

Russia, the Caucasus, and Chechenya¹

Nicholas Dima

Adjunct Professor, James Madison University

One of the most visible characteristics of the Russian people at the present time appears to be a fear of the unknown caused by the dismantling of the Soviet system. Another one, most evident at the center in Moscow and at the periphery of Russia, is the fear of losing the territory Moscow once controlled.

Having reached the Danube, the Caucasus Mountains, Central Asia, and other regions long populated before they began to expand, the Russians cannot reconcile themselves to the idea of withdrawing from these regions, or of staying in them as a minority. Moscow is reluctant to relinquish its conquests.

Consequently, it seems that Moscow and the Russians living outside their Federation or in non-Russian regions of Russia will do anything to keep those republics and regions tied to Moscow. They will continue to enhance local Russian privileges and to promote Moscow's geopolitical interests by dividing and inciting various ethnic groups against each other. If necessary, Moscow will send its own troops, especially if Russia itself is challenged.

Whereas it cannot be denied that ethnic animosities have always been present and were more acute in certain places, the territorial organization advanced under Stalin aimed from the beginning to give the Russians and the communists the upper hand and to make an ethnic break with Moscow extremely difficult.² However, the policies of *glasnost* and *perestroika* have been followed by a desire for independence, with the result that various Soviet republics and regions have challenged the *status quo*. This trend is now visible from Moldova to Tajikistan and in particular in the Caucasus, where several months ago the Chechen war broke out and shocked the world.

The Caucasian Scenario

When the Soviet Union was established, the entire Caucasian region was organized into a single republic. Later, it was split

between Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan, while the northern slopes of the mountains, where Chechenya is located, was incorporated into Russia. Given the physical fragmentation of the area and the slow process of ethnic consolidation, the boundaries between various nationalities were not clear cut, but Moscow did everything to perpetuate the feud and to keep everybody under control. The recent troubles in Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia, North and South Ossetia, Kabardino-Balkar, Daghestan, and most of all Chechenya, reflect a struggle for local autonomy or independence on the one hand, and Moscow's maneuverings to hold the vast Soviet empire together on the other hand.

Nagorno-Karabakh, for example, was overwhelmingly populated by ethnic Armenians in the 1920s, but it was granted to Azerbaijan. As long as the U.S.S.R. was a strongly centralized country and no one was really independent, it made little difference that the region did not belong to Armenia. But once the two republics opted for independence, the Armenians launched a policy aimed at annexing Nagorno-Karabakh. Soon, war between the two republics erupted. The Russian military forces in the area played an ambiguous role to make sure that neither side prevailed. Most likely, Moscow wanted to legitimize its presence in both republics by showing that without it everyone would be at each other's throat. And as long as the two countries continue to fight, Moscow can rest assured that for the time being neither will truly leave the new Community of Independent States.

The case of Georgia is more complex, but it is also more illustrative. Georgia has on its territory two autonomous regions – Abkhazia, strategically located by the Black Sea, and South Ossetia, located on the southern slopes of the Caucasian Mountains near North Ossetia. The latter is part of the Russian Federation and sits on the northern slopes of the Caucasian Mountains. When Georgia was a reliable member of the Soviet Union, it enjoyed internal stability and the two minorities were quiet and rather well integrated. When Tbilisi proclaimed its independence in April 1991, it began to encounter problems. To bring it back to the Russian fold, Moscow first helped replace Zviad Gamsakhurdia, the freely elected president of Georgia, with the former Soviet Foreign Minister, Eduard Shevardnadze. But when Shevardnadze would not change the course of independence, certain circles began to stir up ethnic troubles in

both Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

Abkhazia is an interesting case because only 17 percent of its half a million or so inhabitants are ethnic Abkhazians and Moslems, while 45 percent are Georgians and Christians. Yet, this did not prevent the Abkhazians in August 1992 from declaring their own independence, asking to be accepted into the Russian Federation, and waging war on the local Georgian authorities. Despite their numerical superiority, the Georgians could not win. Unexpectedly, the Abkhazians produced Russian-made tanks, armored cars, heavy and automatic weapons, and Russian volunteers. This prompted Shevardnadze to accuse Russia of aiding the rebels and of interfering in Georgian affairs. Georgia even appealed to the North Atlantic Organization for help and requested a special meeting of the United Nations Security Council.³

