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Nascent Revolution in Post USSR Russia

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a case study of the Soviet Union (past and present) and the conditions that could lead to a repeat of its February revolution of 1917. In doing so, an examination is conducted of classical sociological theories of revolution, and specifically, three propositions regarding the process of revolution and how the Soviet model fits:

(1) prior to revolution, the majority of intellectuals cease to support the regime, write condemnations, and demand major reforms; (2) just prior to the fall of the old regime, the state attempts to meet criticism by undertaking major reforms; and (3) the actual fall of the regime begins with an acute political crisis brought on by the government's inability to deal with some economic, military, or political problem rather than by the action of a revolutionary opposition.

The underlying hypothesis of this paper is that the Soviet Union has displayed (and continues to display) characteristics common or unique to these three propositions -- they are, therefore, continuing the march toward revolution of classical proportions.

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Nascent Revolution in Post-USSR Russia

"We don't care who rules us, even the devil, as long as we
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don't starve."

-- Maria Zorina, 75
Moscow Grocery Shopper

This plea for help by a Moscow woman in December of 1991 cuts to the very heart of what motivates people to rebel -- that spark that ignites months (if not years) of frustration. Often it's not outwardly perceived by the participants of rebellion as any direct effect of corrupt politics or ineffective institutions. They are (more often than not) completely unaware of the forces at work around them, but instead, realize an ultimate state of desperation that finally sends them over the edge. Nevertheless, there are a number of structural factors that do directly account for revolution.

This paper examines the situation in the former Soviet Union (now the Confederation of Independent States) against classical theories of revolution in order to draw conclusions about what their future might hold. In doing so, I'll review three of what sociologist Jack Goldstone has coined as propositions regarding the process of revolution. Several of his observations on the "natural history" of revolutions have been compiled from theories of a number of other historians and sociologists, and are valid so often that they've almost become law-like empirical
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generalizations. Although intended to be a framework for the

theory of revolution in general. I'll specifically address the application of these three most important principles to the situation in the Soviet Union (both past and present). The underlying hypothesis of this paper is that the Soviet Union has displayed (and continues to display) characteristics common or unique to these three propositions --they are, therefore, continuing the march toward revolution of classical proportions.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

It's important, at this point, to provide an historical framework for the environment that led to the complete overthrow of Tsarist Russia in 1917. This framework involves the ultimate alienation of two classes of people -- the very lowest class (the serfs) and the upperclass (landed nobility). An understanding of key historical events prior to 1917 should give an appreciation for the generalizations I present later; particularly as they relate to the discourse involved in both the Russian case study, and perhaps other revolutions.

Many of the causes leading to Russia's overthrow of Tsarist power in 1917 can be traced as far back as the early seventeenth century (and perhaps even further). Beginning with what became known as the Romanov dynasty, Tsarist Russia began to establish absolute monarchies, while repressing traditional Russian representative institutions. Throughout this period, serfdom (a mostly Russian phenomenon) flourished

as the most economical and practical method for landlords to ensure themselves of a labor force. Because land was abundant, the tendency was for peasants to migrate throughout Russia looking for ways to maintain an existence. With landed nobility finding labor becoming even more scarce, they approached the Tsar with proposals that would ultimately turn their estates into enclaves resembling the slave plantations of colonial America. The result was a form of serfdom that became absolutely repressive. By the middle of the seventeenth century, laws had been passed that left serfs virtually powerless. By this time they were bound not to the land (as was the custom elsewhere in Eastern Europe), but to their landlord -- it was his right to buy or sell serfs as he chose.

