NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL
Monterey, California

THESIS

EXPLORING THE "WEIMAR RUSSIA" ANALOGY

by

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December 1999

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DTIC QUALITY INSPECTED 2

20000417 195

REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE

Form Approved
OMB No. 0704-0188

Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instruction, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302, and to the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reduction Project (0704-0188) Washington DC 20503.

1. AGENCY USE ONLY *(Leave blank)*	2. REPORT DATE	3. REPORT TYPE AND DATES COVERED
	December 1999	Master's Thesis

4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE
EXPLORING THE "WEIMAR RUSSIA" ANALOGY

5. FUNDING NUMBERS

6. AUTHOR(S)
Gary P. Russell.

7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)
Naval Postgraduate School
Monterey, CA 93943-5000

8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER

9. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)

10. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY REPORT NUMBER

11. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES
The views expressed in this thesis are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of Defense or the U.S. Government.

12a. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT
Approved for public release; distribution is unlimited.

12b. DISTRIBUTION CODE

13. ABSTRACT ***(maximum 200 words)***

The "Weimar Russia" analogy is based on a comparison between the failures of the Weimar Republic in Germany (1918-33) and the current problems of post-Soviet Russia. The premise of the analogy is that initial advances toward democracy and economic stabilization might fail and that an authoritarian leader might assume power, rearm, and destabilize the Eurasian continent. The comparison has been the subject of academic conferences, books, journal articles, news stories, and miscellaneous comments. This thesis examines the following elements of the comparison: Defeat in War: Revolution as the Internal Cause; Loss of Territory and Resources; Economic Turmoil; Political Systems, Governments, and Leaders; Decline of the Military; The Diaspora and the Desire for an Ethnically-based Nation-State; Revanchism and Irredentism; and Fascism and Anti-Semitism. While some analysts question the validity of the comparison, the "Weimar Russia" analogy commands attention from experts in Russian affairs and government officials concerned with the future of Russia.

14. SUBJECT TERMS
Weimar Russia, Russia, Post-Soviet Russia, Fascism, Nationalism, Historical Comparison

15. NUMBER OF PAGES
66

16. PRICE CODE

17. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF REPORT	18. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF THIS PAGE	19. SECURITY CLASSIFI- CATION OF ABSTRACT	20. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT
Unclassified	Unclassified	Unclassified	UL

NSN 7540-01-280-5500

Standard Form 298 (Rev. 2-89) Prescribed by ANSI Std. 239-18

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EXPLORING THE "WEIMAR RUSSIA" ANALOGY

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS IN NATIONAL SECURITY AFFAIRS

from the

NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL
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ABSTRACT

The "Weimar Russia" analogy is based on the comparison between the failures of the Weimar Republic in Germany (1918-33) and the current problems of post-Soviet Russia. The premise of the analogy is that initial advances toward democracy and economic stabilization might fail and that an authoritarian leader might assume power, rearm, and destabilize the Eurasian continent.

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While some analysts question the validity of the comparison, the "Weimar Russia" analogy commands attention from experts in Russian affairs and government officials concerned with the future of Russia.

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INITIAL DISTRIBUTION LIST **51**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This thesis analyzes the validity and utility of the "Weimar Russia" analogy. It introduces the main premise of the analogy and examines eight elements commonly discussed in the works of both proponents and critics of the "Weimar Russia" comparison.

The eight elements that support the "Weimar Russia" analogy are as follows: defeat in war: revolution as the internal cause; loss of territory and resources; economic turmoil; political systems, governments, and leaders; decline of the military; the diaspora and the desire for an ethnically-based nation-state; revanchism and irredentism; and fascism and anti-Semitism. Following the discussion of each element, the thesis offers four conclusions.

First, "Weimar Russia" is more a rhetorical abstraction than an existential reality. At the risk of stating the obvious, it should be noted that history never repeats itself exactly. Therefore, to say, with any degree of certainty, that post-Soviet Russia will go the way of inter-war Germany is, at best, pure conjecture, and at worst, futile.

Second, the proliferative nature of the "Weimar Russia" analogy--i.e., its popularity with diverse observers--may be far more significant than its intellectual defensibility as a historical comparison. The comparison has been used in

the following ways: as the basis for organizing academic conferences, as the subject of an entire book, as a theme in the persuasive speeches of high-level American and Russian government officials, as a source of "one-liners" in general economics articles, and as an element in the inflammatory rhetoric of Russian right-wing groups.

Third, "Weimar Russia" represents an "academic vessel" in which prominent people--scholars and officials--continue to study post-Soviet Russia.

Lastly, the foreboding conclusion to the logical syllogism that is "Weimar Russia," i.e., a catastrophe of the magnitude of the Second World War will result if the comparison travels the same path as Weimar Germany, commands today's world leaders to never ignore Russia. It seems that many commentators on Russia perpetuate the comparison as a means toward this end.

The comparison can persuasively promote a reassessment of Western priorities. "Weimar Russia" is an example of political "rhetorical alarms" designed to elicit a response from the world's great powers. Only time will tell whether the deterministic "Weimar Russia" analogy has, or had, any validity. Nevertheless, "Weimar Russia," as an impetus to study Russia and to keep Russia foremost in the minds of Western leaders, has evolved into an analogy with genuine utility.

I. INTRODUCTION

This thesis began as a historical comparison of two seemingly distinct cases--the Weimar Republic in Germany (1918-33) and post-Soviet Russia (1991 to present). The comparison was an attempt to clarify and analyze the often-used "Weimar Russia" analogy. The comparison of Weimar Germany and contemporary Russia in this thesis has avoided a general discussion of "Weimar Syndrome" or "Weimarization" theory, which has been robust and varied since the failure of the Weimar Republic. These Weimar theories and commentaries have been used to explain nations', countries', and polities' struggles to democratize.

Deviating from its original course and intention, this thesis has arrived at a different objective. Difficulties along the way included a plethora of independent variables, the nearly complete absence of "across era" constants, a lack of quantifiable measurement techniques for comparison, the massive and diverse bodies of work discussing both the Weimar Republic and post-Soviet Russia, and an inability to gauge the motives of those using the "Weimar Russia" analogy. These obstacles diverted this thesis to its final outcome.

Further complicating the original thesis mission, some commentators have compared post-Soviet Russia to other

widely differing eras and conditions. In 1996, Vladimir Shlapentokh wrote that "the best parallel (albeit limited, as is the case with any historical comparison) is early West European feudalism as it existed between the ninth and twelfth centuries."[1] Others have compared contemporary Russia to the decaying Ottoman Empire of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, i.e., the "Sick Man of Eurasia,"[2] an empire in decline, a people whose ambitions for regional hegemony and world position far outpace their abilities. Still other commentators have compared corrupt, chaotic, and semi-democratic Russia to the "roaring" gangster-dominated, Prohibition era of the inter-war United States. Nonetheless, the comparison that spawned the term "Weimar Russia" continues to maintain its early 1990s momentum, and has been the subject of books, journal articles, academic conferences, newspaper and news magazine exposés, and government officials' speeches.

As Gerald Feldman observed at a forum at the University of California, Berkeley, "much can be learned from Weimar, which at the very minimum is useful for heuristic

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[1] Vladimir Shlapentokh, "Russia: Privatization and Illegalization of Social and Political Life," *Washington Quarterly*, vol. 19, (Winter 1996), p. 65.

