

CONTEMPORARY RUSSIAN IDENTITY BETWEEN EAST AND WEST*

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ABSTRACT. *This is a review of recent English-language scholarship on the development of Russian identity since the collapse of the USSR in 1991. The first part examines literature on the economic and political changes in the Russian Federation, revealing how scholars became more sceptical about the possibility of Russia building a Western-type liberal democracy. The second part investigates approaches to the study of Russian national identity. The experience of empire, in both the tsarist and Soviet periods, gave Russians a weak sense of nationhood; ethnic Russians identified with the multi-national Soviet Union. Seeking legitimacy for the new state, President El'tsin sought to create a civic identity focused on the multi-national Russian Federation. The Communist and nationalist opposition continued to promote an imperial identity, focused on restoring the USSR or creating some other formation including the Russian-speaking population in the former Soviet republics. The final section discusses accounts of the two Chechen wars, which scholars see as continuing Russia's imperial policy and harming relations with Russia's Muslim population. President Putin's co-operation with the West against 'terrorism' has not led the West to accept Russia as one of its own, due to increasing domestic repression and authoritarianism.*

The centuries-old question regarding whether Russia should become part of the West, or follow its own unique Eastern path, acquired new interest after the collapse of the Soviet Union in December 1991. For Westernizers in Russia, the 'West' symbolized progress, freedom, democracy, civil society, normality, and a nation-state. Their opponents saw the West as representing capitalist exploitation, moral decadence, and American dominance. Westernizers saw the 'East' as linked with autocracy, despotism, and empire. Their opponents admired precisely these features, which for them signified a strong state, unity, and order. Still more basic questions of Russian identity emerged. What were the boundaries of Russia? Were they those of the Russian Federation, as the former Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR) was now known, or were they wider, and did they include Chechnia? Who was a Russian? Could Russian nationalism be described as civic, ethnic, or imperial?¹ This article examines how historians and political scientists have analysed the ways in which Russia has developed and how questions of Russian identity have been answered under the first two presidents, Boris El'tsin and Vladimir Putin. It is restricted to works in English and focuses primarily on those published since 1998. Identity

* I am most grateful to Bobo Lo and an anonymous referee for their comments. All responsibility for errors and judgements is mine alone.

¹ For a discussion of national identity and of categories of nationalism, see Anthony D. Smith, *National identity* (London, 1991).

is a notoriously difficult concept, linked to culture and history as much as to social psychology and politics. Studies of post-Soviet Russian culture have, like this present review which focuses more on politics, discussed the tension between the attraction of the West and nostalgia for the Russian past.²

I

This section analyses accounts of internal economic and political developments in Russia after the collapse of the USSR. Is Russia becoming more like the West in its institutions and practices, or returning to a trajectory more in line with the autocratic and collectivist traditions of the tsarist and Communist periods?

According to the prevailing orthodoxy of Western governments and international financial institutions in 1991, the key to consolidating democracy in Russia was to carry out the privatization of the economy as quickly as possible. This would create a new class of private owners who would have a vested interest in opposing any possible return of the Communists. The liberal economic transformations in Russia in 1992 were led by a group of El'tsin's ministers including Egor Gaidar and Anatolii Chubais, known as the 'young reformers' and also by their own self-description as 'democrats'; it is significant that before long the term 'democrats' was used in a pejorative sense by the opposition, to refer solely to such supporters of a rapid economic reform.³ Most accounts of the reforms produced prior to the August 1998 rouble crash and government default convey a confident optimism, with titles such as *The success of Russian economic reforms* and *The coming Russian boom*. Several of these were written by Western advisers to the reform process, or by Russian citizens who took part in the privatization process.⁴ Some accounts were already more pessimistic.⁵ The 1998 crash brought an end to the euphoria. Thane Gustafson's balanced account described the steady but still unfinished progress made towards the establishment of a market economy, while recognizing that the corruption and poverty which had accompanied the transition had eroded support for reform.⁶

From the late 1990s, a group of Western writers produced histories which were very critical of the whole economic reform process under El'tsin and of the role of the West in

² See, for example, on popular culture, Adele Marie Barker, 'Rereading Russia', in Adele Marie Barker, ed., *Consuming Russia: popular culture, sex and society since Gorbachev* (Durham, NC, and London, 1999), pp. 4–5.