Serfdom only grew worse in the ensuing years under Peter the Great. With primary goals of expanding and westernizing Russia, Peter began a process of rebuilding that eventually placed tremendous burdens on serfs and landed nobility alike. Peter wanted an army (and an industrial Russia) that would rival the West. In accomplishing this goal, he began to impose taxes on everything and everyone -- most of which fell upon the already impoverished peasantry. He began a forced industrialization program that created a mercantilists economy, developed mining, metallurgy, and textiles which were indispensable to his army. While serfs were already powerless and without rights, they had traditionally been a source of agricultural labor. Under Peter's new

industrialization efforts labor was needed in the mines and textile shops -- and because Russia now had a long history of free labor, serf-owners could freely sell serfs into industry (further breaking that bond between the serf and his homeland or community).

In addition to his industrial policies, Peter instituted an elaborate administrative state to collect taxes, repress internal rebellion, and implement economic controls⁴ (eventually serfs were not the only oppressed people of Tsarist Russia). While serfs had to be tied to the land and factories to produce taxable surpluses, middle and upper classes were called upon to provide the military officers and officials to man the state organizations required for external warfare and internal social control. Over a period of time, the lands of independent nobles and princes were confiscated and passed out as rewards for official careers to this new class of service (administrative) nobles. As this happened, Peter and subsequent Tsars ensured that no new groupings of independent landed aristocrats could arise. While service nobles were given rights to serfs and landed estates, the Tsars ensured that such estates were scattered over the entire empire and not concentrated in one particular province or region. There was an obvious attempt by Tsars to prevent local and regional solidarity among nobles -- requiring nobles to pursue service careers until old age and forcing them to move from post to post and province to province.⁵ This situation continued until well into the

nineteenth century when, under Alexander II, the serfs were finally set free in 1861.

Although he was no liberal, Alexander II recognized that Russia was in desperate need of reform if it were to compete with the rest of Europe. To affect this change, he saw two of Tsarist Russia's most fundamental institutions needing the most reform -- first, the ideas of liberty and fraternity that were addressed in his attempts to westernize and overhaul the legal system of the country; and secondly, the emancipation of the serfs.

It wasn't until the end of Nicholas I's reign (and the beginning of Alexander II in 1855) that a liberal "intelligentsia" began to emerge. Made up mostly of university students and graduates, professionals, and people with leisure time to read, they formed what became a type of moral opposition. They were well educated, idealistic, engaged in critical conversation, tended to sweeping and all-embracing philosophies, and were quite uneasy about how their position in life had been attained at the expense of a lower serfdom class. ⁶ It was this intelligentsia that became the moral conscience of Tsarist Russia.

In order to enlist the support of the liberal intelligentsia Alexander II began to give more and more freedoms. The result was a great outburst of public opinion on numerous issues, with serfdom being the most passionate. This, in turn, began to factionalize the conservative members of the old order. There were still tremendous strains on

society. While the landed gentry no longer owned human labor, he still owned over half the land -- and while the newly freed serf owned some of the land, he was still obligated to a government that taxed heavily and a landed gentry that could provide the means for making a living.*

As Alexander II's reforms unfolded, many people (particularly the intelligentsia) demanded more. While Alexander formed a system of provincial and district councils to resolve local problems, the intelligentsia demanded a national representative body. However, following a rebellion in Poland in 1863, Alexander II began to have second thoughts about his reform initiatives, and began to tighten some of the concessions he had already granted.⁷

The dissatisfied intelligentsia became even more skeptical of his intentions and even more vocal in their pursuit for reform. Knowing that the peasantry was also dissatisfied with their heavy tax burden and inability to improve their position, the intelligentsia began to form a revolutionary corps that moved from village to village

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While the peasants were emancipated from the gentry, as a class they remained separate from the rest of the population. Their collective responsibility for taxes and the old passport system still made them as individuals dependent on their village community from which they could not leave without permission. Peasants could lease land and hire out their labor; but redeemed (usually over 49 years) it became the property of their village community as a whole.

inciting discord among the peasants.*

Alexander II, unable to satisfy his people on both the left and right, had several attempts on his life. But in 1880, alarmed by a growing movement of dissatisfaction, he once again relaxed his autocratic system by abolishing the secret police, allowing the press to discuss most subjects, and proposing two nationally elected commissions to sit with the council of state. Finally, in 1881, he was assassinated by a well organized leftist, revolutionary movement.⁸

From 1881 to 1894, Alexander III ruled Russia with a much firmer hand -- using more repressive tactics against liberals and revolutionaries. Nevertheless, many of Alexander II's reforms (serf freedom and judicial reform) remained intact.

