deviation from this will not be tolerated.

In May 2000, the alleged “tax police” came in armed and raided Vladimir Gusinskiy’s Media-Most company, which had been producing material the state found objectionable. Gusinskiy was detained, offered a bribe to cease and retract his anti-Putin rhetoric, and, when he turned it down, imprisoned. He eventually agreed to “divest himself of his shares” in the company, renounce all the public statements against Russia and Putin, and to leave Russia. Such crackdowns are ongoing; in 2014, after publishing an interview with a Ukrainian nationalist leader, the editor in chief Galina Timchenko was fired by the owner of the parent company, prominent businessman Aleksandr Mamut and replaced by government relations specialist, Aleksey Goreslavskiy. It now consists “primarily of government-friendly propaganda.” As of April 16th, its homepage featured headlines about “Turkey’s expansionist policy,” “NATO’s untenable policy,” and the fact that the cabinet and administration’s salaries are higher than Putin’s - all distinctly pro-Kremlin messages in ways that echo Soviet influence. The editor of the independent news channel Dozhd, Ilyia Klishin, described this situation in the following way:

There is a huge gap—a canyon of hypocrisy—between what's official and what's real, and you're supposed to know what you can’t say aloud. (Andrey Zvyagintsev’s film “Leviathan” is largely about this phenomenon.)

For instance, you can’t say Russia has no independent media; I work at an independent TV station, after all. But the Devil is in the details, and, in this case, we’re hopelessly outgunned. What’s happened in Russia would be like

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Fox News taking over the airwaves in the US, booting MSNBC from cable TV, and reducing liberals to broadcasting online from a small private apartment in Brooklyn.203

Thus, while Putin is not a totalitarian leader explicitly banning free media, “the devil is in the details,” and the details are up to the discretion of the Kremlin. Freedom House has noted that between 2009 and 2014, Russia’s Internet Freedom Score declined from “partly free” to verging on “not free.” In the wake of the annexation of Crimea in 2014, three high profile dissident websites, Grani.ru, Ezhednevny Zhurnal (Ej.ru), a news and opinion site; and Kasparov.ru, were ordered to shut down on the basis of “extremist” content.

Other forms of expression are similarly restricted. Pavel Durov, founder of V Kontakte, a leading Russian social network, stated that he was ordered to hand over user data and refused. In 2014, he resigned due to pressure and left the country, Mail.ru, owned by businessman Alisher Usmanov, a Kremlin ally, officially took control of V Kontakte. Later that year, a new “blogger’s law” stipulated that any blog or website with over 3,000 daily viewers must register with Roskomnadzor as a media outlet, subjecting it to restrictions such as bans on anonymous authorship or the use of obscenities.” It also stipulated that Google, Facebook and Twitter host internet users’ data on Russian servers.204

In this repressive environment, dissidents find other ways to express themselves. Russia is one of the top five Youtube countries in the world, with an audience of over 50 million.205 Popular Youtube stars range from singers, makeup artists, and cartoonists, to documentarians such as Usachev, who alongside more light videos featuring other popular stars, makes video

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blogs about political affairs and created a documentary about state-Church relations in Russia.\textsuperscript{206} As of April 16, 2016, he has 947,442 subscribers.\textsuperscript{207} There remain risks for journalists and dissidents, even in a space where independent media is not totally banned, beyond the termination of their activities; the Commission to Protect Journalists reports 56 confirmed murders of journalists in Russia, including the infamous case of Anna Politkovskaia, who wrote extensively about the war in Chechnya and was murdered in her apartment.\textsuperscript{208}

Alongside the restriction of media is the distrust of civil society. As we have seen, Putin has taken steps to reduce political party formation. In addition, he has referred to civil society and NGOs as the work of foreign agents serving shady agendas, rather than organizations whose mandate is serve the people. Even local NGOs were considered partners of “foreign foundations and governments.”\textsuperscript{209} As recently as May 2015, Putin enacted a law permitting authorities to shut down “undesirable” NGOs, including “rights-advocacy organizations, ecologists and all other groups that champion liberal values. Without any added mystery, the law is said to be in place “because the Kremlin considers them a risk to the current political regime.” The consequences for violators can range from a fine to imprisonment.\textsuperscript{210} Thus, while Putin refers to democracy and citizens’ rights as important parts of state governance, in practice, the emphasis is once more on the primacy of the state. The public is wary of abuses by police and government, and Russia’s scores on international measures of freedom dismal. In turn, media and civil society are

\textsuperscript{207} https://www.youtube.com/user/usachevShow?&ab_channel=%D0%A0%D1%83%D1%81%D0%BB%D0%B0%D0%B8%D0%9A%D1%81%D0%B0%D1%87%D0%B5%D0%B2
\textsuperscript{209} Taylor, State Building in Putin’s Russia, 236.
considered to be infringing on state sovereignty and therefore unwelcome; however, dissent continues to thrive despite the continual resistance of the state to opposition.

**Ethnic violence and nationalist extremism**

There is another dimension to the reality of Russia, and that is that ethnic tensions are quite a serious problem. Although citizens do not trust the state, they also do not consider everyone in it to be equal. This is counter to Putin, who continually emphasizes inter-ethnic cooperation as essential to the state. Ethnic Russians distrust migrants, and do not consider them members of the state in the same capacity as other ethnic Russians. Levels of xenophobic and racist sentiment in this vein have grown, not decreased, as nonethnic Russians remain poorly integrated and violence continues. This perception is curious, considering the above-mentioned issues of lack of public trust which affect all Russians, but the effect is not equal on all ethnicities. Police treatment, while on the whole very problematic, is worse towards Caucasians and other minorities. The public attitude is reinforced, as we have seen, by the government, which clearly promotes at the most ambivalence toward the idea of inclusion of these ethnic minorities in the nation.

Putin has spoken out on the issue of ethnic conflict, stating the need for more harmonious relations. In a 2012 article originally written in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, Putin stated that “nationalism” was providing a base for “radical tendencies” that “undermines and destroys the state and divides society.” Russia, he says, is historically a multinational state, unlike the American “melting pot,” and not a monoethnic state. He attributes migration and ethnic problems dating back not only to the collapse of the Soviet Union, but the collapse of Greater Russia in the 18th century. Although ethnicity and culture are to be respected, he says, the dominance of Russian culture (defined vaguely as not “only” that of ethnic Russians) and
identification with the Russian state must precede all else. “No one has the right to put their ethnic or religious interests above the laws of the land… At the same time, national laws must take into account the specific characteristics of different ethnic and religious groups.” He encourages the development of multiparty systems, but balks at the question of regional parties, which are in his view “a direct path to separatism.” He recommends both education and improvement of migration laws as solutions to the inflow of migrants.\(^{211}\)

While Putin’s endorsement of diversity is fairly mild, with an unclear focus on what exactly constitutes Russian culture and to what degree nonethnic Russian may be allowed to retain their identity, it clearly emphasizes the importance of the state. Nationalist activity that disturbs the peace is considered to be detrimental to the stability of the state and therefore undesirable. In reality, however, such nationalist activity is unfortunately frequent, and ethnic violence a growing trend.