³ As in Alexander Lukin, *The political culture of the Russian 'democrats'* (Oxford, 2000).

⁴ Brigitte Granville, *The success of Russian economic reforms* (London, 1995); Richard Layard and John Parker, *The coming Russian boom: a guide to new markets and politics* (New York, 1996); Anders Åslund, ed., *Economic transformation in Russia* (London, 1994); Anders Åslund, *How Russia became a market economy* (Washington, 1995); Maksim Boycko, Andrei Shleifer, and Robert Vishny, *Privatizing Russia* (Cambridge, MA, 1995); Dmitry Mikheyev, *Russia transformed* (Indianapolis, 1996); Alfred Kokh, *The selling of the Soviet empire: politics and economics of Russia's privatization – revelations of the principal insider* (New York, 1998).

⁵ John Kampfnier, *Inside Yeltsin's Russia: corruption, conflict, capitalism* (London, 1994); Marshall I. Goldman, *Lost opportunity: what has made economic reform in Russia so difficult?* (2nd edn, New York and London, 1996).

⁶ Thane Gustafson, *Capitalism Russian-style* (Cambridge, 1999); also Stefan Hedlund, *Russia's 'market' economy: a bad case of predatory capitalism* (London, 1999); Bertram Silverman and Murray Yanowitch, *New rich, new poor, new Russia: winners and losers on the Russian road to capitalism* (2nd edn, Armonk, NY, and London, 2000); G. Pirogov and S. Pronin, 'The Russian case: social policy concerns', in Yogesh Atal, ed., *Poverty in transition and transition in poverty: recent developments in Hungary, Bulgaria, Romania, Georgia, Russia and Mongolia* (New York, Oxford, and Paris, 1999), pp. 177–222.

promoting it. The journalist Chrystia Freeland, in her book *Sale of the century*, accuses: 'Russia was robbed in broad daylight, by businessmen who broke no laws, assisted by the West's best friends in the Kremlin – the young reformers.'⁷ Freeland goes on to show how the 'young reformer' Konstantin Kagalovskii drew up a privatization law in such a deliberately obscure way as to discourage foreign investment, in order to keep the prices of the assets being privatized cheap. At the time he was also working for the banker Mikhail Khodorkovskii, who was seeking to acquire the oil company Yukos. In the absence of foreign competition, Khodorkovskii, one of the 'seven bankers' mentioned below, was able to buy the company for a fraction of its value.⁸

While Freeland describes the fanatical 'capitalist messianism' of the young reformers, Peter Reddaway and Dmitry Glinski write of the 'self-confident, almost messianic vanguard mentality of a self-appointed elite', aiming to impose a market economy on Russia, despite the lack of popular support for the aims used.⁹ Reddaway and Glinski's polemical but careful history of the 1990s describes the El'tsin regime as 'market bolshevism'. In their view, the conspiratorial dissolution of the Soviet Union, the violent dispersal of the Russian Supreme Soviet in October 1993 and the adoption, in a rigged referendum, of a new constitution that concentrated power in the presidency two months later were anti-democratic moves which facilitated the transfer of economic wealth to ex-Communist elites and criminals. They conclude by referring to the nineteenth-century Russian philosopher, Petr Chaadaev, who suggested that Russia had been chosen to show the world a particular lesson. If, after 1917, the Bolsheviks had unintentionally demonstrated the folly of a dogmatic imposition of socialism on Russia, then from 1991 the application of free-market dogma by the Russian reformers, egged on by their Western advisers, again showed the world what not to do.¹⁰