[2] John Van Oudenaren, "Sources of Conflict in Europe and the Former Soviet Union," *Sources of Conflict in the 21st Century: Regional Futures and U.S. Strategy*, eds., Zalmay Khalilzad and Ian O. Lesser, (Santa Monica, California, RAND Corporation, 1998), p. 289.

purposes."[3] In other forms, Professor Feldman's assertion has been, and continues to be, repeated frequently by historians, political scientists, journalists, and politicians. Feldman's approach inspired this thesis in its final version.

What follows is an expository discussion of the "Weimar Russia" analogy. Chapter II, "The 'Weimar Russia' Analogy," introduces the main premise of the analogy and examines, in moderate depth, eight elements commonly discussed in the works of both proponents and critics of the "Weimar Russia" comparison. Finally, Chapter III, "Conclusions, Commentary, and Opinions," considers commentary and opinion directed at the essence of the "Weimar Russia" analogy. Chapter III discusses the analogy against the backdrop of both the analogy elements and the difficulties in drawing parallels across eras, and will make four assertions regarding the "Weimar Russia" analogy. In an effort to remain suitably focused, detailed scenarios describing Russia's fate and the range of decisions confronting global leaders have been avoided.

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[3] Gerald Feldman, "Weimar and Russia: Is there an Analogy," Institute of International Studies, University Of California: *Currents*, Fall 1994: "Weimar and Russia" forum, Available [Online]: <http://globetrotter.berkeley.edu/ pubs/ feldman.html> [3 March 1999], p. 3.

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II. THE "WEIMAR RUSSIA" ANALOGY

A. RUSSIA TODAY

At the end of the twentieth century, Russians trudge on in much the same way as generations of Russians before. Their harsh climate produces a rare nice day as the majority of the population lives in the regions of Russia that are at the same latitude as northern Canada. Russia's quality of infrastructure remains below that of most industrialized countries. Russia expends great energy and resources to produce and obtain the food necessary to support a widely dispersed population. Russia's late industrialization and preservation of serfdom until 1861 continue to have negative economic and societal effects.

Nevertheless, Russians have famously endured many hardships, including the First and Second World Wars, the Russian Revolution of 1917 with its subsequent Civil War, and the Stalinist collectivization and purges. The Russians now have new hardships. These hardships, on one hand, appear to be the unintended consequences of liberalization and democratization policy decisions. For example, the increases in cases of tuberculosis, typhus, and syphilis, and the shrinking Russian population may be explained in part by the breakdown of the Soviet state's public health system. On the other hand, some of the Russians' new

hardships result from decisions made as the Soviet Union broke into its constituent republics in late 1991--for example, the privatization efforts that have left the working class at the mercy of powerful oligarchs. In 1998, inflation amounted to 84.4 percent and real income fell by 16 percent. In December 1998, 39.8 million Russians had incomes lower than the subsistence level of 717 rubles ($31) a month.[4] Individual financial problems are widespread, but the macroeconomic and market-related microeconomic problems in Russia are steadily growing worse. The life expectancy and birth rates have dropped to staggering levels. To many within Russia, these accumulating problems can be directly attributed to the demise of the Soviet Union, the liberalization of society, the adoption of democratic principles, the institution of free market capitalist economic concepts, and the loss of much of the territory and resources historically dominated by Russia. Needless to say, many segments of society are dissatisfied with their existence and are equally pessimistic about the government's ability to improve their lives.

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[4] Center of Strategic and International Studies, Russian and Eurasian Program, "Net Assessment of the Russian Economy," Available [Online]: http://www.csis.org/ ruseura/ rus_econ.html [4 March 1999], p. 2.

B. "WEIMAR RUSSIA" PREMISE

With reference to existing conditions in post-Soviet Russia, many commentators have hearkened back to another era to analyze Russia's plight. In many forms, in many degrees, and for differing reasons, the period of the Weimar Republic in Germany (1918-1933) has been evoked by various Russian government officials and political experts, Western experts on Russia, and Western government officials in attempts to explain Russia's increasingly bad condition. On 31 January 1992 before the Senate Armed Services Committee, Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney underscored the magnitude of Russia's difficult transition from authoritarian communism to capitalist democracy:

> Experts often speak of the dangers of "Weimar Russia," in which initial advances toward democracy and economic stabilization fail and an authoritarian leader assumes power and rearms. In Weimar Germany it took more than a decade before democracy failed; we do not know what might happen in Russia. If developments take such a turn, our current defense program will allow us to make necessary mid-course corrections in available warning time.... The uncertainties we face are likely to be with us for the remainder of this decade or longer.[5]

Comments within Russia have been equally pointed. Alexander Konovalov, a historian and political analyst with

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[5] Dick Cheney, "Statement before the Senate Armed Services Committee," (31 January 1992), p. 1.

the Russian television network ORT, drew the comparison by referring to Germany in the Weimar period in the following way: "It was a country that lost a war, lost its dignity, and tried to become a democracy under the worst possible conditions." About Russia he continued, "[Russia] has lost huge amounts of territory, one half of its gross domestic product, and 10 years of male life expectancy."[6]

Furthermore, Russian government officials have used the "Weimar Russia" analogy. In a 20 November 1996 interview with the Institute of International Studies at the University of California, Berkeley, a former Yeltsin economic advisor and acting Prime Minister of Russia, Yegor Gaidar, took credit for first mentioning the analogy. In response to a question, Gaidar said,

> If I am not mistaken, I think that I was the first to mention the parallel between post-Soviet Russia and Weimar Germany. It was, I think, in the summer of '92. And, of course, I still do think that it is a very, very dangerous parallel because it is very easy.[7]

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[6] Christian Caryl, "Is this Weimar Russia?" Available [Online]: http://www.usnews.com/ usnews/ issue/ 981116/ 16weim.htm [3 March 1999], p. 1.

[7] Institute of International Studies, University of California, Berkeley, "From Central Planning To Markets Guiding the Transformation of the Russian Economy A Conversation with Yegor Gaidar," Available [Online]: http://globetrotter.berkeley.edu/ conversations/ Gaidar/ gaidar-con9.html [3 March 1999], p. 2.

Alexander Yanov, in his 1995 book *Weimar Russia*, seemingly corroborates Gaidar's claim of first use in his description of the 28 March 1993 impeachment vote during which Gaidar admitted to a "premonition of arrest" and fears that the new democracy would be "Weimarized."[8] However, as early as December 1991, in an Associated Press article by Alan Cooperman, Moscow's popular mayor, Gavriil Popov, drew attention to the similarities between Russia's fledgling democracy and that of the Weimar Republic of Germany. Popov, an economist, said, "Events in the Russian republic are fast developing toward the Weimar Republic model."[9] Obviously, Popov was referring to the existing theories that had evolved within the economics, political science, and history disciplines after the demise of Weimar. Determining who first drew the "Weimar Russia" analogy is difficult and not necessary to this analysis of the analogy. The key fact is that parallels have been drawn since the early days of the post-Soviet Russia transformation to democracy.

Nonetheless, Yanov has clearly become the staunchest proponent of the analogy. His book is a compilation of

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[8] Alexander Yanov, *Weimar Russia*, (New York, Slovo-Word Publishing House 1995), p. 19.