Many Georgians consider the Russian Federation as the main heir of both the Soviet Union and tsarist Russia, and they believe that Moscow's ultimate aim is to restore the former empire. Accordingly, they view the possible dismemberment of Georgia as the first step toward this end.⁴

Another case in point which strengthens the Georgian fear is South Ossetia. Ossetians are of Iranian origin and are rather pro-Russian. The land where most of them reside is divided between South Ossetia, part of Georgia, and North Ossetia, part of the Russian Federation. When Georgia began to take its independence from Moscow seriously, South Ossetia demanded to secede, to unite with North Ossetia, and to be admitted to the Russian Federation.

This time the quagmire took a new turn. The Ingush people, who were deported by Stalin from North Ossetia in 1944, began to reclaim their historic land. Backed by Moscow, the Ossetians asserted that the land belonged in fact to the Russian Cossacks. Fighting erupted, and to calm the situation Moscow imposed a state of emergency in November 1992 and sent in some ten thousand Russian soldiers. Nevertheless, the Ingush and their close relatives, the Chechens, have also declared their own independence, and the Chechens took their struggle for independence very seriously. All of these developments have complicated enormously the situation at an historic moment when Russia appears unable to solve its own problems.⁵

So far, Moscow has refused to recognize any independent states

on its territory and has put together a new federal treaty, but it has encountered a very limited success. As a matter of fact, even some vast Russian provinces, particularly those autonomous ethnic regions located far from Moscow and which control rich resources, are demanding some sort of sovereignty and even dare to mention independence. The collapse of the old social, political, and economic system has brought about more local freedom on the one hand, and more demand for order and unity under a central control on the other. Leading Russian politicians are increasingly appealing to patriotism and are demanding the territorial restoration of the country. At the same time, many leaders insist that Moscow actively defend its fellow countrymen wherever they live in the former U.S.S.R.⁶

Russia in Transition

According to a top U.S. official, Russia seems to be in a difficult process of decolonization, and the humiliated Russian military is confused and angry. In 1992, for example, the previous Russian Parliament gave in to military and nationalist demands and voted to annul the 1954 transfer of Crimea to Ukraine and to support the secessionist drive of the Trans-Dnestr region of Moldova.⁷ General Alexandr Lebed, the commander of the 14th Russian Army headquartered in Tiraspol, even dismissed Moldova's national revival as Romanian fascism, and he called directly for "the revival of the Russian great-power state."⁸

The transition to democracy in the Eastern bloc and the risk of returning to authoritarian regimes have posed delicate problems for the West. Ever since *perestroika* was launched, the United States and other Western countries have taken a conciliatory attitude toward Moscow. Following the dismemberment of the Soviet Union and the declarations of independence of various republics, Washington also took a cautious but realistic position. The American Government made it clear on many occasions that it expected a transition to democracy and free markets in the new republics, as well as full respect for human rights and protection for minorities.

The most difficult to cope with has been Russia, which has tried to reconcile two incompatible trends: building democracy and preserving its geopolitical interests. The ongoing conflict in Yugoslavia, for example, reveals Moscow's old geopolitical goals in

southeast Europe. Referring to Serbia, Russia made it clear that any action in the Black Sea and Danube basin requires prior agreement from Moscow because these are areas of "traditional Russian interests."⁹ Since Russia is located hundreds of miles away from the Danube, some Russian circles have bet on the self-declared Dnestr Republic as its best proxy in the Balkans. This republic is also used as a threat against Moldova (formerly Romanian Bessarabia) in case it decides to reunite with Romania.¹⁰

Similarly, Abkhazia appeared for a while to be the best Russian surrogate against Georgia. In this case, Russia's Defense Minister Pavel Grachev visited the local Russian military facilities, stressed the region's strategic importance for Moscow, met Abkhazian leaders, but refused to meet with Georgia's leaders.¹¹