David Hoffman's *The oligarchs* tells the story of the rise, and partial fall, of the wealthiest businessmen in Russia and their influence on the El'tsin administration.¹¹ They made their money by exploiting loopholes in the laws, by fraud and stealing, and by exploiting political connections. Faced with what seemed the likely defeat of El'tsin by the Communist leader, Gennadii Ziuganov, in the 1996 presidential elections, which might mean the end of their wealth and power, seven top bankers met. They decided to persuade El'tsin to fight a Western-style electoral campaign, to be headed by Chubais. Contrary to the belief that these oligarchs bankrolled El'tsin's victory, Hoffman shows that the state illegally provided the oligarchs with the money for the campaign, suggesting that the oligarchs in fact profited financially out of the campaign itself.¹² Undoubtedly the television stations controlled by the bankers Boris Berezovskii and Vladimir Gusinskii were of major importance in taking votes from Ziuganov and building El'tsin's image. After the elections, El'tsin rewarded the oligarchs with further privileged access to privatization, and, in some cases, with official positions. The leading young reformers in the government, First Deputy Prime

⁷ Chrystia Freeland, *Sale of the century: Russia's wild ride from Communism to capitalism* (New York, 2000), p. 171. See also Janine R. Wedel, *Collision and collusion: the strange case of Western aid to Eastern Europe, 1989–1998* (Basingstoke, 1998), pp. 121–63; Stephen F. Cohen, *Failed crusade: America and the tragedy of post-Soviet Russia* (New York, 2000).

⁸ Freeland, *Sale*, pp. 184–5.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 343; Peter Reddaway and Dmitry Glinski, *The tragedy of Russia's reforms: market bolshevism against democracy* (Washington, 2001), p. 629.

¹⁰ Reddaway and Glinski, *Tragedy*, especially pp. 624–41.

¹¹ David E. Hoffman, *The oligarchs: wealth and power in the new Russia* (Oxford, 2002).

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 348–9.

Ministers Chubais and Boris Nemtsov, resisted on occasion the greed of the oligarchs, and Nemtsov attacked 'bandit capitalism'.¹³

The crash of 1998 temporarily reduced the power of the oligarchs, with the new prime minister, Evgenii Primakov, appointed under the pressure of the Communist-dominated State Duma, seeking to investigate high-level corruption. This extended to the 'Family', a word used to refer not only to El'tsin, his influential daughter Tat'iana Diachenko, and his biological family, but also his closest advisers, including Chubais and Berezovskii. The latter fought back and persuaded El'tsin to sack Primakov. Having achieved great popularity as prime minister, Primakov gained the aura of a martyr. Appearing as a serious contender to succeed El'tsin in the 2000 presidential elections, the 'Family' saw it as essential to eliminate this threat. In August 1999, Primakov's successor, Sergei Stepashin, fell from El'tsin's favour and was replaced as prime minister by Vladimir Putin, a former career KGB officer from St Petersburg, who had recently headed the KGB's main successor, the FSB. Berezovskii used his money and media resources to promote a pro-Putin centrist block of regional governors and Moscow politicians to contest the State Duma elections of December 1999. Primakov, portrayed as a sick old man, had his chances for the presidency ruined. On the other hand, the apparent success of the Russian forces in the second Chechen war, which Putin had personally co-ordinated, led to high popularity ratings for the prime minister. El'tsin resigned early as president on New Year's Eve, 1999, allowing Putin to become acting president. This was formally in accordance with the Constitution, but the deal with Putin explicitly gave El'tsin immunity for any wrongdoing while president. Putin used his control of the Kremlin to ensure his victory in the presidential elections, brought forward to March 2000, on the first ballot, with Ziuganov, again the Communist candidate, coming second.¹⁴

In the words of Richard Sakwa, in the most thoughtful and comprehensive analysis of the contemporary Russian political system, what had emerged by the end of the 1990s was not a democracy but a 'regime-state'. In place of the rule of the Communist party, 'the regime focused on the presidency exerted extra-constitutional authority over the political system as represented in the institutions of the state'.¹⁵ Many of the gains of the late 1980s and early 1990s had been reversed, and the system was now a hybrid of authoritarianism and democracy. It was not the formal rules of a Western democracy that distributed power and characterized procedures in Russian decision-making, but the impact of networks of personal patron-client relationships.¹⁶ As Geoffrey Hosking pointed out, El'tsin's handover of power to Putin in December 1999 exemplified the importance of these patrimonial ties.¹⁷ They drew from the traditions of the Communist *nomenklatura* system, and built on networks inherited from that era.¹⁸

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 366. On Berezovskii, see Paul Klebnikov, *Godfather of the Kremlin: Boris Berezovsky and the looting of Russia* (New York, 2000).