[9] *The Associated Press*, "Moscow Mayor, Resigning, Warns of treat of Fascism," 19 December 1991. Available [Lexis/Nexis]: NEWS/ CURNWS, MAGS, MAJPAP, NWLTRS, PAPERS, [1 March 1999], p. 1.

political, economic, historical, and social analyses of Russia's problems. He further develops the similarities between Weimar Germany and post-Soviet Russia; many of these are examined in this thesis. Furthermore, Yanov identifies his intended audience. At the end of his introductory chapter, Yanov writes:

> In 1930, to know how the German crisis would end required looking back at this open warfare rather than to the "stabilization" that immediately preceded the fall of Weimar. The same, I am afraid, might be true of Weimar-in case the fateful confusion of priorities in the current American policy is not overcome while there is still time.[10]

Yanov directs his advice toward Russians as well, but demonstratively chose the West, and the United States in particular, as possessing the will and resources necessary to arrest the downward trajectory represented by the "Weimar Russia" analogy. Concomitant with the analogy, as currently crafted, is the belief by many that Russia will follow the slide of Weimar Germany and possibly usher in an authoritarian regime, destabilize the Eurasian region, and perhaps precipitate another major continental war. Obviously, apart from Russia's currently terrible situation, it is the foreboding nature of the analogy that captures experts' and laymen's attention. In the remainder of this

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[10] Yanov, p. 20.

chapter, the striking similarities between Weimar Germany and post-Soviet Russia are examined. Following a brief reiteration of the main premise of the analogy, eight elements of the comparison are discussed.

Secretary Cheney best articulated the premise of "Weimar Russia"--that initial advances toward democracy and economic stability might fail and that an authoritarian leader might assume power and rearm. The impetus behind this premise is the abjectly dismal quality of Russian life today and the pessimistic outlook of Russian society. This section includes what has happened since the demise of the Soviet Union and "remedies" that some groups and individuals are advocating. Throughout this chapter, parallels are drawn between the two countries and periods in many diverse aspects.

Comments about the analogy's validity and utility are reserved for the conclusion. Regardless of the analogy's validity, its extensive use commands attention from experts in the field and officials in positions to formulate policies concerning Russia and Russian affairs. The proliferation of the analogy may itself cause momentum and contribute to a tragic "self-fulfilling prophecy."

C. ELEMENTS OF THE COMPARISON

1. Defeat in War: Revolution as the Internal Cause

The First World War ended on 11 November 1918 when Germany signed an armistice with the allied and "associated" countries of Great Britain, France, and the United States. With fighting suspended, the warring powers met at Versailles outside Paris to negotiate a peace settlement. On 28 June 1919, the Treaty of Versailles was signed. It clearly affirmed that Germany and the other Central Powers were responsible for the war's beginning and its disastrous and costly effects. Furthermore, those deemed to have caused the war suffered a great reduction of their territory (especially Germany) and a vast cut in allowable military strength. They also incurred enormous reparations obligations.

The provisions of Versailles levied upon the Germans were seen by many as further "salt in the wounds" for a country that had suffered gravely from the fighting and blockade of its shores during the war. Resentment was further fueled by the increasingly popular belief among the Germans that Germany had, in fact, not lost the war, militarily. Many believed that the German army had never been decisively beaten on the battlefields of Europe. This popular belief fueled the so-called "stab in the back" myth.

The "stab in the back" myth contained many parts, but it principally asserted that Germany's fate was caused by treacherous internal forces, not an overwhelming military defeat. On 18 November 1919, Paul Von Hindenburg, Field Marshal of the German Army, alluded to this popular belief during his testimony before a parliamentary committee. "An English general said with justice: 'The German Army was stabbed in the back.' No guilt applies to the good core of the army. Its achievements are just as admirable as those of the officer corps. Where the guilt lies is clearly demonstrated."[11] Hindenburg was alluding to the politicians, Social Democrats and others, who founded the Weimar Republic and signed the Treaty of Versailles.

During his campaign for the presidency in 1925, Hindenburg continued to employ the "stab in the back" logic to justify his and Erich Ludendorff's decisions late in the First World War. Adolf Hitler would later use the myth to encourage collaboration between his National Socialist Party (NSDAP) and the conservative elements of the National Party (DVNP). By perpetuating the myth and blaming individuals he labeled "Jewish-Marxist revolutionaries", Hitler further hardened a large sector of the German population against the

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[11] Hindenburg quoted in *Stenographischer Bericht über die öffentlichen Verhandlungen des 15*, in Anton Kaes, Martin Jay, and Edward Dimendberg, eds., *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994), p. 16.

nascent Soviet Union. In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler echoed this anti-Semitic and anti-Communist rhetoric: "Kaiser William II was the first German Emperor to hold out a conciliatory hand to the leaders of Marxism, without suspecting that scoundrels have no honor. There is no making pacts with Jews;...."[12] The prominence of the "stab in the back" myth is unquestioned, and its effect in undermining the Weimar Republic was probably significant. Deconstructing this myth demonstrates a similarity between post-First World War Germany and post-Cold War Russia.

The Soviet Union was engaged in a political-military competition with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) during the Cold War. The Cold War chiefly pitted the United States and the Soviet Union in a global struggle for spheres of influence, but contained some "hot" areas such as fighting in Korea, Viet Nam, and Afghanistan. Although East and West never fought each other directly, the United States/NATO versus Soviet Union/Warsaw Pact competition "heated" up occasionally during this era of great power peace.

Following the end of the Cold War in the late 1980s, the United States-led coalition performed superbly in the Gulf War in 1990-91. In July 1997, NATO announced the

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[12] Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, (Boston, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1971; first published by Verlag Frz. Eher Nachf, G.M.B.H. 1925), p. 206.

selection of three new allies, which were formally inducted on 12 March 1999. Conversely, the Soviet Armed Forces' quality began slipping during the Brezhnev regime and plummeted drastically with the debacles in Afghanistan and the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Today, this falling trajectory continues.

However, as with Weimar Germany's myth of a "stab in the back," the Soviet, now Russian, military has not been defeated on the battlefield. Thus, a prevailing sentiment among Russian military officers, politicians, academics, and other elites is that the Gorbachev-led reforms and subsequent liberalization of Soviet rule caused a defeat in the competition with the West. Thus, in the absence of a military defeat, internal factors are responsible for Russia's post-Cold War predicament. Moreover, many Russians cultivate ambitions beyond Russia's means. As Sherman Garnett has noted, "Neither Russia nor the rest of the world has adjusted to the shape of the new Eurasia, to the potential for the combination of excessive Russian ambitions and dwindling Russian capabilities to spark strategic surprises."[13] Henry Kissinger summed up the Russian fall

[13] Sherman Garnett, "Russia's Illusory Ambition," *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 76, no. 2, (March/April 1997), p. 75.

more succinctly: "The Soviet Empire collapsed even more suddenly than it had erupted beyond its borders;...."[14]

With Soviet forces poised to engage NATO to the West, Chinese or Japanese forces in the East, and Islamic militants to the South, the Soviet regime crumbled in a revolutionary *perestroika*. In a dramatically short period, an empire that once rivaled the collective power of the Western democracies in military, industrial, and intellectual might disappeared, leaving a loosely knit group of independent republics in its wake. Russia emerged as the dominant power among these new autonomous countries, but it had fallen drastically from its Cold War apex.