With regard to Central Asia, Russia's brutal attitude could not have been any plainer. When Tajikistan split and the local pro-Moscow communists were confronted with defeat, the Russians promptly stepped in. Their intervention left no doubts about their determination to keep the region. *The Washington Post* carried a long article titled "Tajik Communists Reclaim Power at Price of at Least 20,000 Dead," and the caption of a large, frightening picture reads: "A Russian mercenary for Tajikistan's National Guard killed a wounded rebel who was trying to cross over into Afghanistan."¹²

On February 23, 1993, the anniversary of the Soviet Armed Forces, thousands of Russian militants led by angry generals demonstrated in Moscow against current Russian policies and demanded the restoration of the "socialist homeland." Such events led two reputed American journalists, Rowland Evans and Robert Novak, to conclude that Moscow was introducing a "Monroe Doctrine" of its own, making the restoration of greater Russia its primary goal.¹³ This is probably what some Russians call the new "sphere of Russian responsibility." On April 28, 1993, Yeltsin and the Russian Parliament signed a special document on national security doctrine which proclaims Russia's right to intervene militarily not only anywhere at the periphery of Russia, but in any of the 15 former Soviet republics as well, allegedly to defend the territorial integrity of Russia.¹⁴

For certain circles in Moscow the new world order must keep the old one in place. It may be just wishful thinking, but it also reflects the current political struggle in Moscow and a deep split

among Russians. Should they give up the empire, embrace democracy, and become a normal country? Or should they try to preserve their 19th century conquests? This struggle and dilemma could last for decades unless Moscow changes its attitude quickly and radically. The Chechen war is only the most telling case.

The War in Chechenya

It could be said that the Russo-Chechen war started in the early 19th century and somehow never fully ended. At the core of the conflict is simply the rejection of a huge empire at one of its farthest corners of expansion by a small people of a different culture.

Russia annexed the Caucasus at the beginning of the 19th century, but it took decades to subdue the mountainous region inhabited by the fierce Chechen people. This is, for example, how Count Leo Tolstoy described the Russian takeover of Grozny in the summer of 1851: "... civilians of all ages brutally killed, houses destroyed, farmland ruined. As the Chechens laid out the bodies of their children in the local mosque, hatred was an inadequate word for what they felt toward the Russians. To merit hatred, one must be a human being, and in Chechen eyes, the cruelty of the attackers made them instead like 'rats, poisonous spiders or wolves,' so that 'the desire to exterminate them was as natural an instinct as that of self-preservation.'"¹⁵

The main centers of Chechenya succumbed in 1859, but the Russians did not really control the interior of the country for many more years. After the Bolshevik Revolution the Chechens tried to break away from Moscow again, and during World War II almost all of them were deported to Kazakhstan. They were allowed to return home only in the late 1950s, and many of them were born away from their original country. One of them was General Dzhokhar Dudaev, who was elected chairman of the Chechen National Congress in November 1990 and who on September 6, 1991, led Chechenya to declare independence.¹⁶

Chechenya is a small region on the northern slopes of the Caucasian Mountains and has some 1.2 million people. It is bordered by Georgia to the South, Russia to the North, North Ossetia to the Southwest, and Dagestan to the East. Dagestan is another autonomous republic within the Russian Federation and is also populated by a group of mostly Moslem peoples not necessarily

friendly toward Russia. Most of Chechenya's inhabitants are Chechens, but a large percentage of them are Russians. From an economic point of view, the region is important because, among other things, it has some 25 percent of Russia's oil refining capacity. It appears, however, that for Moscow the greatest importance of Chechenya is geopolitical. This is enhanced by some of Dudaev's statements that his end goal is to create a North Caucasian Moslem republic.

If the economic importance of the Chechenya had seemed paramount, the Russian troops would have not destroyed it so thoroughly. And if Moscow had really cared for the ethnic Russians living there, it would have shown a more discriminate attitude when it stormed Grozny.