By 1905, and under the rule of Nicholas II, Russians were becoming well respected throughout Europe for their industrial, business, and intellectual pursuits. Rising business and professional classes, reinforced by enterprising landowners, became strong enough to form a liberal segment of public opinion, and eventually their own Constitutional

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This was the movement known as the Narodniki, "men of the people." It is useful to note, that however well intentioned, the narodniki, in their mission to the peasants, were on the whole unsuccessful. Made up of revolutionists, anarchists, and other political and intellectual strains, the peasants often failed to understand their strange ideas, indeed, often turning them in to the authorities.

Democratic Party. Similarly, revolutionary organizations such as the Social Democratic Labor Party (Lenin and Trotsky) were working underground. All groups seemed to have the same goal -- a constitution, civil liberties, and a representative body with the powers to enact laws and control the administration. But following "Bloody Sunday" of January, 1905 (where hundreds of peaceful protestors were shot by the Tsar's troops), Nicholas II relented by issuing a decree that ostensibly satisfied many of these demands. The result was a split between the Constitutional Democratic Party and the more revolutionary Social Democrats.

Nicholas II's superficial attempt at reform fooled no one, and eventually by 1917 almost all classes within Russian society were disaffected. The resulting political and economic pressures of World War I, the mismanagement of an inept bureaucracy, food shortages and hunger, an army that was worn out, and a well-organized revolutionary intelligentsia (unlike the revolution of 1905) all contributed to the eventual abdication of Nicholas II in March of 1917.

From March to July, a provisional government tried to keep the war effort going. But discipline in the army and throughout the Russian countryside had collapsed. In their quest for land reform, peasants were ravaging the rural districts, burning and looting as they went. Soldiers fighting on the war front were afraid they might miss an opportunity to get land being redistributed, and many just

left the army. As a result, Lenin and the Bolsheviks saw the opportunity for a well organized revolutionary party to step in and take control. Finally, in November of 1917, with a well conceived plan that included an immediate peace, land redistribution, and a transfer of capital to a committee of workers, Lenin seized power.

Richard Pipes (1992) has characterized Russian history (at least as it evolved from the 14th century on) as being a continuous period marked by "a distinctive type of unlimited authority that combined sovereignty with ownership" -- a "patrimonial" regime.¹⁰ Pipes suggests that for centuries, Russia's political system has been "structured vertically, with shafts of state authority sunk into society to serve as stabilizers."¹¹ In other words, the state molded and structured society -- it served as the foundation, and in doing so, deprived citizens of the right to form independent organizations or to own property (thereby destroying the balance between government and society). Without that foundation, or as soon as it begins to crumble, society begins to fall apart. A government such as this can only survive as long as it remains firm and decisive. This is exactly what happened to Tsarist Russia in 1917 when Nicholas II began losing power, and again in 1990 under Gorbachev.

With an historical foundation laid, I will now explore a series of propositions that have been made about theoretical revolution in general, that may be able to be generalized to the Soviet Union (past and present) in particular.

PROPOSITION NUMBER 1

Prior to a revolution, the majority of "intellectuals" (journalists, poets, playwrights, essayists, teachers, members of the clergy, lawyers, and trained members of the bureaucracy) cease to support the regime, write¹² condemnations, and demand major reforms.

An historical review of pre-Soviet Russia (such as I've already presented) clearly shows a trend in this direction. With a focus on France in the 18th century, and Russia and China in the early 20th century, Theda Skocpol (1979) conducted an historical and comparative analysis of what she believes have been successful social revolutions. She has found in all three cases that under the old regimes (prior to revolution) the landed upper classes were not powerful enough to prevent local rebellion. Consequently, by entering into cooperative relationships, the states used their repressive forces to control the peasantry in return for upper class compliance and support. In the process, members of the upper classes were able to amass private fortunes. The peasantry, on the other hand, enjoyed strong local communities and at least some rights in small plots of land.