¹⁴ Hoffman, *Oligarchs*, pp. 434–74; George W. Breslauer, *Gorbachev and Yeltsin as leaders* (Cambridge, 2002), pp. 224–30; Boris Kagarlitsky, *Russia under Yeltsin and Putin* (London, 2002), pp. 223–50; Martin McCauley, *Bandits, gangsters and the mafia: Russia, the Baltic States and the CIS since 1992* (Harlow, 2001), pp. 161–73.

¹⁵ Richard Sakwa, *Russian politics and society* (3rd edn, London and New York, 2002), p. 456.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 448–54, 469–74.

¹⁷ Geoffrey Hosking, *Russia and the Russians: a history* (Cambridge, MA, 2001), p. 612.

¹⁸ On the operation of these networks in everyday life, see Alena Ledeneva, *Russia's economy of favours: blat, networking and informal exchange* (Cambridge, 1998).

Russian accounts of political change in post-Soviet Russia reveal a variety of perspectives. El'tsin and Gaidar have produced interesting memoirs.¹⁹ Gaidar's associates, Vladimir Mau and Irina Starodubrovskaya, claim that a process of revolution has been going on since Mikhail Gorbachev's time, beginning from the top and then being taken up by society.²⁰ Socialist and some liberal accounts are more critical. The Marxist historian Roy Medvedev sees a 'capitalist "revolution from above"' under El'tsin.²¹ The socialist Boris Kagarlitskii considers that there was neither reform nor revolution, but a capitalist 'Restoration'. He calls for the 'expropriation of the oligarchs' and a 'new revolutionary cycle'.²² Alexander Lukin argues that Soviet patterns of thinking had affected the ideas of the 'democrats'; they sought their own unlimited power, in place of the unlimited power of the Communists, in order to carry out liberal reforms.²³

A more favourable analysis was offered towards the end of the El'tsin period by the liberal Moscow political scientist, Lilia Shevtsova. Her year-by-year history *Yeltsin's Russia* chronicled the president's ups and downs, balancing his arbitrariness against the gains for freedom of expression and human rights. She termed Russia at that time a 'delegative democracy' (the term of Guillermo O'Donnell, in relation to Latin America): a system whereby elected presidents are entitled to rule as they see fit.²⁴ After his retirement, Shevtsova credited El'tsin with having 'fatally undermined' what she called the 'Russian System', with its domineering state, all-powerful leader, international isolation, and great-power ambitions, through his victory in democratic elections. Although he created what she now called an 'elected monarchy', he respected civil rights and could tolerate criticism.²⁵ Her account of the first three years of Putin's presidency, *Putin's Russia*, charts the efforts of the new leader to establish central control over the independently functioning parts of the state and society: Chechnia, the other regions, the media, some of the oligarchs, both chambers of parliament, the political parties, the trade unions, and the armed forces. Already in June 2000 Gusinskii, whose media had opposed the Kremlin's party in the 1999 elections, was in prison, accused of owing money to the state. The reality was, as Shevtsova argues, that Putin was breaking El'tsin's taboos against suppression of the independent media and the oligarchs, and using the prosecutor-general's office for political ends.²⁶

One week before his presidential victory in March 2000, Putin had condemned the oligarchs for 'merging power with capital' and warned: 'Such a class of oligarchs will cease to exist.'²⁷ Over his first term in power, Putin moved slowly but firmly to reduce the influence of El'tsin's 'Family' and of the oligarchs, and increasing that of his former associates in the KGB and of the security services in general. Gusinskii and Berezovskii, who had both openly opposed Putin's policies, were divested of their television stations and

¹⁹ Boris Yeltsin, *The view from the Kremlin* (London, 1994; American edn, *The struggle for Russia* (New York, 1994)); idem, *Midnight diaries* (London, 2000); Yegor Gaidar, *Days of defeat and victory* (Seattle and London, 2000).