The Soviet collapse was not the result of defeat in a major war. Moreover, large segments of the Russian population clearly recognize this fact, causing a bitter search for reasons for the current state of affairs. This collective search, pursued against the backdrop of countless studies, analyses, and exposés, has fueled anti-Western, anti-democratic, and anti-capitalist sentiments. Decisions made by the last Soviet leaders and their successors--President Yeltsin and his several Prime Ministers--have come under great scrutiny and criticism. There is little respect

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[14] Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy*, (New York, Touchstone Books, 1994), p. 762.

for President Yeltsin or the institutions of the Russian political system. In discussing scenarios for the 2000 Russian presidential election, Vladimir Shlapentokh raised the following possibility: "The supporters of the losers would quickly declare the elections results a fraud, triggering mass political unrest and further fragmentation."[15] Furthermore, the Russian people feel that they are suffering setbacks in their standard of living commensurate with a cataclysmic military defeat.

Thus, a parallel drawn between Weimar Germany and post-Soviet Russia by many is that these negative circumstances are attributed by large sectors of the respectively affected populations to internal causes, not to defeat in an armed confrontation with external adversaries. Whereas the German perspectives resulted from repeated retelling of the "stab in the back" myth, the Russian people's sentiment appears more objectively supportable in that no great power war occurred in the late twentieth century.

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[15] Vladimir Shlapentokh, "Will Russia Pass the Democratic Test in 2000?" *The Washington Quarterly*, vol. 22, no. 3, (Summer 1999), p. 64.

2. Loss of Territory and Resources

With the Treaty of Versailles, Germany lost Alsace-Lorraine, Eupen and Malmédy, Northern Schleswig, Posen, West Prussia, portions of Silesia and all of its overseas colonies. Many of the territorial losses simply redrew the Western European map to reflect territorial alignments before the Bismarck era. Although some regions were of significant industrial and strategic importance, arguably the loss of resources damaged the German state and economy more than the loss of territory. As part of the War Reparations agreement, Germany turned over many of its natural resources, including iron and coal, to Belgium and France. Nevertheless, the loss of territory was a symbolic blow to German pride. The rising public outrage further agitated the many fringe political movements that would later gain enhanced power through the Weimar Constitution's electoral processes.

In Russia, a large segment of the population views the "loss" of the other former Soviet republics as the dismantling of what was historically the Russian Empire. The Soviet Union was dominated by Russia and Russians. Many experts have argued that the Soviet Union was merely a repackaged version of the long-established Russian Empire. Clearly, Moscow controlled the Communist Party structures in all the Soviet republics and reaped many economic benefits

from the Soviet-controlled regions beyond the Russian border.

With the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Russia lost the industrial output and vast farming lands of Ukraine, the energy reserves of the Transcaucasus, much of the Caspian basin, and the Central Asian Republics (including the many nuclear and space facilities of Kazakhstan), and the Western defensive buffer provided by the Warsaw Treaty Organization (WTO) countries. These newly autonomous countries with their respective resources significantly redefined their ties with Moscow, gaining increasing independence in the process. Now, Russia finds itself dependent on the specialized assets of other former Soviet republics--an octopus with no tentacles.

3. Economic Turmoil

The economic difficulties of the period 1929-1933 in Germany have been widely analyzed and are generally understood by anyone making a cursory study of the period. The key aspects of economic turmoil to hit the Weimar Republic and German society included hyperinflation, widespread unemployment, plummeting national income, dropping industrial production, and an ineffective tax system.

Today, Russia suffers from similar economic difficulties. The Russian and Eurasian Program of the Center for Strategic and International Studies lists the following problems in its March 1999 *Net Assessment of the Russian Economy*:

> The gross domestic product (GDP) of the Russian Federation has declined each year since 1989, apart from a 0.8 percent increase in 1997. The current GDP is about 55 percent of the 1989 level. After a drop of 4.6 percent in 1998, a further decline of 5-6 percent is anticipated for 1999.
>
> The Primakov administration published a stabilization program on November 15 [1998]. This was a political wishlist without a viable and visible means of financial support.
>
> A medium-term economic program is to be submitted by the Minister of Economics to the government on March 31 [1999]. It is reported to foresee the resumption of growth in the year 2000.
>
> On February 5 [1999], the State Duma passed the 1999 budget at its fourth reading by 305 votes to 58. It provides for revenues of 474 billion rubles ($20.6 billion), expenditure of 575 billion rubles ($25 billion), leaving a deficit of 101 billion rubles, or 2.5 percent of GDP. It is predicated on an annual inflation rate of 30 percent and an exchange rate of 21.5 rubles to the dollar. Both [assumptions are] considered unrealistic.
>
> Inflation in 1998 amounted to 84.4 percent. In the month of January 1999, retail prices rose by 8.5 percent.
>
> Real disposable income fell by 16 percent in 1998. In December 1998, 39.8 million Russians had incomes lower than the subsistence level of 717 rubles (about $31) a month.

> Accumulated wage arrears in 10 basic industries on January 1 [1999] amounted to 77 billion rubles, down from 85 billion rubles on December 1 [1998].
>
> Standard & Poor's has cut its rating for Russian long-term debt in foreign exchange to CCC-, the lowest rated sovereign debt in the world.
>
> The Central Bank of Russia reportedly plans to close about 720 of the nation's 1,500 banks.
>
> Net foreign direct investment (FDI) in Russia in 1997 amounted to $3.9 billion, less than 1 percent of global FDI of $400 billion. The 1998 total is estimated at around $1.8 billion.
>
> Fixed capital investment in January-July [1998] was 5.5 percent lower than in January-July 1997. New investment in 1997 was less than one-fifth of the 1991 level in comparable prices.[16]

The above statistics suggest that the cumulative status of the Russian economy is dismal. It was within a similar sort of economic "crucible" that National Socialism and rigid authoritarianism gained fervent support in Weimar Germany. This section and the next are inextricably linked. The next section discusses the outlook and perceptions held by each society--German and Russian--toward its leaders, governments, and political systems. Criticism of Russia's democratic and economic liberalization has been increasingly directed at President Yeltsin and the system of government

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[16] Center of Strategic and International Studies, Russian and Eurasian Program, "Net Assessment of the Russian Economy," Available [Online]: http://www.csis.org/ ruseura/ rus_econ.html [4 March 1999], pp. 1-2.

he has developed, notably in the December 1993 Russian Constitution.

4. Political Systems, Governments, and Leaders

A crucial aspect of a vibrant democratic system is often the autonomy of the legislative branch of government, or parliament, from the executive body of government. In the Weimar Republic, Chancellors Brüning, Papen, and Schleicher (with the concurrence of the President) became increasingly dependent on the powers afforded by Article 48 of the Weimar Constitution because of a loss of party support in the Reichstag. Routine business was gridlocked as ad hoc coalitions were formed to counter legislation. The diversity of German political parties made it difficult to craft legislation that would satisfy the majority of delegates. Foreseeing obstacles to governing, the authors of the Weimar Constitution included certain provisions. In its second paragraph, Article 48 states:

> In the event that the public order and security are seriously disturbed or endangered, the Reich president may take the measures necessary for their restoration, intervening, if necessary, with the aid of the armed forces.[17]

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[17] Article 48 of the Weimar Constitution, quoted in Kaes, Jay, and Dimendberg, p. 48.

The last part of Article 48 delineated the many individual freedoms and rights that could be abrogated in the same circumstances. Another crucial passage describing the relationship of the executive branch to the legislative branch is contained in Article 54. It states:

> The Reich chancellor and the Reich ministers require for the exercise of their office the confidence of the Reichstag. Any one of them must resign if the Reichstag by formal resolution withdraws its confidence.[18]

Due to the increased diversity of the composition of the Reichstag and the eventual plurality established by the Nazis and their conservative allies, Article 54 lost much of its "check" on the executive branch. This conservative force in the Reichstag allied itself with the sympathetic Chancellors. The increasingly conservative, right-wing Chancellors were thus able to fully establish a great imbalance between the branches in favor of the President, Chancellor, and the executive branch. It was within this arrangement that Hitler was legally appointed Chancellor in January 1933.