As the old regimes came under increasing pressure from competing states (e.g., economic constraints and military defeats), their need for taxation and mobilization of military recruits steadily increased. Given the limited resources available from the peasantry, the states began to

pressure the landed upper class and at the same time ceased to cooperate in protecting them from the peasantry. As a result of these conflicts, a weakening of the combined power of the state and landed upper class against the peasantry allowed the revolutionary leadership to mobilize discontented urban and peasant workers. Again, this scenario was played out in all three cases (France, Russia, and China).

Skocpol's analysis fits nicely into this first proposition. According to Skocpol, peasants are not capable of mounting a revolution by themselves. * "Marginal elites" (university students, teachers, journalists, lawyers, civil servants -- without proper family background or connections to obtain social positions within the old regime) were the catalyst for revolution. The replacement of the old regime elites with these previously "marginal elites" was the climactic stage of the revolution. ¹³

Eric Wolf (1969) has done a comparative study of six peasant revolutions of the twentieth century; Mexico, Russia, China, Algeria, Vietnam, and Cuba. Although the focus of Wolf's study is on 20th century revolutions in the context of North Atlantic capitalism, he does conclude that of three classes of peasants, the "middle" peasants are the ones most

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Lenin would have agreed with Skocpol. But neither were the workers. They were capable of developing only "trade union consciousness" not a revolutionary one without the help of well trained communists. The marginal elites thesis does fit the old bolshevik backgrounds.

likely to rebel. Poor peasants and landless laborers are relatively weak, with the strength to join a rebellion coming from some external power (in Russia, peasant soldiers returned home from WWI already trained and armed, and ready to join the revolution). "Rich" peasants, on the other hand, are relatively satisfied to keep things just as they are. It is the "middle" peasant, or "poor but free peasant" that are likely to be concerned with tradition and are most vulnerable to pressure from economic change (encroachment on land rights; loss of grazing lands, forests, and water; falling prices for their products).

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But Wolf's assertions also support this first proposition. According to Wolf, just prior to revolution, the old elite faces mounting pressure and competition from new social groups. Financial experts, labor bosses, foremen (junior executives of the capitalist market), the petty officials of the state bureaucracy, the professionals and schoolteachers all fall within the makeup of these new social groups. "Marginal men", who need intense politicization, lay increasing claims against the economic and political power holders. These "marginal men" need a constituency, and with increasing frequency look to the industrial workers and dissatisfied peasants.

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Hence Stalin's campaign to eliminate the kulaks as a class. He assumed that such middle peasants would be the most severe obstacle to collectivization beginning in 1929.

The parallels to be drawn between Tsarist Russia and this proposition are quite clear. But a parallel can also be drawn between the proposition and today's Commonwealth of Independent States. Beginning as far back as the post-Stalin years in 1956 there have been dissidents such as Andrei Sakharov and Alexander Solzhenitsyn who, in spite of being harassed and deprived of rights, openly opposed the Soviet system. In Solzhenitsyn's case, he encouraged a much more conservative political philosophy with strong Russian nationalistic and religious overtones. Sakharov, on the other hand, was a strong proponent of a liberal and pro-Western ideology emphasizing political democracy, legal justice, fair play, and rationality. Both men suffered during years of struggle until perestroika allowed new freedoms of expression within Soviet society.

But the real evidence for such "marginal elite" theories have come in the later years. In 1987, Boris Yeltsin emerged in Soviet politics as a strong advocate of faster and more radical change. At first shunned by the existing political order, Yeltsin was relentless in his push for change. By this time, President Gorbachev's reform policies had opened the door just wide enough that eventually a flood of both moderate and even radical dissidents (to include former political prisoners) became openly involved the liberalization process. Yeltsin was elected to the Peoples Congress in 1989 as a "populist" candidate, and what followed him was a long line of supporters that became known as

Yeltsin's "Young Turks."