In the fracas and fragmentation of the 1990s, many radical groups came onto the scene in Russia; most of them fell out of relevance.\(^ {212}\) These groups had various priorities for what they believed to be the appropriate vision for the Russian nation: white supremacy, fascism, marked anti-Semitism, orthodoxy, monarchism. The most commonly known of these is the Skinheads, who are infamous for their racist and anti-Semitic ideology. Due to the improvement of their organization and resources since the 1990s, Skinheads have been engaging in violence on an increasing scale, attacking and murdering people of color and also engaging in cyber attacks.\(^ {213}\)

Xenophobia is directed at both foreigners and national minorities. The relationship between them and “ethnic Russians” is described in the view of these ethnic Russians as being one of

\(^{212}\) Laruelle, In the name of the nation, 55.
\(^{213}\) Laruelle, In the name of the nation, 60.
“master vs. guests,” or “us vs. them.” Thus, those who are not ethnic Russians are considered to be not only separate, but to entirely lack title to equal consideration as a member of society. Marlene Laruelle states that previously, xenophobia was linked to political leanings, but that this is no longer the case. It is also not linked to economic or social status. However, in recent years, the sharpest spikes are found among “citizens of major cities and among those people with a high level of education,” according to the Civic Chamber, an official civil society oversight body created by Putin.

Laruelle writes that since 2003, all surveys have shown that around two-thirds of ethnic Russians have some type of “ethnic phobia,” with only anti-Semitism being reduced in recent years. The prejudice that was at one time specifically directed at Chechens (due to the conflicts during the 1990s) is now a “generalized Caucasophobia.” In the eyes of around 47% of respondents to a study in 2004, foreigners and minorities were perceived as having “too much power.” In recent years, the numbers have only increased; in 2012 “nearly 70 percent of Russians” did not favor individuals of other ethnicities, “and one in five [believed] that they have no place in Russia at all.” Nearly 65 percent “[favored] some form of restrictions on labor migration.” In 2012, 18 people were injured and 200 killed in ethnic violence. Extreme right-wing nationalism propagated by racists and xenophobes only appears to be gaining in strength and influence.

The reaction of authorities, from policemen to lawmakers, to explicit xenophobic or racialized violence demonstrates a clear bias against migrants and nonethnic Russians. In many

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214 Laruelle, *In the name of the nation*, 43.
216 Ibid.
cases, the police are perpetrators of violence or at the least dismissive of reports; lawmakers are similarly ambivalent towards prosecution of these cases and the legislation on them inadequate.

The police have been implicated in several forms of mistreatment of migrants. In 2013, a nonethnic Russian was accused of murdering an ethnic Russian. Shortly after, police arrested 1,200 migrants at the suspected killer’s workplace “preemptively,” while nationalist fervor brewed. Claiming “Russia for the Russians,” nationalists rioted against what they saw as government inaction.217 What followed were “raids” against migrants, in which Human Rights Watch reported that “hundreds of people in street markets and other places where migrants gather were detained simply based on their non-Slavic appearance. Migrants experienced prolonged detention in appalling conditions…without access to counsel, with courts ordering their deportation based on perfunctory, rubber-stamp hearings.” Generally, migrants are also subjected to beatings or threats of torture, or else dismissed when attempting to report crimes against them to the police.218

The calls of authorities to “combat extremism” do not present a picture of serious consideration of racial issues as a problem that needs addressing in an environment that grants nationalists effective impunity to carry out their actions. Following the 2013 incident, Human Rights Watch further reported that authorities “failed to prosecute the organizers and perpetrators of violence during the riots, which included an episode of beatings and destruction of property clearly motivated by ethnic hatred.”219

219 Ibid.
The language used to refer to these acts is indicative of a disregard for ethnic violence. Acts of ethnic violence are commonly referred to as “hooliganism,” not racism; their classification as racist depends on the judgment of “experts,” who are not selected by the lawyers dealing with the case but the government.\textsuperscript{220} This was the case in the 2013 incident, where “hooliganism” was used to refer to the actions of the nationalists. It also happened in the case of Andi Muslimov, a Chechen man who was attacked while talking on the phone in Arabic and Chechen; although the attacker was using racist language, the crime was considered “battery,” but not motivated by hatred.\textsuperscript{221}

Further, the legislative provisions for prosecuting violence are muddled and appear to be ineffective. Although there is a law against extremism, there is no clear definition; instead, it includes such acts as violation of rights based on ethnic/religious grounds, propaganda of superiority on ethnic grounds, public justification of terrorism, alongside “dissemination of knowingly false accusations against federal or regional officials in their official capacity.” This measure has been leveled against activists and opposition to silence their activities, while special protection is given to “law enforcement personnel, the military, investigation service officials, police officers, state employees, owners of Russian-made motor vehicles representatives of the government of the Tatarstan Republic and informal groups of young people.” It has been pointed out even by administrators that the law is “too broad,” and its application unpredictable. Thus, the law does not adequately address the issue of ethnic hatred, lumping it in with offenses such that the definition of extremism becomes more of a mechanism to act against criticism of the state or its employees.

\textsuperscript{220} Laruelle, \textit{In the name of the nation}, 68.
Conclusion

Thus, Putin’s emphasis on statism through his recentralization of power, and his appeal to cultural values through a constructed narrative of Russian history, is designed to recreate the strength of the Soviet period, while upholding the importance of Russian history. At the same time, Putin’s rhetoric regarding the rights of citizens and the opening of Russian society prove to be inconsistent with the reality of Russia. Distrust of state entities and ethnic fractionalization, not an environment where citizens can feel at liberty and work towards a stronger state, characterize the Russian public, and Putin’s increased narrowing of opportunities only serve to strengthen this discord. Nonetheless, persistent appeals to the cultural and historical heritage of Russia remain central to Putin’s designs. In Green’s formulation, then, we see the resurgence of ressentiment as Putin applies Westernized concepts to his own actions, in ways that appear to resist Western supremacy and assert Russian capabilities.
Chapter Four: Chechnya and Ukraine – Two Case Studies

Chechnya and Ukraine are two case studies which illustrate the important aspects of Putin’s philosophy as explored in the previous chapters. Ukraine, to which Putin claims Russia has historical rights based on the origin of Rus, demonstrates the importance of reframing history in ways that appear “truthful” to Russian interests and the Russian people. Putin also uses a framework of humanitarianism to explain his actions in Crimea and the Donbass region as protecting ethnic Russians, purporting to challenge the Western monopoly on such justifications. In Chechnya, the object of Russian invasion was ostensibly to keep the integrity of the state. However, by framing the issue of Chechnya as a terrorist situation, Putin both uses language that connects his actions to a wider problem and emphasizes the role of the government in protecting the state. Despite the criticism Russia has received for its actions in Chechnya, its right to ensure the integrity and safety of the state remain paramount. In both these cases, I look at the history, the internal dynamics of the conflict, the region’s relationship with Russia and the end result, and compare them in the conclusion.