Turning to Russia, many similarities exist that create comparable imbalances. The 1993 Constitution of the Russian

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[18] Ibid., p. 48.

Federation "grants sweeping powers to the President."[19] President Yeltsin's inclination to invoke these powers has been obvious. The Russian Constitution includes the following noteworthy articles:

> Article 80: The President...shall take measures to protect the sovereignty of the Russian Federation, its independence and state integrity, and ensure concerted functioning and interaction of all bodies of state power.[20]
>
> Article 84: The President of the Russian Federation shall: a) call elections to the chambers of the State Duma in accordance with the Constitution and federal law; b) dissolve the State Duma in cases and under procedures envisaged by the Constitution;....[21]
>
> Article 87: (2) In the event of aggression against the Russian Federation or an immediate threat thereof, the President of the Russian Federation shall introduce martial law on the territory of the Russian Federation or in areas thereof with immediate notification thereof of the Federation Council of the State Duma.[22]
>
> Article 88: Under circumstances and procedures envisaged by the Federal Constitutional Law, the President of the Russian Federation shall impose a state of emergency on the territory of the Russian Federation or in areas thereof with immediate notification of the Federation Council and the State Duma.[23]

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[19] Russia Index, ICL, "Constitutional Background," Available [Online]: http://www.uni-wuerzburg.de/ laws/rs_indx.html [3 March 1999], p. 1.

[20] Ibid., p. 14.

[21] Ibid., p. 15.

[22] Ibid., p. 16.

[23] Ibid., p. 16.

> Article 91: The President of the Russian Federation shall possess immunity.[24]

These passages from the Russian Constitution are not remarkable when compared to similar articles in other democratic countries' constitutions. Specifically, the language in other constitutions appears to parallel the Russian Constitution's language in describing presidential or executive powers in times of emergency. However, Yeltsin's tendency to issue decrees must be noted in light of his constitutionally determined "sweeping powers." The resulting effect has been an imbalance in the branches of government that decidedly favors the Russian President. The Duma has succeeded in certain head-to-head clashes--for example, its refusal in September 1998 to re-install Victor Chernomyrdin as the Prime Minister. However, President Yeltsin has enjoyed primacy within the Russian political system.

Yeltsin continues to be viewed as a heroic figure among certain sectors of society, but his popularity at the national level has fallen to a low percentage. According to the data compiled by Vladimir Shlapentokh: "fewer than 3 percent of Russians 'trusted' Yeltsin in February 1999."[25]

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[24] Ibid., p. 16.

[25] The Fund of Public Opinion, *Bulletin*, No. 22, February 1999 quoted in Vladimir Shlapentokh, "Will Russia Pass the Democratic Test in 2000?" p. 63.

Moreover, the system established by Yeltsin, for Yeltsin, may not be appropriate for the next president, who might pursue dictatorial objectives. In that sense, we see a similarity in that the Weimar Republic experienced a significant reshuffling of power *within* the constitutional framework that enabled a succession of Chancellors to insidiously strengthen the executive branch; these developments enabled Hitler to consolidate various organs of state power.

Another parallel drawn between the two periods involves the mental and physical faculties of the two Presidents--Hindenburg and Yeltsin. In the early 1930s, Hindenburg became increasingly unable to govern. Yeltsin suffers from significant health problems and is widely believed to be a chronic alcoholic. In the 16 November 1998 *US News Online, World Report*, Christian Caryl wrote:

> Like Berliners in the early 1930s, Muscovites openly mock their president's mental capacity: In recent months, Yeltsin mistakenly identified Japan and Germany as nuclear powers, failed to recognize one of his own ministers during a public appearance and blabbered incoherently at a press conference.[26]

Furthermore, Yeltsin (like Hindenburg) has become decidedly dependent on an inner circle of advisors, many of

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[26] Caryl, p. 1.

whom have little or no experience in governing. In the same report Caryl commented:

> Making the parallel even sharper, Yeltsin has become dependent on the advice of two advisors, his daughter Tatyana Dyachenko, and chief of staff, Valentin Yumashev. Hindenburg also relied on his son Oskar, and chief of staff, Otto Meissner.[27]

During the early 1990s, a key segment of the Russian population that demonstrated a striking lack of confidence in Yeltsin and his advisors was the military. An August 1994 survey of Russian officers conducted by the Moscow firm *Sinus* found that only 29 percent "were loyal to the president."[28] Adding to the military's dissatisfaction with the Yeltsin regime was their overwhelming dislike for the Defense Minister at the time, General of the Army Pavel Grachev. According to the same *Sinus* poll, only 17 percent supported Grachev, 52 percent answered that they were against him, and roughly 50 percent responded that they did not trust him. Vladimir Shlapentokh argues that the political role of the military has increased in post-Soviet Russia, but concedes that the overall prestige and readiness

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[27] Ibid., p. 1.

[28] Vladimir Shlapentokh, "The Enfeebled Army: A Key Player in Moscow's Current Political Crisis," *European Security*, vol. 4, no. 3, (Autumn 1995), p. 422.

of the military have severely declined since the fall of the Soviet Union.[29]

5. Decline of the Military

Following the First World War, Germany's military strength was severely limited by the victors, whose actions were bolstered by the provisions of Article 231 of the Treaty of Versailles. For example, the German army was limited to 100,000 volunteers, the navy was cut, the air force was eliminated, and specific areas of the national territory were demilitarized.

Expert opinions on the decline of the post-Soviet military are numerous. According to Sherman Garnett, "The Russian military is in deep crisis. Russia remains a preeminent nuclear power, but the great instruments of conventional power projection created by the Soviet Union are in ruin."[30] Even Russian defense officials acknowledge the sad state of the Russian military. In the 14 February 1997 *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, the Russian Council of Foreign and Defense Policy described the state of the Russian military

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[29] Ibid., pp. 422-33.

[30] Sherman Garnett, "The Revolution in Eurasian Military Affairs," *The Future of the Russian Military: Managing Geopolitical Change and Institutional Decline*, Heritage Lecture No. 578, The Heritage Foundation, Washington, DC, December 12, 1996, p. 4.

as an "accomplished catastrophe" and warned of a "national catastrophe."[31]

The current economic crisis has caused large portions of the military to go long periods without pay. Quasi-military units such as the Presidential Security Service, the Border Guards, the Internal Security Forces; and special military units like the Strategic Rocket Forces and certain paratroops units continue to receive pay and to enjoy privileges not seen by the majority of the armed forces. Forces returning from former Warsaw Pact countries were often placed in dilapidated housing areas in Russia.

All of these factors and more have had the cumulative effect of lowering the military's standing in Russian society. The plight of the modern Russian military person is similar to that experienced by German soldiers returning from the front after the First World War. The German and Russian militaries, once-proud organizations, saw their statures greatly diminished within their post-war domestic and international situations.

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[31] Statement by the Russian Council on Foreign and Defense Policy quoted in Stuart D. Goldman, "Russian Conventional Armed Forces: On the Verge of Collapse?" *CRS Report for Congress*, 4 September 1997, p. 1.