There is, however, one slight difference between "marginal elite" theories, such as those of Skocpol and Wolf, and what we've seen with the emerging "Young Turks." Both Skocpol and Wolf have implied (Skocpol more than Wolf) that leadership for any revolutionary movement would come from middle class people "without proper family background or connections to obtain social positions within the old regime."¹⁶ The "Young Turks", however, seem to come from fairly well-connected families and backgrounds. Most prominent among them is Gennadi Burbulis, a former professor of Marxism-Leninism, who has risen to the rank of Deputy Prime Minister. Another example is Yegor Gaidar -- Yeltsin's chief economist. Gaidar is the grandson of a Red Army fighter and writer of patriotic children's stories, son of a vice admiral and Pravda military correspondent, and a devoted Young Pioneer as a child.¹⁷ So what's the difference? Rather than being educated middle class people who had little chance for position within the existing order, these "Young Turks" were well placed, with bright futures, but at some point became dissatisfied with the existing order -- many were closet democrats waiting for an opportunity to emerge.

PROPOSITION 2

Just prior to the fall of the old regime, the state attempts to meet criticism by undertaking major reforms.¹⁸

As stated previously, many of Russia's early and most

sweeping reforms began with Alexander II during the second half of the nineteenth century. But, again, it was Nicholas II who gave desperate concessions following the revolution of 1905. When faced with a crisis that (at first glance) appeared unmanageable, he provided the liberal intelligentsia most of what they wanted (a representative body that would lead to a constitution). Once Nicholas realized that things were again under control, and that he had successfully divided the moderate and radical opposition, he began to reclaim many of the concessions he had given. Throughout the war years (1914-1917), however, most of the moderate and radical opposition began to realize that not only were conditions failing to improve, but following a successful outcome to the war, Nicholas had every intention of finally killing liberalism and constitutionalism in Russia. In the end, Nicholas' initial (albeit superficial) attempts at reform were too late and not enough. His people were hungry, war weary, and demoralized by an oppressive state system that served only the Tsar.

There are similar parallels when comparing Tsarist Russia of 1917 with the Soviet Union of 1991. It is said that Gorbachev set into motion changes that ultimately overtook him. While maintaining his allegiance to Marxism-Leninism, he began with a restructuring program that adopted many philosophical tenants of Western liberalism. He relaxed discipline and central control to the extent that many warned he was propelling the country not toward reform but toward

anarchy. In the end, Gorbachev was blamed for making serious policy miscalculations in his handling of the economy and ethnic relations -- he could not hold onto power and began making unprecedented concessions. The people of the old Soviet Union felt deprived in a number of areas. A lack of faith in the old Soviet economy, along with an emerging nationalistic fervor, led to their dissolution in the Fall of 1991.

There are a number of theorists who have studied the effects of strain on an existing social system and that system's inability to satisfy its constituency. The range of study seems to fall within two schools, and both are applicable to this examination of Tsarist Russia and the modern Soviet Union.

Ted Gurr (1968), fostering a social-psychological approach, has argued a concept that has become known as "relative deprivation." According to Gurr, perceived differences in power and privileges between social groups begin to emerge. These differences can be between groups within a particular society or they can be perceived differences between societies. Samuel Huntington has referred to this process as "Gap Theory", which occurs when the government's ability to satisfy new aspirations increase slower than the aspirations themselves -- leading to political instability. In both cases, Gurr and Huntington seem to agree that leadership develops among the elites (an unemployed intelligentsia consisting of competent men and

women who feel they have been deprived), and that no revolution is ever led by peasants. Gurr, in particular, stresses that revolution starts with leaders who make the masses conscious of their relative deprivation. This consciousness intensifies as they begin to mobilize resources and generate institutional coercion. Again, the parallels are clear between Tsarist Russia and the modern Soviet Union: We see Lenin's ability to convince the Russian people of their deprivation (and both the Tsar's and provisional government's inability to deal with it) during the Summer and Fall of 1917, as well as Mikhail Gorbachev's (and later Boris Yeltsin's) ability to convince Russian people today that the old Soviet economic system was leading them to ruin. In Yeltsin's case, however, he has not yet proven that he can deliver the Russian people from their relative deprivation.