²⁰ Vladimir Mau and Irina Starodubrovskaya, *The challenge of revolution: contemporary Russia in historical perspective* (Oxford, 2001).

²¹ Roy Medvedev, *Post-Soviet Russia: a journey through the Yeltsin era* (New York and Chichester, 2000), p. 5.

²² Kagarlitsky, *Russia*, pp. 3, 289.

²³ Lukin, *Political culture of the Russian 'democrats'*.

²⁴ Lilia Shevtsova, *Yeltsin's Russia: myths and reality* (Washington, 1999), pp. 286–9.

²⁵ Lilia Shevtsova, *Putin's Russia* (Washington, 2003), pp. 16, 58–61.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 104–8.

²⁷ Peter Rutland, 'Putin and the oligarchs', in Dale R. Herspring, ed., *Putin's Russia: past imperfect, future uncertain* (Lanham, MD, and Oxford), p. 138.

forced into exile. In February 2002, Chubais expressed the fear of Russia becoming a police state, while El'tsin complained that it was 'difficult to voice even justified criticism'.²⁸ The phrase 'managed democracy' began to be used to refer euphemistically to Putin's growing authoritarianism.²⁹ The oligarch Khodorkovskii was arrested in October 2003 and held for nine months before being put on trial, undoubtedly for political reasons. As Shevtsova noted, much of the population supported moves against the independent media, because they so disliked the oligarchs who controlled them.³⁰ Archie Brown's comment that the high level of support for Putin through 2000 could not be attributed solely to the manipulation of public opinion³¹ remained valid three years later. Pressure by the security services on critical journalists and on academic researchers who were sharing open-source information with foreign colleagues did not evoke popular concern. Putin's supporters easily won the parliamentary elections in December 2003, and Putin himself was re-elected even more decisively in March 2004. As Stephen White had remarked at the end of the El'tsin era, it was too early to assess whether Russia would achieve a democracy, but if it came, it would take a long time.³²

II

This section discusses how historians have considered the impact of the above changes in Russian society on Russian national consciousness and identity. Could Russia become a nation-state or could it exist only as an empire? Would Russians be able to overcome the legacy of tsarism and the Soviet Union, and come to terms with the new frontiers of the Russian Federation? The new state had lost a quarter of the territory of the Soviet Union and half the Soviet population. What was Russia's role in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the loose association embracing all the former Soviet republics, apart from the Baltic States? The fact that the other former Soviet republics were referred to under El'tsin as the 'near abroad' meant that Russians continued to differentiate psychologically the former Soviet Union from the rest of the world.

Ethnic Russians had composed just over half of the USSR's population in 1991, but around four-fifths of the Russian Federation's people. Muslim nationalities such as the Tatars, Bashkirs, Chechens, and other North Caucasian peoples now account for around a tenth of the population. The principal indigenous ethnic minorities retain their own republics within the Russian Federation, as in Soviet times, but now with a real degree of autonomy. It is worth noting that the Russian language distinguishes between the words for an ethnic Russian (*russkii*) and a citizen of the Russian Federation (*rossiianin*) who may be of any nationality.³³ While ethnic Russians are traditionally Orthodox Christians, the Russian Federation is a secular state, which since 1997 has recognized Orthodoxy, Islam, Buddhism, and Judaism as the traditional religions of Russia.

²⁸ Shevtsova, *Putin's Russia*, pp. 226–7.

²⁹ Timothy J. Colton and Michael McFaul, 'Russian democracy under Putin', *Problems of Post-Communism*, 50, no. 4 (2003), pp. 12–21.

³⁰ Shevtsova, *Putin's Russia*, p. 95.