Russia may give up the former non-Russian Soviet republics. But Moscow is afraid that if it loses one corner of the territory that is administratively under the Russian Federation, it may lose many others as well. The historic pendulum that took the Russians from the Duchy of Moscow to the Danube, Caucasus, and Central Asia may one day be reversed. It is probably this gut-level fear that made the Russians commit atrocities against the Chechens in 1995 similar to those described by Tolstoy in 1851.

As in the case of Georgia and Moldova, Moscow first resorted to proxies to undo Dudaev's path of independence. The Russians helped an opposition group challenge what they labeled the illegal government in Grozny, but nothing could destroy the Chechens' determination to fight for freedom to the bitter end.¹⁷ This made Yeltsin and his advisers resort in January 1995 to one of the most savage recent wars. Eventually, the Chechen fighters abandoned Grozny for the mountains, but they have not given up. They only lost a round while the West watched almost in complicity.¹⁸ And what did Moscow accomplish by applying a drastic military cure to an elusive political problem?

Further Ethnic Complications

Military solutions could be applied quite swiftly by superpowers. An air strike, for example, could reach a given target in a matter of minutes. A full-scale land intervention could be accomplished in a few weeks. Yet, they cannot substitute political settlements. Moreover, ethnic processes which last hundreds of years often defy

quick political solutions.

The Caucasus area is a maze of ethnic groups, sub-nations, and well-developed nationalities hard to match almost anywhere else in the world. Some of these populations are only a few hundred individuals strong, but others number in the millions. A few of them have rich traditions and all the attributes of nationhood while others will never make it on their own.

Throughout history, the Russians have arrested the natural evolution and maturation of larger nationalities, and occasionally have split them in different groups. At the same time, the Russians have strengthened artificially small and inviable ethnic groups, while often pitting nation against nation.

The Chechens are one of the largest peoples of North Caucasus. According to the 1989 Census, they numbered about one million, while the Ingush numbered an additional 240 thousand. Before Chechnya declared its separate independence, the two groups had a common autonomous republic with a land area of 19.3 thousands of square kilometers. By comparison, neighboring Dagestan has 50 thousand Sq. Km., but its dominant ethnic group, the Avars, are only 600 thousand and make up a mere third of their republic's population. The Kabardines and the Balkars are 391 and 85 thousand strong respectively, and share a common republic west of Chechnya and North Ossetia.

Except for the Ossetians, the native North Caucasian peoples hold to the Moslem faith and share a deep resentment for the Russians and for their way of life. In the vision of the Chechen leader Dzhokar Dudaev they should join together and make their own independent federation stretching from the Black Sea to the Caspian Sea.¹⁹

The Ossetians are of the Christian Orthodox faith and as a rule they side with the Russians. They number about 600 thousands in North Ossetia, and 90 thousands in South Ossetia. When Georgia declared its independence of Moscow, South Ossetia, supported by Russia and North Ossetia, revolted against the Georgian authorities. That made the Ingush people, who claim that the Ossetians took over their ancestral land, rise against them. The Chechen leaders, however, preferred to court the Ossetes, in order to prevent them from joining Russia. That, in turn, made the Georgian president welcome the Russian military intervention in Chechnya.²⁰ The

Caucasian maze is thus like a house of dominoes: one moves a piece and everything tumbles.

Russia succeeded so far in bringing a modicum of peace to the region, but this has not been done through any consensus. As often in Russian history, it has been achieved by force and sheer destruction. From an economic point of view, the entire Caucasian area has been crippled for decades to come. While the Russian troops invaded Chechenya, most of its Moslem neighbors waited in a state of shock. If they learned anything, it was probably that they could not confront Russia alone; yet, they also learned from Dudaev that they cannot beg independence from Russia, they must fight for it.

If the Chechens had anything in common with the Russians, it was ruined by this invasion. The Russian military campaign sowed a new wave of hatred which will endure for another hundred years. This is hardly a good beginning for a lasting peace in a region where family revenge and vendettas, are as old as people can remember.