A more structural view has been taken by Charles Tilly (1978), who has argued that revolution is only likely when powerful groups press competing claims on the government, and the government lacks the resources to either satisfy the claims of contending groups or to defeat them.²² He takes this view from his own study of the French revolution, as well of the writings of Leon Trotsky regarding the Russian revolution. Tilly believes that in both cases there was widespread uneven development. As urbanization intruded more into the countryside, tensions developed. The urban environment was one of a money-market-manufacturing complex, while the rural environment was much more agrarian. In both

cases, the key issues that split the two were a demand for roads, taxes to pay for the roads, prices for such commodities as cattle and textiles, and the ownership of land. Tilly's fundamental bottom line stresses resource mobilization: What groups are contending? What are their claims? What ability do both sides have to mobilize such resources as money, manpower, or weapons? And, watch for the emergence of "multiple sovereignties" -- which leads to the next proposition.

PROPOSITION 3

The actual fall of the regime begins with an acute political crisis brought on by the government's inability to deal with some economic, military, or political problem rather than by the action of a revolutionary opposition.²³

Charles Tilly would specifically argue that when competing factions within an old regime begin carving up the existing polity (what he calls the emergence of multiple sovereignties), the revolution is all but complete. His study of the French and Russian revolutions are clear examples of this. However, this generalization should also be extended to multiple "territorial" sovereignties. The most recent and dramatic example being the nationalist fervor that led to the breakup of the Soviet Union into individual republics. But both Tilly and Theda Skocpol argue that some major circumstance of international consequence (either political, economic, or military) will almost always precede

such an event.

Building upon the notion that "states are warmakers, and wars are state-makers",²⁴ Tilly argues that in some circumstances war promotes revolution. Specifically, (1) the extraction of resources to conduct the war has repeatedly aroused revolutionary resistance; (2) the defeats of states in war has often made them vulnerable to attack from their domestic enemies; (3) it becomes absolutely necessary for the armed forces to cooperate with revolutionaries for the revolution to be successful (coups are the most common occurrence); and (4) the waning phases of military conquest²⁵ are extremely vulnerable periods for revolution. The summation of his argument is that there is a connection between realignments in international relations (political, economic, or military crises) and conflicts within individual countries.

Theda Skocpol clearly discounts all the theorists who claim that revolution is caused by relative deprivation or some other value-oriented change. She states flatly that revolution results from the emergence of a political-military crisis of state and class domination. In other words, because of some external crisis suffered by the state, the military and/or state is severely weakened -- the previously dominated class seizes the opportunity through revolution. Skocpol cites the emancipation of the serfs in 1861 as the real "beginning of the end" for Tsarist Russia. While intended by the Tsar to be a measure to stabilize the rural

agrarian situation, it actually enhanced the rebellious potential of the ex-serfs. Inadequate land reform and heavy redemption payments left the peasantry (and even land owners) dissatisfied. By 1905, with the combination of this tremendous dissent, military defeats abroad, and a growing disaffected liberal middle class at home, it was not surprising that widespread rebellion erupted. Skocpol insists that with the international pressures levied against Russia by 1917 (such as the large losses of men in WWI), it should have been easily predicted that any breakdown in central authority would bring the even greater upheaval that it did.²⁶