Chechnya

History

In 1722, Peter the Great annexed the regions of the Caspian Sea along present-day Dagestan, and gradually moved inward. This annexation was more akin to colonization than the expansion that was detailed in chapter 1, as the peoples in the Caucuses were subordinated.222 The indigenous people, including the Chechens, mounted a resistance to the incursion of the

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Russians, but their “traditional nonprofessionalized warfare” could not hold against the more
developed military. The Russians employed a strong narrative of their civilization and
modernization that was contrasted to the “backwardness” and “fanaticism” of the Chechens; this,
in their view, justified the brutality of their rule.\textsuperscript{223}

The 19\textsuperscript{th} century Russian General Yermolov was infamous for his “pacification” measures.
Ordered to subjugate the Caucasus as an “integral part of Russia,” he used deforestation,
scorched earth, and the destruction of villages to subdue resistance through starvation and blows
to morale, as well as using ethnic cleansing to “expel Muslim peoples” into the Ottoman
Empire.\textsuperscript{224} His campaign made use of massacres and rape, as well as deportations to Siberia or
the mountains, to further decimate the population.\textsuperscript{225}

The struggle against Russian colonization, and particularly policies like Yermolov’s, led to
organized rebellion; between 1785-1791, led by the Sheikh Mansur, and in the 1840s, led by the
Avar Shamil, who led with the vision of creating a pure Islamic state and purging the
Russians.\textsuperscript{226}

By the 1860s, the Russians had achieved “pacification.” Modernization of towns and industry
saw a complication of cleavages in Russia: “secular /religious, Russified/traditional,
insider/outsider” all became salient “dichotomies” of identity, more so with the influx of Russian
migration. The region also became an important part of the Russian oil boom in the 1890s.”\textsuperscript{227}

\textsuperscript{223} Hughes, Chechnya, 8.
\textsuperscript{224} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{225} Michael Church, “Russia’s bitter relationship with Chechnya will be in the spotlight during Sochi 2014 Winter
Olympics in February,” The Independent, December 26, 2013,
\textsuperscript{226} Hughes, Chechnya, 10.
\textsuperscript{227} Ibid.
After the Bolshevik revolution, the Chechen and the Ingush regions were combined into the “Checheno-Ingushetia Autonomous Republic,” while Russian migration into the region continued. By 1937, Russians were 29 percent of the population. Stalin eliminated the Republic and put in place a policy of deportation to Central Asia in 1944 – the majority of the 600,000 people in the North Caucasus who were deported were Chechens (400,000).\(^{228}\)

For the next two decades, the population of ethnic Russians and Slavs increased as the oil industry expanded, almost comprising half the population in 1959; the flow was reversed in the 1980s as deported Chechens returned. The number of Chechens in the Republic grew by 20 percent between 1979 and 1989, while the number in the USSR as a whole grew by 26.1 percent. The population was now more homogenous, “Sovietized, secularized, and urbanized.”\(^{229}\)

In 1991, after the Soviet Union collapsed, the newly elected leader, Dzokhar Dudayev, unilaterally declared independence from Russia. Naturally, the Russian government declared the election “null and void.”\(^{230}\) After the breakdown of civil order and negotiations that went on with no progress, Russia forged ahead with an inadequate, undersupplied military intervention in 1994.\(^{231}\) The conflict ended in 1996, only for a Second Chechen War to reemerge in 1999 under the auspices of Putin, after the invasion of Dagestan by Dudayev.\(^{232}\) Although the war ended in 2002, and a “new leader,” Ramzan Kadyrov, was installed by Russia, there were ongoing tensions, as radicalization, lack of adequate institutions, and mistreatment by the government continued. Basic necessities, such as running water, sewage, or electricity, were unreliable.

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\(^{228}\) Ibid.
\(^{229}\) Ibid, 12.
\(^{230}\) Ibid, 25.
\(^{231}\) Ibid, 26.
\(^{232}\) Ibid, 48.
Unemployment was still an issue, with an economy that had not developed past the extraction of oil, and would continue to be one as education resources for universities were lacking.233

**Internal Dynamics of Conflict**

Internally, Chechnya suffered greatly under Dudayev as a result of the blockade and ensuing state breakdown. As a result of this state of affairs, then, it is argued that Chechnyan resistance took on a gradually more radical Islamist tone between the first and second wars. The people of Chechnya, however, have demonstrated that they too fear radicalization and that secession may no longer be a priority for most.

After the unilateral announcement that Chechnya would secede from Russia, Dudayev had many resources at his disposal: the largest oil refinery in Russia, a major petrochemicals industry, and a main railway line linking Russia to Azerbaijan, another major oil producer. Chechnya did not pay taxes, yet received social services transfers. And yet, severe corruption around the oil industry and the misappropriation of state funding, worsened by a blockade by Russia, led to a breakdown in civil order. Alongside the general failing economy of the post-Soviet period, this led many of the unemployed men of the region to turn to armed resistance.234 At this point, however, Dudayev and Chechnya both were fairly secular, and aimed only to create a strong nation-state.235 At the same time, religiosity was experiencing a resurgence in general across the Caucasus as a result of the end of communism.236

As the situation in Chechnya continued to deteriorate, the opposition grew stronger. Nonetheless, Dudayev continued to be an implacable champion for secession, making the question of settlement difficult. Umar Avturkhanov led the establishment of an alternative

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234 Hughes, Chechnya, 64.
235 Ibid, 65.
236 Ibid, 79.
government, the Provisional Council of the United Opposition, but he was not the only opponent – several former loyalists, communists, and gang members could not form a united front to challenge his power.\textsuperscript{237} By the time Dudayev had started to pull back on his intransigence, it was already too late, as Russia had been ignoring attempts to further negotiations and decided on the use of force.\textsuperscript{238}