Conclusion

The world at the turn of this century is a world of contradictions: ethnic fragmentation at a micro scale, and regional integration and global interdependence at a macro scale. Contemporary nation-states may lose some of their attributes for the sake of future harmony, but nations, cultures, languages, religions, are not likely to vanish or to merge into a homogeneous global family. To foster a more stable world, the advocates of the new world order may try to by-pass small nations, but the Chechen war has just proved how stubborn nationalism can be. Until people acquire a global conscience, if ever, accommodation will have to be made in many regions of the world.

Is there a solution to the ethnic and geopolitical conflicts in Russia or anywhere else in the former Soviet Union? The answer is yes. Find political solutions to territorial disputes! Any other choice can be disastrous. A persistent attempt in Moscow to return to the old empire could ruin Russia's economy and throw it into chaos. A replay of the 1917-1920 events could follow with dire consequences. A democratic Russia, on the other hand, will have to compromise and renounce any far-away geopolitical ambitions. Instead of trying to preserve the former Soviet land, Moscow should concentrate on its

own non-Russian periphery and attract it into a true community of economic interests. Later, future generations of Russians will have to adjust to the new realities, while the non-Russians will have to decide whether to stay within a Russian federation, or to establish their own small "Chechen" states.

One of the most visible characteristics of the Russian people at the present time appears to be a fear of the unknown caused by the dismantling of the Soviet system. Another one, most evident at the center in Moscow and at the periphery of Russia, is the fear of losing the territory Moscow once controlled.

Having reaching the Danube, the Caucasian Mountains, Central Asia, and other regions long populated before they began to expand, the Russians cannot reconcile themselves to the idea of withdrawing or to staying and living as a minority, while Moscow is reluctant of relinquishing its conquests.

Consequently, it seems that Moscow and the Russians living outside their Federation or in non-Russian regions will do anything to keep those republics and regions tied to Moscow. They will continue to enhance local Russian privileges and to promote Moscow's geopolitical interests by dividing and inciting various ethnic groups against each other. And if necessary, Moscow will send its own troops, especially if Russia itself is challenged.

Whereas it cannot be denied that ethnic animosities have always been present and were more acute in certain places, the territorial organization advanced under Stalin aimed from the beginning to give the Russians and the communists the upper hand and to make an ethnic break with Moscow extremely difficult. However, the new policies of *glasnost* and *perestroika* and the ensuing desire for independence of various Soviet republics and regions have challenged the *status quo*. This trend is now visible from Moldova to Tajikistan and in particular in the Caucasus, where recently the Chechen war broke out and shocked the entire world.

Endnotes

- 1) Throughout this article, Chechenya is spelled in a manner which corresponds more closely to the pronunciation favored by the Chechens, rather than the spelling Chechnya, used by the Russians.

The Journal of Social, Political and Economic Studies

- 2) For a general background to the Soviet-controlled nationalities see: Walter Kolarz, *Russia and her Colonies* (New York: Praeger), 1953; Paul E. Lydolph, *Geography of the USSR* (New York: John Wiley and Sons Inc.) 1970; and Robert A. Lewis, Richard H. Rowland and Ralph S. Clem, *Nationality and Population Change in Russia and the USSR* (New York: Praeger), 1976.
- 3) See among others "Abkhazian Rebels Call Georgians Invaders," *Washington Post*, 7 November 1992.
- 4) Joan Beecher, "Russia and Northern Caucasus," and "Russia/Georgia," *Voice of America Radio Report*, 7 October 1992, and 5 November 1992.
- 5) "An Ethnic Nightmare in the Caucasus," *Newsweek*, 7 December 1992.
- 6) "Marching to the Old Tunes," *Washington Times*, 28 July 1992; "Russians Cope with Area of Crisis," *Christian Science Monitor*, 22 June 1992.
- 7) "Russia versus the Republics," *U.S. News & World Report*, 22 June 1992.
- 8) "Lebed Addresses Cossack Assembly," *Radio Free Europe Daily Report*, 18 August 1992.
- 9) "Russia Asserts Interests on the Lower Danube," *Radio Free Europe Daily Report*, 23 February 1993; "Serbia and Moscow Connection," *Washington Post*, 24 February 1993.
- 10) Nicholas Dima, *From Moldavia to Moldova: The Soviet-Romanian Territorial Dispute* (New York: Columbia University Press), 1991.
- 11) "Grachev in Georgia," *Radio Free Europe Daily Report*, 1 March 1993.
- 12) "Tajik Communists Reclaim Power ...," *Washington Post*, 5 February 1993.
- 13) "Kremlin Coup Figures Join Anti-Yeltsin Rally," *Washington Post*, 24 February 1993; "Russia's Monroe Doctrine," *Washington Post*, 26 February 1993.
- 14) Ed Warner, "Conflict in the Caucasus," *Voice of America Radio Report*, quoting Paul Goble, formerly of the State Department who cited a recent Russian source (p. 11, May 7, 1993).
- 15) *Washington Post*, 15 January, 1995.
- 16) Peter Collins, "Chechenya/ Dudaev," *Voice of America Radio Report*, 19 January, 1995.
- 17) "Chechen opposition attack on Grozny fails," *Radio Free Europe Daily Report*, 28 November 1994.
- 18) Zbigniew Brzezinski, "Moscow's Accomplice," *Washington Post*, 8 January 1995.
- 19) *Soyuz*, No. 32, August 1990.
- 20) "Shevardnadze Supports Russian Action in Chechnya," *Radio Free Europe/ Radio Liberty Daily Report*, 19 December 1994.