Of course, the Soviet people have probably never suffered more than during World War II -- millions of people were killed and whole towns and villages were virtually laid waste. And while they had just come through an almost equally brutal period (the purges of 1934 - 1938), certainly one difference between the conditions during World War I and the years surrounding World War II was their quest for survival against a common enemy (a massive German army that had taken the war all the way to Moscow). Although the casualties (and other costs) were high during World War I, that war was still a distant conflict to most Russians. Both peasants and middle class gentry left at home were able to concentrate their efforts on more immediate social issues (from food to land reform) -- thanks primarily to some of the small liberal reforms of Nicholas II. However, if the Tsar's

regime can be characterized as oppressive, then Stalin's conduct during the 1930s can be described as nothing less than brutal. While experiencing the tremendous external stress of World War II (as Skocpol suggests), Stalin's central authority did not break down and the Russian people had not enjoyed some of the relative freedoms that Nicholas had given them.

Perhaps the 1991 downfall of the Soviet Union can be traced back to Nikita Krushchev's de-Stalinization program in 1956, and what may have been the first glimmer of hope for reform. But certainly if we follow both Skocpol and Tilly on their notion of international relations (or some external crisis having occurred) as the most profound impact on the stability of regimes, we can see a whole series of international bungles by the Soviets that were interwoven with their deep economic troubles. Consider, for example: (1) the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962 where Krushchev clearly lost in a stand-off with John Kennedy and the Soviets suffered humiliation -- this probably led to Krushchev's demise as much as any single event; (2) while the Soviet's took the initiative in 1957 with the launch of Sputnik, they clearly lost the space race when the United States landed on the moon in 1969; (3) world opinion (led by the United States) reached an all-time low following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979; (4) Poland severely embarrassed them with a sharp movement toward democracy in 1980; (5) the Soviet air force shot down a Korean airliner in 1983 --

prompting President Reagan to label them "the evil empire"; (6) the crumbling of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and eventual reunification of Germany; and (7) the end of the Warsaw Pact. But perhaps the greatest precipitating external event was a decades old arms race with the United States that had completely devastated the Soviet economy. With billions of rubles being spent on the continued maintenance and upgrade of massive Soviet military forces (at the expense of their agriculture and civilian industrial base), Gorbachev finally realized that the Soviet Union could no longer compete. The effects of their inability to remain in the arms race with the United States while maintaining a viable civilian economy, made even more dramatic by their forced retreat from Afghanistan, clearly demonstrates what Skocpol was referring to as an external political-military crisis of sufficient scope to precipitate revolution.

PROSPECTS FOR THE FUTURE

It's hard to predict, with any degree of certainty, what the future holds for the Commonwealth of Independent States. However, as I stated in the introduction to this paper, the trends lead me to believe that the former Soviet Union is continuing a march toward revolution of classical proportion. The trends presented in propositions one through three are clear -- the intellectuals demand major reform; the state works (just prior to its fall) feverishly to grant major reforms; and, the actual fall of the state is preceded by its

inability to deal with some international economic, military, or political crisis.

Yet, the domestic situation of each republic gets worse almost every day. While Gorbachev gave more freedoms (and Yeltsin even more), some republics have shown signs of returning to some form of autocratic rule. The problem here is one of "trade-offs." When conditions get bad enough, people begin to think that personal liberties take a secondary role to getting food and shelter for their families. As Maria Zovina said, "We don't care who rules us, even the devil, as long as we don't starve."

Will a "man on a white horse" emerge -- a charismatic (but autocratic) leader to rally his people similar to Adolph Hitler in Germany following World War I? It's hard to say, but the conditions are just about right. According to Goldstone, moderates first ascend to power after a revolution, and are soon followed by more radical elements²⁷ that bring more rapid and sweeping changes. The problem here is that in an effort to maintain continuity, they fail to rid themselves of the liabilities that caused the old regime to fail (they inherit the same inability to deal with urgent economic and political problems). This occurred with the first revolution of 1917, and could easily happen in 1992 -- Yeltsin is likely to be even more vulnerable than Gorbachev was. If not careful, people will eventually blame the so-called democrats for their current situation. Yeltsin and his reformers could find themselves serving as scapegoats

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for problems they inherited.