The negotiations for peace following the disastrous military campaign were vague and unsatisfactory. Russia did not provide the aid it promised; instead, it continued its blockade and isolation of Chechnya. This was the situation in which the new state had to be built, but the limitations that were in place made it exceedingly difficult.\textsuperscript{239}

Political fragmentation was only one of the issues inhibiting state development. Serious political fragmentation and a struggle for power became evident after the conclusion of the truce. There were hundreds of candidates for the parliamentary seats (766 candidates for 63 seats), as well as 16 for president. Intimidation and infighting plagued the electoral process.\textsuperscript{240}

Criminality and a breakdown of law and order had become the norm; assassination, kidnapping, and terrorism were rampant.\textsuperscript{241} There was a lack of infrastructure, a serious problem of poverty, and high rates of disease, all going unchecked. By 1997, it was clear that there would be no aid, nor a resolution to the issue of secession.\textsuperscript{242} It was in this environment, fraught with tension and a “moral vacuum,” that radicalization occurred.\textsuperscript{243} Then-President Maskhadov was undermined by the grim outlook of the situation, while radical Islamists, bolstered by an international environment where Islam had become a salient motivating force, called for his

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{237} Ibid, 74.
\textsuperscript{238} Ibid, 76.
\textsuperscript{239} Ibid, 93.
\textsuperscript{240} Ibid, 95.
\textsuperscript{241} Ibid, 96.
\textsuperscript{242} Ibid, 103.
\textsuperscript{243} Ibid, 100.
\end{footnotesize}
removal. To smooth the situation, he appointed Basaev, a member of the radical factor, as prime minister. Thus, internal discontent with the President soon began to complement the external problem of Russia. By this point, Maskhadov had decided to also introduce shari’a law in Chechnya and adopt an Islamic constitution. Meanwhile, Basaev led forces into Dagestan to "liberate" the North Caucasus from the Russian "infidels" and establish a Caliphate.” This was the impetus for the Second Chechen War, put forward by Putin. Chechnya’s constitution was Islamized in 2002: it was now a “sovereign, independent Islamic law-based state” where the “source of all adopted decisions is the Qur’an and Sunna. Maskhadov was killed and replaced by Sheikh Abdul Khalim Sadulaev. Under Sadulaev, moderate ministers were removed, and the parliamentary democracy abolished.

Basaev was killed in an explosion which the FSB took responsibility for. Ahmed Kadyrov, who had fallen out with Maskhadov, surrendered to Putin and was appointed head of the new administration that was to take the reins in Chechnya, installed by Russia. In October 2003, a referendum on a new constitution was rife with electoral fraud, used by Russia to secure Kadyrov’s position – which supported Russia’s sovereignty. A few months later, in March, the same became of the presidential election. In May 2004, Kadyrov was assassinated. The subsequent rule of his son, Ramzan, also propped up by Putin, has allowed him to act with impunity in “terrorizing the civilian population.” As we will see, the human rights, socioeconomic needs, and overall infrastructure situation of Chechnya remains seriously distressed.

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244 Ibid, 203.  
245 Ibid, 106.  
246 Ibid, 206.  
247 Ibid, 119.  
248 Ibid, 121.  
249 Ibid, 124.
Relationship with Russia

As we have seen in previous chapters, Russian popular attitude towards nonethnic Russians, particularly Chechens, is extremely negative and discriminatory. In a recent study, “nearly 70 percent of Russians” did not favor individuals of other ethnicities. Nearly 65 percent “[favored] some form of restrictions on labor migration.” Since 2003, the results have shown about a two-thirds majority who have “generalized Caucasophobia.” This is not only an issue in the general public. Reporting from the Chicago Tribune’s Moscow Bureau, James P. Gallagher repeatedly found that Russian soldiers, officers and even generals he spoke to were highly suspicious of Chechens, characterizing them as “evil, malicious [savages] who [fight] with heroic courage,” and who didn’t know when to give up. Such commentary calls to mind the earliest days of empire as described above, when Russians justified their mistreatment of Chechens using virtually the same language.

Racist language aside, the Russian relationship to Chechnya has, as we have seen, been fraught from the beginning. However, the framing of the conflict with Chechnya as a fight against terrorism has been consistent since the 1990s. And indeed, several terrorist acts have been part of the repertoire: seizing hospitals (1995, 1996), airplanes (1991, 2004), and a school in Beslan in 2004, where 330 were killed and 700 wounded. As we will see, these acts are mirrored in the actions of Russia towards Chechens, including torture, bombings, disappearances, and other abuses. James Hughes provides an estimate that “either 150,000-

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251 Laruelle, In the name of the nation, 41.
254 Hughes, Chechnya, 136.
160,000 or up to 300,000 have died” in Chechnya according to “pro-Moscow Chechen officials.” An estimate of the casualties as a result of Chechen acts puts the number at 1,544 killed and 3,463 injured.\textsuperscript{255}

The Yeltsin leadership frequently referred to armed forces, or even individuals such as Maskhadov, as terrorists.\textsuperscript{256} Yeltsin also framed the issue as one of territory; he believed he was “saving the country” with his military action.\textsuperscript{257} In signing the peace treaty in 1997, he stated that under the authority of the president, there would be “no room for terrorists and abductors of people on our land.” In the same treaty, the issue of sovereignty was not addressed – it was instead deferred five years. Russia maintained that Chechnya was part of their territory, while Chechnya held fast to its sovereignty. “But the important thing is that both sides are trying not to speak of it,” was the commentary given by an OSCE monitor who facilitated the negotiations.\textsuperscript{258}

As we have seen, however, these grand proclamations did not prove to be true.

Putin penned a letter entitled “Why We Must Act,” which was published in the New York Times in April 1999, when he was still prime minister. In it, he urges the American people to draw a parallel between themselves and Russians, describing the situation as analogous to “ordinary New Yorkers or Washingtonians, asleep in their homes.” He describes panic that “engulfs a nation,” a situation in which the government is responsible for protecting its citizens from danger. He characterizes the terrorism as not confined to one nation, but part of a network, perhaps connected even to Osama bin Laden’s activities. Although he states that Russian makes efforts to avoid civilian casualties and the need to protect Chechens as well, the need to fight terrorism is “forced upon” Russia, due to a threat to its society – which, he emphasizes, includes

\textsuperscript{255} Ibid, 150.
\textsuperscript{256} Ibid, 182.
\textsuperscript{257} Ibid, 38.
jurisdiction over Chechens as well. Putin also echoed previous refusals to capitulate on the issue of independence in the aftermath of the 2004 metro attack in Moscow. “Russia doesn't conduct negotiations with terrorists -- it destroys them.” Thus, the framing of the conflict as a terrorist issue is very much connected to the importance of the state and the unwillingness to compromise its integrity.