6. The Diaspora and the Desire for an Ethnically-based Nation-State

With the demise of the Soviet Union, millions of ethnic Russians have found themselves outside the borders of the Russian Federation. In Belarus, Ukraine, the Baltic States, and the Central Asian States, millions of Russians, who settled during many decades of the Soviet system, remain. The government of the Russian Federation is thereby presented with significant security, social, and political challenges. These challenges have given rise to many groups and individuals calling for an ethnically Russian nation-state.

Woven within many of these arguments for a consolidation of all ethnic Russians in one state are revanchist, irredentist, communist, fascist, and racist threads. This Russian nation-state has been offered as a "remedy" to the dismal Russian situation. This remedy has been a common theme emerging from both right-leaning groups and remaining Communist leaders. In his analysis of Russian nationalism, Alan Ingram noted that, "Of the geopolitically revisionist movements to emerge in post-Soviet Russia, the Congress of Russian Communities (Kongress russkikh obshchin-KRO) has received little attention. The KRO was created in 1993 by Moscow-based political entrepreneurs [led by Dmitrii Rogozin], aiming to reunite a putative Russian nation within

a territorially enlarged state."[32] Moreover, Ingram has pointed out, "While even during 1995 the KRO was often termed 'moderate,' it never renounced an irredentist commitment to the reunification of all Russians in an enlarged state."[33]

In this sense, certain political movements in the current Russian case resemble and even imitate the German National Socialists, who made the creation of a greater German state one of their prominent goals. Hitler's stance, the Anschluss, and the Sudetenland crisis all point to the realization of the Nazi agenda to create such a nation-state. Many right-wing factions in Russia are calling for a greater Russian nation-state comprising the Russian Federation, Belarus, Ukraine, and the regions of northern Kazakhstan heavily settled by ethnic Russians. In part, the ideology of the KRO was established in the *Manifesto for the Rebirth of Russia*. Reflecting on the pre-Soviet Russian Empire to describe the aspirations of a new Russian nation, the *Manifesto* declares that the Russian Empire of the past

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[32] Alan Ingram, "'A Nation split into fragments:' The Congress of Russian Communities and Russian nationalist ideology," *Europe - Asia Studies*, vol. 51, no. 4, (June 1999), p. 687.

[33] Ibid., p. 687.

"secured the nation a living space and material resources, corresponding to its historical scale and uniqueness."[34]

7. Revanchism and Irredentism

Closely related to the points of the previous section are the strong feelings in Russia that the power, prestige, and glory of the Russian Empire and Soviet Union must be restored. The denotations of *revanchism* and *irredentism* in a country often focus narrowly on "regaining areas of its original territories that have been lost," but in the context of an analysis of Weimar Germany and Russia today, the terms must be expanded to connote the desires to restore the political, social, economic, and military conditions of bygone eras. In this regard, leaders at the polar opposite ends of the political spectrum stand together.

The term "Red-Browns" has come to mean the groups led by the Genady Zyuganov-Vladimir Zhirinovsky partnership as well as the many conjoined sub and splinter groups. Both the communists (led by Zyuganov) and the nationalists (led in large part by Zhirinovsky) routinely advocate an increase in Russia's prominence. This pragmatic partnership is comparable to the "red-brown" (Communist-Nazi) tactical alliances that formed during the Weimar period. Competing

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[34] *Manifesto for the Rebirth of Russia*, quoted in ibid., p. 690.

factions of the German right-wing establishment joined together to "protect" their state from the communist *Sparticists*. Remarkably, Weimar experienced "Red-Brown" agreements in the shared Communist and Nazi disgust directed at the Social Democrats (SPD), the largest party in the Reichstag from 1912 forward. The SPD was considered by these left- and right-wing extremist parties to be the perpetrator of Weimar Germany's decadence and an entrenched status quo force in German politics.

8. Fascism and Anti-Semitism

The depths to which Nazi Germany implemented its rabid anti-Semitic policies are widely understood. Any comparison with the contemporary Russian situation must begin by noting that the historical roots of Russian anti-Semitism are long and deep. The Russian pogroms of the nineteenth century are among the most devastating actions taken against Jews. Nonetheless, before beginning this section's discussion of fascism and anti-Semitism, a brief discussion of the operational meaning of *fascism* is needed. Four standard definitions follow:

fascism, n. 1. A totalitarian governmental system led by a dictator and emphasizing an aggressive nationalism and often racism. 2. The philosophy, principles, or methods of fascism. 3. A fascist movement, esp. the one established by Mussolini in Italy 1922-43.[35]

fascism, n. 1. A political philosophy, movement, or regime (as that of the Fascisti) that exalts nation and often race above the individual and that stands for a centralized autocratic government headed by a dictatorial leader, severe economic and social regimentation, and forcible suppression of opposition. 2. A tendency toward or actual exercise of a strong autocratic or dictatorial control <early instances of army *fascism* and brutality--J.W. Aldridge>. [36]

fascism, philosophy of government that glorifies the nation-state at the expense of the individual. Major concepts of fascism include opposition to democratic and socialist movements; racist ideologies, such as anti-Semitism; aggressive military policy; and belief in an authoritarian leader who embodies the ideals of the nation. Fascism generally gains support by promising social justice to discontented elements of the working and middle classes, and social order to powerful financial interests....[37]

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[35] *The Random House College Dictionary Revised Edition 1988*, p. 480.

[36] WWWebster.com, p. 1.

[37] Encyclopedia.com, <fascism> p. 1.

> *fascism,* 20th Century form of totalitarian dictatorship that sought to create a viable society by strict regimentation of national and individual lives; conflicting interests would be adjusted by total subordination to the service of the state and unquestioning loyalty to its leader. Fascism emphasized nationalism, but its appeal was international. It flourished between 1919 and 1945 in several countries, mainly Italy, Germany, Spain, and Japan. Fascist regimes also existed for varying lengths of time in Austria, Poland, Bulgaria, Greece, Portugal, Romania, Hungary, Finland, Norway, and Argentina. Even such liberal democracies as France and England had important Fascist movements.[38]

Although the aforementioned definitions differ in wording, many common themes emerge. The common words and phrases include "totalitarian," "dictator," "at the expense of the individual," "nation and often race above the individual," "racism," "nationalism," "opposition to democratic and socialist movements," and "regimentation." Benito Mussolini first used the term fascism in 1919.[39] He coined the phrase from the Roman symbol of strength and power: the *fasces*. A *fasces* is a bundle of sticks fixed to the handle of an ax, and it has been used to represent civic unity within Roman symbology.

In *A History of Fascism, 1914-1945,* Stanley Payne lists "nationalism, the cult of a supreme leader, and the

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[38] "Fascism," *Encarta 97®, Microsoft Corporation ®,* 1993-1996, Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved, p. 1.

[39] Ibid., p. 1.

redemptive power of violence"[40] as elements of fascism. However, Payne later laments the inability to define fascism: "the search for an adequate theory of interpretation of fascism generally ended in failure."[41] Walter Laqueur in *Fascism: Past, Present, Future* devotes his introduction and first two chapters to describing the essence and doctrine of fascism. Laqueur writes, "Fascism resembles pornography in that it is difficult--perhaps impossible--to define in an operational, legally valid way, but those with experience know it when they see it."[42] Laqueur analyzes the following definition put forth by Roger Griffin: "[fascism is a] genus of political ideology whose mythic core in its various permutations is a palingenetic form of popular ultra nationalism."[43]

In commenting on Griffin's definition, Laqueur writes, "Even though it might be difficult to improve on this statement, it still covers movements that are not really fascist and omits others that are."[44] Moreover, Laqueur

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[40] Robert O. Paxton, "The Uses of Fascism," *The New York Review of Books*, 28 November 1996, Available [Online]: http://proquest.umi.com/ pdqweb?TS=…3&Sid= 4&Idx= 1&Deli= 1&RQT=309&Dtp=1 [March 1999], p. 1.