Intelligence and National Achievement

Editor
Raymond B. Cattell, Ph.D., D.Sc.

CONTENTS INCLUDE

INTRODUCTION: THE CONTEMPORARY AWAKENING
Raymond B. Cattell

THE ROLE OF PSYCHOLOGICAL TESTING
Raymond B. Cattell

TEST SCORES AS MEASURES OF HUMAN CAPITAL
Barbara Lerner

**FERTILITY DIFFERENTIALS AND THE STATUS OF NATIONS:
A SPECULATIVE ESSAY ON JAPAN AND THE WEST**
Daniel R. Vining, Jr.

POPULATION INTELLIGENCE AND NATIONAL SYNTALITY
Raymond B. Cattell and Jerry M. Brennan

**APPENDIX: SOME CHANGES IN SOCIAL LIFE IN A COMMUNITY
WITH A FALLING INTELLIGENCE QUOTIENT**
Raymond B. Cattell

ISBN 0-941694-14-3 \$30.00 Hardback
MASTERCARD AND VISA ACCEPTED
Tel: (202) 371-2700 Fax: (202) 371-1523

Cliveden Press
1133 13th St., N.W., Suite C-2
Washington D.C. 20005

Toward Equality and Justice in Labor Markets

Charles W. Baird

California State University, Hayward

The Norris-LaGuardia and Wagner Acts will, I predict, come to be regarded by future historians as economic blunders of the first magnitude. They were worked for and acquiesced to under motivations of almost unparalleled sordidness and cynicism combined with the highest, misguided idealism.

W. H. Hutt¹

In the U.S. context, two necessary, but not sufficient, conditions for moving toward equality and justice in labor markets are repeal of all the 1932 Norris-LaGuardia Act (NLA) and most of the 1935 National Labor Relations Act, as amended (NLRA). While there is room in the free society for voluntary unionism, there is no room for the special privileges granted unions under the NLA and NLRA. To the extent that the U.S. is taken as a model for newly emerging, democratic, and market-based economies, this paper can be regarded as an essay on mistakes to be avoided.

In what follows I first define voluntary exchange, a concept that is fundamental to a correct understanding of equality and justice. Then I consider alternative meanings of equality and justice, and explain the sense in which I use those terms. Next, I explain the features of the NLA and NLRA that are inconsistent with a correct understanding of those principles. Finally, I propose an agenda for reform of American labor relations law that I also offer as a model for newly emerging market economies.

I. Voluntary Exchange

An exchange is a reciprocal giving and receiving of goods and services among two or more people. An exchange is voluntary if four

¹ Hutt, W. H., *The Strike-Threat System: The Economic Consequences of Collective Bargaining*, Arlington House, New Rochelle, NY, 1973, p. 23.