**End result of crisis**

The war in Chechnya is over, and relations between Russia and Chechnya under Ramzan Kadyrov appear to be steady. In March 2016, in one of his usual meetings with Kadyrov, Putin describes the situation as “positive,” citing lower unemployment rates, lower homicide rates, and increased investment. He describes the tasks of “any regional leader in Russia” as being the protection of his people and the raising of living standards, framing the relationship between Kadyrov and himself clearly. Even the task of helping to rebuild Chechnya, he says, was done in a “wider sense for the whole of Russia.” Given that Kadyrov was nearing the end of his mandate (which ended on April 5), Putin also gave him a signed executive order to be appointed Acting Head of the Republic. “Our priority, and the priority set by the first President of Chechnya, was to raise people’s living standards and ensure their security,” he affirms.

However, during and after war, the reality of Russian involvement was quite different than it was portrayed to be in this pleasant conversation between the two leaders, or in Putin’s urging of the need for action. Anna Politskovskaia gave first-hand, detailed accounts of what she saw in the Duba-Yurt and Chiri-Yurt regions of Chechnya. Regular bombings of villages and cities left

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civilians dead, and if the bombs did not then the mines would.\textsuperscript{262} The aid provided by Russia, three cans of evaporated milk and a can of processed meat per person for refugees, three days’ worth of food, was ostensibly insufficient; Politskovskaia describes the sickly appearance of those suffering from chronic hunger.\textsuperscript{263} No compensation was provided to people whose houses had been burned down or who had been robbed by the Russian military.\textsuperscript{264} She describes the fate of Rosita, a woman who was tortured using shocks because she was accused of “harboring militants.”\textsuperscript{265} Most tragically, she encountered individuals who actually requested to be moved out of Chechnya because of the conditions: having no food, shelter, or access to medical care, and being under constant fear of bombings.\textsuperscript{266} Politskovskaia has dozens of such stories; in one anecdote, a doctor refuses to treat a woman’s husband unless she can pay him 40,000 rubles; obviously, she cannot, and has no one to call who could give her the money. He tells her: “Call Putin.”\textsuperscript{267}

Human Rights Watch produced a report in 2009 detailing the ways in which Russia was failing to implement the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights on several cases in Chechnya. They found that Russia’s lack of investigation and cooperation with the judgments of the Court was unacceptable. While financial compensation to the applicants was provided, there was no resolution to the cases of people who went missing or were taken by federal officers, for which the European Court found Russia responsible. As of 2009, “not a single person” had been held accountable, despite the fact that many of these cases had a great deal of evidence as to the

\textsuperscript{262} Anna Politskovskaia, A small corner of hell: dispatches from Chechnya (University of Chicago Press, 2003), 35.
\textsuperscript{263} Politskovskaia, A small corner of hell, 38.
\textsuperscript{264} Politskovskaia, A small corner of hell, 46.
\textsuperscript{265} Politskovskaia, A small corner of hell, 48.
\textsuperscript{266} Politskovskaia, A small corner of hell, 55.
\textsuperscript{267} Politskovskaia, A small corner of hell 58.
people who had been directly involved. Russia’s failure was the lack of investigation, despite sufficient evidence, and no effort to prosecute.

There were several problems with Russia’s handling of the case. First, there was a clear failure to give applicants any information about the case, as well as a failure to communicate respectfully and humanely. Then, a propensity to question individuals who had already been questioned and not give them any new information. There was a refusal to respond to requests for information, even to the organization representing the victims. Victims would not be allowed to see the case file, making it impossible to determine what was being investigated. Despite claims by investigators that this was in accordance with the law, HRW determined that no such law existed. Investigators fully had the option of providing access to the files. In one case, the lawyer calling to speak to investigators was told that the investigation had been suspended, and was still not allowed access to the files. Finally, there was a problem of sheer inadequate investigation, such as failing to identify soldiers who had been implicated as being on duty at certain times when crimes had been committed. In one case, a woman was told that her disappeared husband had been released by the FSB and that his disappearance was not connected to them.268

Thus, Russia’s handling of the human rights situation in Chechnya has been subject to criticism. Despite insistence that such concerns were taken into account during military operations, much evidence has been found to the contrary. Russia and Chechnya are no longer at war; nevertheless, the well-being and compensation of Chechens for the suffering of the wars has not been found to be an adequate concern of Russia’s.

Ukraine

History

There is still historical debate among Russian and Ukrainian historians as to a very simple question: what is Ukraine? Some believe that it was never and is still not, a separate entity from Russia. For example, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov referred to it in 2014 as “one nation” with Russia, and to Kiev as the “mother of Russian cities.” This is a reference to the “Kievan Rus,” the premodern collection of territories that is said to be the origin of Russia itself. The details of Kievan Rus are less clear, with a lack of evidence to fully answer the question for either Russian or Ukrainian historians. What does exist is the myth of the conversion of Kievan Rus to Christianity. In 972, when the Kievan Prince Vladimir the Great converted to Orthodox Christianity, along with all of Kievan Rus – and conquered part of the territory of Crimea. Whether this story told the beginning of Russia or Ukraine, then, is the question that remains a hotly debated topic. The name “Ukraine” first appeared in 1187 in church records.

270 Kalb, Imperial Gamble, 36.
271 Ibid, 43.
Kievan Rus fell prey to a Mongol assault in the 13th century, and was henceforth split down the middle: the West fell under the rule of Catholic Poland, and the East to Russia. The Ukrainians in the West were, to some degree at least, allowed to keep their political and civic institutions, their language, and their religion – attempts to Catholicize the region by giving it large tracts of it to Polish Aristocrats did not succeed. At the same time, Ukrainians in the East were Russified under Catherine the Great, who wished them to “no longer, like wolves, look for the wood.”

Ukrainian nationalism nevertheless began to develop through the works of intellectuals such as Shevchenko and Gogol. Gogol himself expressed deep conflict over whether he identified as Russian or Ukrainian; he used a Russified name (he was actually Mykola Hohol) and wrote in Russian about both Russian and Ukrainian Policies. Despite this, as we saw in chapter 3, he was presented as a figure of Russian history in the Sochi Opening Ceremonies. Tsar Nicholas was extremely wary of this nationalism, shutting down intellectual associations like the Brotherhood of Cyril and Methodius and banning virtually all Ukrainian publications.