[41] Ibid., p. 1.

[42] Walter Laqueur, *Fascism: Past, Present, Future* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 6.

[43] Ibid., p. 9.

[44] Ibid., p. 9.

considers the terms *left* and *right* useless when trying to define fascism. As Laqueur points out, fascism is not always conservative; both Mussolini and Hitler vigorously waved a revolutionary banner.

Alona Wartofsky defines fascism as follows: "fascism is generally defined as a political movement embracing rigid one-party dictatorship, private economic enterprise under government control, belligerent nationalism, racism, and militarism."[45] Several other works dealing with fascism identify similar themes as the key elements.

At this point, following the above discussion on the complexity of defining fascism, the assertion can be made that post-Soviet Russia is experiencing increasingly vocal fascist movements. As noted earlier, anti-Semitism played a role in the decline of the Weimar Republic and the rise of Hitler. Advocates of the "Weimar Russia" analogy point to Nazi fascism with its rabid anti-Semitism as an example of what Russia's pervasive anti-Semitic views and fascist groups could lead to.

Within the many scenarios proffered about Russia's future, the possibility that Russia will return to an authoritarian regime is often cited. This idea, expressed

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[45] Alona Wartofsky, "Alona Wartofsky on the Resurgence of Fascism," *Civnet Journal*, January-February 1998, Available [Online]: <http://198.67.74.211/ usiaweb/ civnet/ revwart.htm> [3 March 1999], p. 2.

by Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney in 1992, contains the most feared subplot to the "Weimar Russia" analogy. Fueling this fear is the noteworthy rise in prominence of fascist, anti-Semitic, xenophobic, and racist groups. The fear is that one of these groups, a leader from such a group, or a seemingly mainstream democrat enamored of this type of rhetoric will gain mass appeal and seize power--much like the NDSAP rose from the economic ruin and political chaos of the disaffected German state to grab the levers of power.

Commentators like Yanov have warned the West of the would-be Russian Hitlers and Nazis. Contemporary Russian political groups and individuals waiting for their chance to lead a Russian revival include, but are not limited to, the following:

Pamyat. As early as 1985, Pamyat began to gain membership. Led by Dimitri Vasiliev, this group has been generally labeled as the first right-leaning, fascist group in Soviet and post-Soviet Russia. Vasiliev and other Pamyat members have viciously attacked Jews and Masons, whom they collectively blame for Russia's dire situation. Vasiliev has often quoted the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, a notorious forgery utilized by anti-Semites. In the late 1980s, as the Soviet Union was weakening, Pamyat served as a

breeding ground for many of the "parafascist" groups that would later spring up in Russia.[46]

Liberal Democratic Party. Laqueur identifies Vladimir Zhirinovsky's Liberal Democratic Party as the extreme right's most important party. Zhirinovsky was a member of Pamyat. He is a former military officer with a biography that eerily mirrors that of Hitler. He thrust himself on the scene when six million Russians voted for him in the 1991 presidential elections. In the Duma elections in December 1993, more Russians voted for him and his party than for any other party.[47]

As is common among many of these fascist-oriented groups and individuals, Zhirinovsky greatly dislikes Jews and the West. He has said, "Our greatest problems are with the Americans and the Zionists."[48] Zhirinovsky is clearly the best known leader of this new wave of fascist reactionaries. "Zhirinovsky arouses his followers' sense of wounded national pride in light of the last several years of grievous economic decline."[49] Zhirinovsky presents the West

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[46] Laqueur, p. 181.

[47] Ibid., p. 185.

[48] Zhirinovsky quoted in Laqueur, p. 179.

[49] Alain Besancon, "Forgotten Communism," *Commentary*, vol. 105, no. 1, (January 1998), p. 1.

with many concerns because of his demonstrated ability to garner support and votes from the masses.

Russian National Unity Group (RNE). A former army karate instructor, Aleksandr Barkashov, leads this group. When asked about his fascist leanings, Barkashov responded, "I am not a fascist; I am a Nazi."[50] RNE members participate in military training, use the swastika as their symbol, and use the "Heil Hitler" salute as their common greeting. The RNE advocates a two-class system of citizenship--Russian and non-Russian. The latter would have no rights in Barkashov's Russia. Barkashov believes that Russia's decline has resulted from a calculated genocide campaign perpetrated by Jews, Masons, and Westerners. The RNE has been active in Belarus as well as Russia. Barkashov threatened "revenge" after Moscow mayor Yury Luzhkov barred the RNE from holding its party congress in his city. Barkashov has been charged with "threat of violent attack of officials,"[51] which can carry a five year prison sentence.

National-Social Union (NSS). The NSS is led by Viktor Yakushev. His group emphasizes "Aryan" values and is fighting to prevent a global "Zionist" hegemony. The NSS

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[50] Barkashov quoted in Laqueur, p. 189.

[51] *Reuters*, "Russian Ultra-Nationalist Faces Legal Action," Moscow, 8 February 1999, p. 1.

despises the typical collection of fascist foes, including Jews, Masons, homosexuals, and all "inferior races."[52]

National Republican Party. Nikolai Lysenko leads this group. The National Republican Party is based in Saint Petersburg and claims to have nearly ten thousand members. Lysenko has attempted to portray his party as moderate, and this has enabled him to get elected to the Duma. This party has fostered strong ties with the Russian Orthodox Church and with people calling for a restoration of the monarchy. Despite its attempts to project an image of moderation, the National Republican Party still maintains an armed branch and still uses an SS-like emblem.[53]

Werewolves. The Werewolves are one of nearly twenty illegal groups. Andrei Anokhin, like many other leaders of these groups, was a member of Pamyat. The Werewolves have committed crimes in Russia, including murder. Moreover, members of this group fought along side the Croats in the early phases of the Yugoslav wars, apparently in recognition of Croatia's historical legacy of fascism. The Werewolves are admitted Nazis.[54]

In addition to the many groups described above, several regional groups have sprung up across Russia's vast

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[52] Laqueur, p. 190-1.

[53] Ibid., p. 191.

[54] Ibid., p. 191.

territory. In an attempt to stem the tide of this fascist wave, the Russian government has tried many individuals under existing libel, incitement, threat, and terrorist laws. However, to date, the government, for a myriad of reasons, not least of which is an ineffective legal system, has not been able to prosecute individuals for certain crimes that would be punishable in most other industrialized countries, such as Germany, France, and the United States.

Many of these groups are at odds with each other, but nonetheless share many concepts and beliefs. A major common theme is the hatred of outsiders, or xenophobia. Moreover, these groups all consistently blame "others" for the misfortunes of Russia. Anti-Semitism is another prevailing common theme of nearly every one of these groups.

III. CONCLUSIONS, COMMENTARY, AND OPINIONS

The previous chapters summarized the organization and purpose of this thesis, introduced the "Weimar Russia" analogy, and described elements of "Weimar Russia" that commentators have cited as evidence supporting the analogy's cogency and relevance. This final chapter discusses four conclusions regarding the essence of the "Weimar Russia" analogy.

