



## THE PREMATURE PARTNERSHIP

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Excerpts from an article in *FOREIGN AFFAIRS*, March/April 1994, by the former National Security Adviser to President Carter, Counsellor at the Centre for Strategic and International Studies, and Professor of American Foreign Policy at the School for Advanced International Studies, John Hopkins University.

Unfortunately, considerable evidence suggests that the near-term prospects for a stable Russian democracy are not very promising. The growing political influence of the Russian army, especially in Russia's foreign policy, is not reassuring. President Yeltsin's inclination toward authoritarianism has transformed the new constitution for a democratic Russia into a document that can be easily used to legitimize arbitrary personal rule. Russian political culture is still far from accepting the principle of compromise as the basis for political discourse. Meanwhile the continuing economic crisis has been alienating the masses from both the democratic process and the free market. That the democratic parties do not control the newly elected Duma is also worrisome.

Making matters worse is the centrality in Russian politics of an old issue, one that evokes the greatest passion from the majority of politicians as well as citizens, namely, "What is Russia?" Is Russia primarily a nation state or is it a multinational empire? Polling data indicate that the dissolution of the Soviet Union is viewed by roughly two-thirds of the Russian people, and even by the majority of democratic politicians, as a tragic mistake, something that must somehow be undone. Yet any effort to recreate some form of empire, repressing the awakened national aspirations of the non-Russians, would surely collide head-on with the effort to consolidate a democracy within Russia. The bottom line here is a simple but compelling axiom: Russia can be either an empire or a democracy, but it cannot be both.

The non-Russians are no longer politically passive nor nationally unaware. Their nationalism is a reality that expresses itself through the strong desire for independent statehood. Efforts to suppress it would unavoidably affect the fabric and substance of any emerging Russian democracy. Moreover, efforts to

recreate and maintain the empire by coercion and/or economic subsidy would condemn Russia not only to dictatorship but to poverty.

### **INSURANCE IS NEEDED AGAINST THE POSSIBILITY THAT RUSSIA WILL NOT STABILIZE AS A DEMOCRACY.**

Regrettably, the imperial impulse remains strong and even appears to be strengthening. This is not only a matter of political rhetoric. Particularly troubling is the growing assertiveness of the Russian military in the effort to retain or regain control over the old Soviet empire. Initially, these efforts may have been the spontaneous acts of rogue military commanders in the field. However, military self-assertion in such places as Moldova, Crimea, Ossetia, Abkhazia, Georgia and Tajikistan, as well as military opposition to any territorial concessions in the Kuriles and to the reduction of Russian forces in the Kaliningrad region and to a prompt withdrawal from all the Baltic republics, perpetuates imperial enclaves on the outer edges of the former empire. (A line drawn on the map between these points would virtually trace the outer boundaries of the former U.S.S.R.)

These efforts were formalized in late 1993, when the Russian military command asserted its de facto right to intervene in the former Soviet republics if developments there were deemed to violate Russian interests or threaten regional stability. These sentiments were subsequently echoed by Russian political leaders. Moreover, they have been matched by deeds. In 1993, Russian military behaviour toward the new states of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) became increasingly unilateral, while the Moscow government became more assertive in the use of economic leverage.

Russian policy toward its CIS neighbours has had two central prongs: it has focused on progressively stripping the

newly independent states of economic autonomy and forestalling the emergence of separate armed forces. The first has been designed to drive home the lesson that economic recovery is only possible through closer CIS integration, while the second has sought to limit national armies to essentially symbolic and nominal forces, to be increasingly integrated under Moscow's command. So far, only Ukraine has made serious efforts to shape its own military.

In addition, the last two years have seen a concerted effort by Moscow to rebuild some of the institutional links that used to bind the old Soviet Union together. Much energy has been invested in promoting a host of new agreements and ties, including the CIS charter, a collective security treaty (which in several cases also gives Russia control over the external frontiers of the former Soviet Union), a collective peacekeeping agreement (used to justify intervention in Tajikistan), a new ruble zone (meant to give the Russian central bank the decisive role in monetary matters), and a formal economic union (transferring key economic decision-making to Moscow), to a common CIS parliamentary institution.

The use of military and economic means to obtain subordination to Moscow has been strikingly evident in the recent trials of Belarus and Georgia. In Belarus, Russian economic subsidies were translated into political subordination. In Georgia, military intervention gave Moscow the pretext for political mediation. In the course of it, Georgia learned - contrary to what Clinton said in Moscow - that Russia as umpire is not very different from Russia as empire.

Most ominous, given Ukraine's size and geostrategic importance, has been the intensification of Moscow's economic and military pressure on Kyiv, in keeping with the widespread feeling in Moscow that Ukrainian independence is an abnormality as well as a threat to Russia's standing as a global power. (The inclination of some leading Russian politicians to speak openly of Ukraine as a "transitional entity" or "a Russian sphere of influence" is symptomatic.) The