As we have seen, when the Soviet Union overthrew the Russian monarchy, ethnic nationalism was quashed violently. However, glasnost provided an opening for the issue of Ukrainian nationalism to arise once again. Intellectuals openly questioned the way that Ukrainian history had been rewritten to vilify Ukrainian nationalists. In the South and East, which had been under Russian control, and where “secession had already gained appeal,” this did not sit well. The division became clearer in the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union, when the attempt to

272 Ibid, 45.
273 Ibid.
274 Ibid, 54.
275 Ibid, 62.
276 Ibid, 64.
reach a consensus over the future of an independent Ukraine highlighted a problem. Many of those in Western and Central Ukraine advocated for the creation of a Ukrainian nation-state, while ethnic Russians in the South and East feared “Ukrainization,” despite the willingness of most nationalists to accommodate minorities. The solution was to declare Ukraine a state of “all its citizens,” and to keep Ukrainian as a state language. The East-West cleavage that becomes most important to understanding the Ukraine conflict, then, is the cleavage between the leaning of the West toward the EU and NATO, and the alignment of the South and East with Russia.

**Internal dynamics of conflict**

The post-independence years were plagued by corruption and a faltering economy, with severe problems of hyperinflation and little privatization. While a third of citizens lived in poverty, the rich elite were able to capture the state, solidifying the cronyism and corruption that is still visible today.

Leonid Kravchuk, the first president of Ukraine, took care to avoid conflict in Russian-majority Crimea, allowing for the election of President but reaffirming the unconstitutional nature of a referendum to secede. He was succeeded in 1994 by Leonid Kuchma, an ethnic Russian. Despite lip service to assuage Eastern Russian fears of “Ukrainization,” Kuchma acted in the opposite way - he abolished the office of president of Crimea and did not move towards the establishment of Russian as a state language. To smooth over the potential for conflict from this issue, he brokered a deal with Russia over the Black Sea fleet, a holdover from the Soviet

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278 Menon and Rumer, *Conflict in Ukraine*, 23.
280 Ibid, 25.
era.\textsuperscript{283} The fleet had flown both flags, but Russia had paid the bills and essentially controlled it. The new deal left Russia in possession of 82 percent of the vessels.\textsuperscript{284} At the same time as he was accommodating Russia, however, Kuchma “courted the EU and NATO,” announcing intentions to join the latter in 2002, and worked to deepen US relations. In 2004, when membership in either organization was still elusive, he swung the other way, opening negotiations to join the Eurasian Economic Community. Domestically, continuing corruption in the economy meant the perpetuation of “oligarchical clans,” particularly in Donetsk and Dnipropetrov’sk.\textsuperscript{285}

The Kuchma government grew increasingly unpopular. Worse still were attempts to thwart the rising opposition of Western-leaning Viktor Yuschenko and Yulia Tymoshenko; these efforts went as far as an attempt to poison Yushchenko.\textsuperscript{286} It was no surprise that the 2004 election was ridden with rigging that led to the election of Victor Yanukovych, who was backed by Putin. Despite Putin’s dismissal of the need for a runoff,\textsuperscript{287} unrelenting protests in Kiev led to EU mediation and a new election, with Yuschenko winning 51 percent of the vote. The West and Center were pleased; the East and South rallied against the results.\textsuperscript{288} To show his support for Yanukovych, Putin paid a visit, bringing along the services of Russian political advisers and the company of Moscow’s nationalist Mayor, as well as the support of the Russian Orthodox

\textsuperscript{283} Menon and Rumer, \textit{Conflict in Ukraine}, 28.


\textsuperscript{285} Menon and Rumer, \textit{Conflict in Ukraine}, 30-31.

\textsuperscript{286} Menon and Rumer, \textit{Conflict in Ukraine}, 33.


\textsuperscript{288} Menon and Rumer, \textit{Conflict in Ukraine}, 34.
Church. The West continued to back what was known by then as the Orange Revolution.\(^{289}\) Russian involvement in Ukrainian domestic politics was clearly intended to set a precedent.

Yuschenko and Tymoshenko’s government continued to be plagued by corruption, which only seemed to be growing more insidious and hindering economic growth.\(^{290}\) Russia’s involvement in affairs continued, with Russia suspicious of Yuschenko’s apparent desire for NATO membership.\(^{291}\) Yuschenko was clearly supported in the West and Centre, making him “nationalist,” in the old, “bourgeois” sense, and anti-Russian. This was not helped by his rebuff of offers to join the Russian side in commemorating a battle against Sweden, or his desire to bring awareness to the Holodomor, an artificial famine during Soviet times which the Ukrainians considered genocide and the Russians, in return, considered revisionist.\(^{292}\) In an address to the nation, Yuschenko explicitly placed the blame on Stalin’s agricultural policies and the Soviet dismissal of the crisis as a “bad harvest,” as well as the oppression of Ukrainian nationalism in general.\(^{293}\) In response to these events, Russia decided to raise Ukraine’s gas bill, demonstrating both their assumption of entitlement to input in Ukraine and the dependence of Ukraine itself.\(^{294}\) The express contradicting of the Russian narrative of history through acknowledgement of the Holodomor ran counter to Russia’s desires to frame the history of Ukraine as intertwined with Russia, as we shall see.

\(^{289}\) Menon and Rumer, *Conflict in Ukraine*, 35.

\(^{290}\) Menon and Rumer, *Conflict in Ukraine*, 38.

\(^{291}\) Menon and Rumer, *Conflict in Ukraine*, 39.

\(^{292}\) Menon and Rumer, *Conflict in Ukraine*, 40-41.


\(^{294}\) Menon and Rumer, *Conflict in Ukraine*, 44.
The Ukrainian people had become disenchanted with the current regime. In the next election, Yanukovych won the presidency after 2 rounds and a runoff between him and Tymoshenko, in which he won 49 percent and Tymoshenko won 45.5. Unsurprisingly, he took 77 percent of the vote in the South and East.\footnote{Menon and Rumer, \textit{Conflict in Ukraine}, 44.} Dependent as he was on Russophone support, Yanukovych passed a 2012 language law that declared Russian the official language if 10 percent of the population of a region spoke it as their native tongue. This law played into the East-West divide; including Donetsk, Luhansk and Crimea, there were 11 regions whose population met the requirements to consider the official language Russian.\footnote{Menon and Rumer, \textit{Conflict in Ukraine}, 47.} Yanukovych’s turn from the West continued through the (yet still) growing corruption, jailing of Tymoshenko and failure to meet IMF requirements for cutting spending.\footnote{Menon and Rumer, \textit{Conflict in Ukraine}, 52.}