Still, what about the ethnic diversity of the former Soviet Union? Without doubt, there has been a clear trend over the past several months that cultural identification supersedes most (if not all) nationalistic ties. Ethnic tensions are running at an all-time high, with problems between Armenia and Azerbaijan, an internal struggle within Georgia, Islamic fundamentalism within the Southeastern republics, the Crimean Peninsula wanting to rejoin Russia, Moldavia wanting to rejoin Romania, and numerous others. Politics within the central republics are based on clan divisions -- with each political leader serving almost as a dictator. It's almost impossible to expect any commonwealth to survive in the long term with such diverse ethnic interests.

There is one final factor affecting the future of the former Soviet Union that follows the model of Skocpol, Tilly, and others. With troop withdrawals from Afghanistan, and massive military cuts in eastern Europe, the early 1990s look rather ominous. Consider, again, the return of a battered and all but beaten Russian Army in 1917. Disaffected and faced with low morale, yet still well equipped and adequately

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The reverse is also true. It is ironic that Yeltsin will make or break Gorbachev's reputation. If he succeeds, Gorbachev will in retrospect look like a hero; if Yeltsin fails, and ushers in a period of chaos, then Gorbachev will be blamed for having started it all.

trained, the returning Russian soldiers of 1917 were the "means" by which the revolution was conducted. Eric Wolf (supported by other) insists that "marginal elites" will provide the leadership, but poor peasants and landless laborers are too weak to carry-out a revolution alone. The strength to join a revolution has to come from some external power, and most theorists will argue that the military almost always plays the pivotal role -- this is exactly what happened in 1917 when the Tsars troops refused to fire on the people (and eventually went over to the revolution). This phenomena occurred again in August of 1991, when during a coup attempt against President Gorbachev, the Red Army refused to take part (again playing the pivotal role).

However, the real concern is that from a structural point of view, can Russian, Ukrainian, Byelorussian, and other societies absorb several hundred thousand troops returning home from both Afghanistan and eastern Europe. They return facing an ideology gone bankrupt, an economy spiraling downward, and a future (for the military) that is bleak at best. Many of those returning from Afghanistan have been demoralized by their involvement in what they perceive as a shallow imperialistic venture. With the breakup of the Warsaw Pact, troop commanders are already experiencing unprecedented morale problems as the Red Army begins to reposition itself back inside the Commonwealth. Widespread reporting indicates a critical shortage of food and housing -- and it's hard to tell just how much another

returning, well equipped and trained army will take.

FINAL THOUGHTS

While I've drawn parallels throughout this paper that demonstrate a continued march toward revolution by the former Soviet Union, there is one important phenomena that may mitigate the degree or extent to which revolution evolves. Although conditions are right for revolution, throughout most areas of the Commonwealth (particularly in Russia) there appears to be significant progress toward the development of a "rational-legal" model of authority.

The Russian people will never understand or develop an appreciation for the type of democracy found in the United States. Nowhere in the world (not even the British Commonwealth) is democracy -- with its commitment to human rights, separation of powers, or guarantees of free speech and worship -- practiced like it is in the United States. But while the Russian people are unlikely (at least for some time) to develop that same Calvinistic-based sense of democracy and capitalism, they have shown signs of developing what Max Weber calls a system of rational-legal authority.

Weber had argued that while bureaucracy is the purest type of legal authority, socialistic bureaucracy would stifle individual freedom and creative leadership. ²⁸ What Soviet Russia had prior to perestroika and glasnost, was a system that (although highly bureaucratic) was based on traditional and charismatic models of authority (the sanctity of age-old

rules, rulers, and powers). What we find today is the emergence of a bureaucracy that is highly participative, becoming more streamlined, develops more qualified personnel, and derives its authority more and more from rules that are rationally and legally enacted.

The classical conditions for revolution, or a sense for democratic ideals -- what remains to be seen is which develops faster.

End Notes

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