First, "Weimar Russia" is more a rhetorical abstraction than an existential reality. In this sense, "Weimar Russia" has been conceived apart from any concrete realities. At the risk of stating the obvious, it should be noted that history never repeats itself exactly. Therefore, to say, with any degree of certainty, that post-Soviet Russia will go the way of inter-war Germany is, at best, pure conjecture, and at worst, futile.

Second, the proliferative nature of the "Weimar Russia" analogy--i.e., its popularity with diverse observers--may be far more significant than its intellectual defensibility as a historical comparison. As described earlier, a remarkably diverse group of elite observers has used the "Weimar Russia" analogy. The comparison has been used in the following ways: as the basis for organizing academic conferences, as the subject of an entire book, as a theme in

the persuasive speeches of high-level American and Russian government officials, as a source of "one-liners" in general economics articles, and as an element in the inflammatory rhetoric of Russian right-wing groups.

With the widely publicized use of the comparison, its place in post-Soviet studies is firmly ensconced. "Weimar Russia" has taken on a life of its own. For instance, in several periodical articles describing Russia's economic plight, "Weimar Russia" comparisons are made as if they reflected an eminently understood and agreed upon reality. One example is the opening sentence of an article by Steve Forbes: "The Kremlin's kleptomaniacal elite have done to Russia what Berlin's well-meaning but incompetent politicians and central bankers did to Germany after WWI; undermined and discredited democracy and free-enterprise."[55] Forbes goes on to describe a "Weimar Germany-style currency collapse" and expresses hope that Russia will avoid a "lurch into extreme authoritarian nationalism."[56]

Third, "Weimar Russia" represents an "academic vessel" in which prominent people continue to study post-Soviet Russia. In April 1994, the Institute of International Studies at the University of California, Berkeley presented

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[55] Steve Forbes, "Russia," *Forbes*, vol. 162, no. 6, (September 21, 1998), p. 31.

[56] Ibid., p. 31.

a forum titled, "Weimar and Russia: Is there an Analogy?" The speakers at this forum included Gerald Feldman, Harold James, Andrei Melville, and George Breslauer--all respected figures within their fields.

According to Feldman, a historian, "One of the most dangerous things we can do is to attempt one-to-one analogies between Russia and Weimar on the basis of allegedly similar happenings and developments."[57] Feldman added, however, that "much can be learned from Weimar, which at a minimum is useful for heuristic purposes."[58]

At the same conference, Harold James, a professor of history at Princeton University, reflected on Weimar Germany and said, "Russians are facing exactly the same kind of problem, and some are offering the same kind of analysis, that the Soviet Union disintegrated not because of any external failures, but because of internal failure."[59] James found evidence to support some of the popular elements of "Weimar Russia," including the "stab-in-the-back" logic and economic comparisons.

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[57] Gerald Feldman, p. 3.

[58] Ibid., p. 3.

[59] Harold James, "Weimar and Russia: Is there an Analogy," Institute of International Studies, University Of California: *Currents*, Fall 1994: "Weimar and Russia" forum, Available [Online]: <http://globetrotter.berkeley.edu/ pubs/ james.html> [3 March 1999], p. 1.

Melville and Breslauer, chairs of their respective universities' political science departments (at Moscow State University and at the University of California, Berkeley) expressed doubts as to the validity of such an analogy. Nevertheless, both supported the assertion that the topic requires further study. Melville articulated a common idea regarding the utility of the analogy and the ongoing studies: "[A]s a political scientist, I would argue that irrespective of whether there is an analogy or whether there is no analogy, a real problem exists behind what we call the Weimar-Russia analogy."[60] He described the "real problem" as Russia's ongoing struggles to democratize.

Perhaps the best study of "Weimar Russia" to date is the article, "The Weimar/Russia Comparison," completed for *Post-Soviet Affairs* in 1997 by two professors of political science, Stephen E. Hanson and Jeffrey S. Kopstein. Hanson and Kopstein begin their article by commenting on works that superficially investigate the comparison. One by one, the works are briefly discussed to illuminate shortcomings and to build the case that a significant lacuna exists in the field.

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[60] Andrei Melville, "Weimar and Russia: Is there an Analogy," Institute of International Studies, University Of California: *Currents*, Fall 1994: "Weimar and Russia" forum, Available [Online]: <http://globetrotter.berkeley.edu/ pubs/ melville.html> [3 March 1999], p. 1.

Hanson and Kopstein put forward their objective as follows: "In this essay we attempt to develop the analogy between Weimar Germany and post-Soviet Russia more rigorously and thus fill this gap in the literature."[61] Weimar Germany and post-Soviet Russia are then analyzed with reference to three factors: the incomplete revolution; the international dimension; and the party system and presidentialism. Following discussions of both eras and countries within this framework, they conclude that "Russia is unlikely to repeat the experience of the Weimar Republic, despite the many evident similarities in their structural positions."[62] They base this conclusion upon the differences in Weimar Germany's party system and Russia's emerging parties.

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[61] Stephen E. Hanson and Jeffrey S. Kopstein, "The Weimar/Russia Comparison," *Post-Soviet Affairs*, vol. 13, no. 3 (July-September 1997), p. 254.

[62] Ibid., p. 277.

> Although the parallels between Weimar's history from 1918 to 1924 and the first half-decade of post-Soviet Russian democracy are certainly disturbing, the further development of German politics in the years leading up to the rise of Hitler can be shown to have been decisively influenced--in an anti-democratic direction--by its remarkably well-developed and representative system of programmatic parties. By contrast, contemporary Russian parties, based primarily upon the instrumental interests of Moscow elites possessing few ties to Russian society at large, appear far too ineffective and amorphous to serve as a potential political base for anti-liberal statism.[63]

Lastly, the foreboding conclusion to the logical syllogism that is "Weimar Russia," i.e., a catastrophe in the magnitude of the Second World War will result if the comparison travels the same path as Weimar Germany, commands today's world leaders to never ignore Russia. It seems that many commentators on Russia perpetuate the comparison as a means toward this end.

Perhaps in an attempt to ensure the continued flow of International Monetary Fund loans, many Russians keep the gloom of "Weimar Russia" on the minds of Western decision-makers. Russian anti-NATO comments often lament the "isolation" and "humiliation" of a once-great power. Speaking on the fifty-seventh anniversary of the German attack on the Soviet Union, Yeltsin noted that Russia "saved

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[63] Ibid., pp. 277-8.

the world from Nazism half a century ago."[64] Rhetorically, Yeltsin cautioned, "Will Russians allow the most fearful ideology ever known to mankind to take root on our soil?"[65] These comments are just two examples of Russian government statements warning the West not to ignore Russia.

In this sense, the comparison can persuasively promote a reassessment of Western priorities. "Weimar Russia" joins "nuclear arsenal," "ecological disaster," "economic turmoil," and "humanitarian tragedy" as examples of political "rhetorical alarms" designed to elicit a response from the world's great powers. Only time will tell whether the deterministic "Weimar Russia" analogy has, or had, any validity. Nevertheless, "Weimar Russia," as an impetus to study Russia and to keep Russia foremost in the minds of Western leaders, has evolved into an analogy with genuine utility.

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[64] Boris Yeltsin quoted in Paul Goble, "A New National Socialist Threat," *The Truth Tree's General Message Board: Fascism a threat in Russia?* Available [Online]: <http://www.truthtree.com/ wwwboard/ messages/ 230.shtml> [3 March 1999], p. 2.

[65] Boris Yeltsin quoted in ibid., p. 2.

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