Yanukovych’s corruption and pursuit of power for himself and his cohorts also showed weakness. Dependence on Russian gas and the risk of default were lingering problems.\footnote{Menon and Rumer, \textit{Conflict in Ukraine}, 53-62.} Waffling between both the EU and Russia only worsened Putin’s opinion of him as a leader. As the talks progressed with the EU in July 2013, Russia employed sanctions to demonstrate its displeasure. In November, Yanukovych suspended talks with the EU and met with Russia, who announced a generous aid package and a reduction of gas prices.\footnote{Noah Rayman, “Russia Gives Ukraine Financial Lifeline Amid Protests,” \textit{Time Magazine}, December 17, 2013, http://world.time.com/2013/12/17/russia-gives-ukraine-financial-lifeline-amid-protests/} Once this was announced, people filled the streets in Kiev and in Western Ukraine. Among increasing police crackdowns on the protesters and international condemnation, Yanukovych fled the government.\footnote{Menon and Rumer, \textit{Conflict in Ukraine}, 80-81.}
claimed that the president being deposed was the result of a coup d’etat, but, as Stephen Sestanovich argues, a more accurate interpretation was the loss of political legitimacy and a unanimous vote in which all members of Parliament participated.301

**Relationship with Russia**

In the turmoil that was created by Yanukovych’s flight, Russia took the opportunity to move in on Crimea. Pro-Russian demonstrations began February 23 and, by March 1, “Crimea was no longer under the control of the government of Ukraine.”302 In his March 18 address to the State Duma, Putin proclaimed that “everything in Crimea speaks of our shared history and pride,” that Crimea had always been part of Russia, and that in annexing it, no slight was intended to Ukraine’s sovereignty. In the same speech, he referred to the Cold War policy of containment, accusing the West of attempting to perpetuate limitations on Russia’s expansion.303 This speech demonstrates two essential tenets of Russian policy: desire to perpetuate control in former satellites and resentment of the expansion of Western influence into this sphere.

As we saw in chapter 3, it is the expansion of NATO that particularly draws Putin’s ire. The constant back-and-forth with Ukraine was seen as an attempt to marginalize Russia.304 Given that “22 of 28 EU members are in NATO,” Russia’s resistance to EU accession is even stronger.305 Ukraine, a large economy with a large population and “across whose territory Russia sends 15


302 Menon and Rumer, *Conflict in Ukraine*, 83.


304 Menon and Rumer, *Conflict in Ukraine*, 71.

305 Menon and Rumer, *Conflict in Ukraine*, 118.
percent of Europe’s gas supply,” is clearly not an acceptable risk, strategically or otherwise.\textsuperscript{306}

For their part, the EU is well aware of this, but does not want to capitulate to Russia’s desires.\textsuperscript{307}

After the annexation of Crimea, sanctions against Russian elites were put in place by the EU and United States; it took the downing of a Malaysia Airlines flight by what were presumed to be Russian-backed Eastern Ukrainian rebels to inspire tighter sanctions, despite the importance of Russian trade relations.\textsuperscript{308} Russia responded with its own sanctions on the United States and the EU.\textsuperscript{309}

The intervention of Russia in Ukrainian affairs is constantly represented as a response a clear situation of oppression of ethnic Russians. For example, in his annual Direct Line on April 17, 2014, he describes the motivation for intervention in Crimea as follows:

I said in my recent speech in the Kremlin that Russia had never intended to annex any territories, or planned any military operations there, never. Quite to the contrary, we were going to build our relations with Ukraine based on current geopolitical realities. But we also thought, and have always hoped, that all native Russians, the Russian-speaking people living in Ukraine, would live in a comfortable political environment, that they would not be threatened or oppressed.

But when this situation changed, and Russians in Crimea were facing exactly that, when they began raising the issue of self-determination – that’s when we sat down to decide what to do. It was at this exact moment that we decided to support Crimeans, and not 5, 10 or 20 years ago.\textsuperscript{310}

\textsuperscript{306} Menon and Rumer, Conflict in Ukraine, 75.

\textsuperscript{307} Menon and Rumer, Conflict in Ukraine, 119.

\textsuperscript{308} Menon and Rumer, Conflict in Ukraine, 122.

\textsuperscript{309} Menon and Rumer, Conflict in Ukraine, 129.

By using the term “self determination,” which is a right granted by the United Nations charter, Putin frames his own actions as comparable to other attempts to liberate people, rather than simply an invasion of a sovereign nation to his own ends.

He justifies the incursion into the Donbass in a similar manner, claiming that “people in eastern and southeastern regions of Ukraine were worried about their future and the future of their children.”

Russia also outright claims the ownership of Ukrainian territories, which “were not part of Ukraine...These territories were given to Ukraine in the 1920s by the Soviet government.” This is stated about Crimea, which was given back to Ukraine in the 1950s, as well as the Southern parts where the Russian population is concentrated. As we have seen, Putin’s emphasis on history is an important part of his strategic toolbox, used to cement a narrative that strengthens the Russian state even in former satellites.

Putin’s assertions are not supported by the facts. According to a poll presented in April 2014 by Ukrainian newspaper Zerkalo Nedeli, which is a weekly newspaper published in Ukrainian and Russian and considered bipartisan by Western media, only 15.4 percent of Southern and Eastern Ukrainians desired separatism and union with Russia.

In fact, the situation after Yanukovich’s flight leading to the “separatist” activity was so chaotic that it was difficult to tell what was happening. Yanukovich’s son personally appointed a militia to deal with the pro-Western, pro-EU protesters in Donetsk. Added to this mix were the

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thugs hired by mafia bosses to attack protesters.\textsuperscript{316} Oligarchs thus attempted to gain control of the situation due to their economic interest in the Donbass region, effectively creating a situation of warlordism.\textsuperscript{317}

The local “referendums” for independence to form a Donetsk Republic were held in this climate in May 2014. A leaked tape of a conversation between Russian Nation Unity leaders Aleksandr Barkashov and Dmitry Boitsov demonstrated the falsification of the results. According to Andrew Wilson’s transcript, Boitsov is heard fearing that the referendum cannot be held, and that Russia will not send support. In response, Barkashov is heard instructing Boitsov: “Let’s say 89 percent voted for the Donetsk Republic.” \textsuperscript{318} The movement was not only taking cues from Russia, but reliant on its support.

The extent of Russian involvement was a frequent subject of confusion. Ihor Todorow, a political analyst at Donetsk University, stated in an interview that “popular leaders” of the movement were “nobodies” before the conflict broke out, suggesting that they had been catapulted into the forefront artificially. “Even those who work with Denis Pushilin (the “head of state” of the “new Republic of Donetsk”) daily say they know little of his background,” Griff Witte of the Washington Post writes.\textsuperscript{319} Talking to the people assembled in protest, Tim Judah, writing for the New York Review of Books, surmised that there was discontent, certainly, and the belief that the Donbass was economically supporting the Ukraine was repeated, but it was difficult to tell what was real and what was “phony.” “Is Putin behind all this, and if so what is

\textsuperscript{316} Wilson, Ukraine crisis, 127.

\textsuperscript{317} Wilson, Ukraine crisis, 134.

\textsuperscript{318} Wilson, Ukraine crisis, 133.

\textsuperscript{319} Griff Witte, “Pro-Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine were ‘nobodies’ — until now,” The Washington Post, April 30, 2014, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/pro-russian-separatists-in-eastern-ukraine-were-nobodies--until-now/2014/04/30/c504e687-cc7a-40c3-a8bb-7c1b9cf718ac_story.html
} This question did not only puzzle the Western media, which was already in a position to suspect Russian involvement and instigation. The Ukrainian Week published an article on May 1, 2014, titled “Who’s behind separatism in the Donbass?” describing the confusion of different factions on the ground. The only thing uniting them, according to Denys Kazanskyi, appeared to be “sheer hatred towards Ukraine and the government in power.”\footnote{Denys Kazanskyi, “Who’s behind separatism in the Donbass?” The Ukrainian Week, May 1, 2014, http://ukrainianweek.com/politics/108903.
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Putin insisted that it was “nonsense” to suggest any Russian involvement in the crisis, even “tactical advisers.”\footnote{Direct Line with Vladimir Putin,” http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20796.
} When questioned as to why convoy was sent into Ukraine without the permission of the Ukrainian government, Russian ambassador to the UN Vitaly Churkin responded, “The United States do not have monopoly to humanism, you know? We are all human. So if you are trying to question our humanism, I would resent that.”\footnote{Simon Shuster, “Russia Lashes Out at U.S. ‘Monopoly’ on Humanitarianism With Aid Convoy to Ukraine,” \textit{Time}, August 24, 2014, http://time.com/3166682/russia-ukraine-trucks-putin/.
} What he meant to say, of course, was humanitarianism. Elizabeth Dunn and Michael Bobick argue that Russia uses the guise of humanitarianism and responsibility to protect as a means of “occupation without occupation.”\footnote{Elizabeth Cullen Dunn and Michael S. Bobick, “The empire strikes back: War without war and occupation without occupation in the Russian sphere of influence,” in \textit{American Ethnologist} 41:3 (2014), 406.
} As we have seen, Russia justifies its actions in former Soviet satellites, but
especially Ukraine, by framing them as humanitarian interventions to protect the Russian minorities.  

End result of crisis

The Ukraine crisis ended in a stalemate. A new government is currently in place, but it is fragile, and as recently as February of this year was in danger of collapse. Economic problems persist, as well as reports of corruption. Although there is widespread dissatisfaction with the government both from the people and the parliament, the government withstood a vote of no confidence. Meanwhile, Russia considers the new government illegitimate – it condemned the government’s “failure” to address issues of anti-Russian sentiment and accused the authorities of “suppressing protesters” in the South and East. It remains to be seen what will come of this conflict.

Conclusion

The Ukraine and Chechnya case studies demonstrate that Russia, and particularly Putin, clearly prioritize the integrity of the Russian state, its economic well-being, and its historical claims to former satellites. The actions and rhetoric of Putin, Yeltsin and other officials demonstrate that policy towards Ukraine and Chechnya operates on a firm line regardless of what may be seen as alien attempts to thwart it. Russia’s claim to rights in Ukraine, in Putin’s view, has historical merit, and is justifiable by international standards of human rights. At the same time, Chechnya was a matter in which Russia had to prioritize the state, regardless of how this was interpreted by Western critics, for the greater good. Thus, both of these cases...

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demonstrate the importance of continuity of history in Putin’s Russia, as well as more strategic considerations of reinvigorating the Russian state again
Conclusions

Russia has transitioned from a monarchy to a totalitarian regime; from there, it has limped through attempts to establish democracy and ended up now in a state of increasing centralization. Several conclusions can be drawn from the progression that I have laid out in this thesis.

First, in contrast to what has been proposed by past scholars, to say that Russians are predisposed to democracy appears not to be accurate. Although Putin has received wildly high approval ratings, which are not out of line considering his consistent efforts to present himself as against the tyranny of oligarchs and for a stronger Russia, there is the very salient matter of the questionable veracity of these assessments in a system shown not to be fully free and democratic.\(^{328}\) It has also been shown that resistance to Putin’s regime through media is not totally squashed, and that the ongoing efforts to censor media lag behind the work of dissidents.

Second, it remains to be seen whether the problems of ethnic conflict and nationalist extremism will as yet be conquered. It appears that despite international monitoring and widespread criticism, not to mention embarrassment, no significant efforts are being made to address violence and persecution. In fact, Putin’s crackdowns on NGOs and political groups may reduce even further the ability of civil society, national or international, to continue to monitor the seriousness of the situation or to organize effective resistance internally.

Third, Russia continues to score abysmally on assessments of democratization. Despite the existence of an electoral system, fraud, coercion, repression of dissent, and undermining of

opposition all challenge the ability to call Russia a democracy in anything but name. As Putin extends power over the state and maintains control through a small group of Soviet-era elites, it seems unlikely this will change in the near future.

Finally, Russia’s incursion in Ukraine and its treatment of the republics demonstrate problems of operating by the standards of international norms. Restricting the ability of republics to be represented electorally and the formation of regional parties appears to go against the UN mandates for the respect of self-determination and avoidance of exploitation, economic or otherwise.\textsuperscript{329} The treatment of Chechens and its subsequent dismissal is likewise counter to the notion of responsibility to protect, which forbids the state to commit war crimes or crimes against humanity with impunity.\textsuperscript{330} As for Ukraine, invasion of another state (despite what rhetoric may be used to reframe it otherwise) flies directly against the principle of respecting national sovereignty.\textsuperscript{331}

Thus, Russia’s future appears to be fraught with obstacles to true democracy. It remains to be seen whether these prospects change, whether opposition can finally gain ground, or whether even further leanings to authoritarianism can be expected. Nonetheless, it should not be considered that this is the only expected option for Russian. As we have seen, the desire to identify what Russianness is has been a longstanding conflict, and is by no means unanimous in its rejection of democracy. Even now, dissidence should not be overlooked or undermined; to do so would discredit those who work at their own peril to expose the realities of their country and express a longing for change.


\textsuperscript{331} General Assembly Resolution 50/172, Respect for the principles of national sovereignty and non-interference in the internal affairs of States in their electoral processes, February 27, 1996, available from \url{http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/50/ares50-172.htm}. 
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