³¹ Archie Brown, 'Evaluating Russia's democratization', in Archie Brown, ed., *Contemporary Russian politics: a reader* (Oxford, 2002), p. 565.

³² Stephen White, *Russia's new politics: the management of a postcommunist society* (Cambridge, 2000), p. 292.

³³ Sven Gunnar Simonsen, *Pains of partition: nationalism, national identity and the military in post-Soviet Russia* (Oslo, 2002), pp. 31–50.

In his history of imperial Russia, Hosking argued that ‘the building of an empire impeded the formation of a nation’.³⁴ Ethnic Russians were encouraged to identify with the Russian empire as a whole, rather than develop a national solidarity amongst themselves. The reforms of Peter the Great created a gulf between a Westernized elite and the peasant mass. By 1917, Russia was neither an ethnic nor a civic nation. In 1998, Hosking asked whether Russia could ever become a nation-state. The Soviet Union had in some ways strengthened Russian identity, although it proclaimed itself a multi-ethnic rather than a Russian state. The millenarian and egalitarian aspects of Soviet Communism were in tune with Russian folk traditions and the spread of education did much to integrate society. The use of the Russian language, the dominance of ethnic Russians in the leadership, and the sense of the defeat of Nazi Germany as a Russian national victory all encouraged ethnic Russians to identify with the USSR. Other nationalities, according to Hosking, also subsumed their identities in this ‘Russian-Soviet statehood’, creating the possibility of creating a ‘huge compound nation-state’. But instead of this, the Soviet Union collapsed into its component ethnic republics, mainly because of the failure to replace traditional Russian patron–client relations with civic institutions which could promote solidarity between the Soviet nationalities. Hosking suggested that despite the arbitrariness of the borders of the Russian Federation, it offered the most likely basis for the future development of a Russian nation-state, if only in the distant future. Russia might be considered a compound nation, with its ethnic minorities co-existing with the ethnic Russians as the Scottish and Welsh had co-existed with the English in the British state.³⁵ Anatol Lieven similarly argued that imperial identity ‘gave the Russians a very weak sense of themselves as an ethnos, and to a considerable extent it divorced Russian national identity from ethnicity’. This weakness of ethnic identity helped to avoid ethnic conflict involving ethnic Russians, both in the former Soviet republics and in the republics inside the Russian Federation.³⁶ As George Breslauer and Catherine Dale pointed out, El’tsin himself (and also Putin) advocated a civic and non-ethnic definition of Russian nationhood, embracing all the citizens of the Russian Federation.³⁷ El’tsin and Putin address their fellow citizens as *rossiiane*, the non-ethnic word for Russians, and the Russian Constitution refers to the ‘multi-ethnic people of the Russian Federation’.³⁸

The most thorough and successful recent discussion of the development of Russian national identity is Vera Tolz’s *Russia*, which shows how, from the time of Peter the Great, Russia defined itself in opposition to ‘the West’ as its significant ‘other’. She traces the debates between Westernizers and Slavophiles as to whether Russia should copy the West or follow its own traditions, perceived as unique. ‘The East’, represented by the Caucasus and Central Asia, represented another, although less significant, ‘other’ for Russia, as the empire expanded in that direction in the nineteenth century.³⁹ Most interestingly, Tolz

³⁴ Geoffrey Hosking, *Russia: people and empire, 1552–1917* (London, 1997), p. xix.

³⁵ Geoffrey Hosking, ‘Can Russia become a nation-state?’, *Nations and Nationalism*, 4 (1998), pp. 449–62, at pp. 451–8.

³⁶ Anatol Lieven, *Chechnya: tombstone of Russian power* (New Haven and London, 1999), pp. 376 (quotation), 377.

³⁷ George W. Breslauer and Catherine Dale, ‘Boris Yel’tsin and the invention of a Russian nation-state’, *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 13 (1997), pp. 303–32, at pp. 315–17.

³⁸ *Konstitutsiia Rossiiskoi Federatsii* (Moscow, 1993), p. 3.

³⁹ Vera Tolz, *Russia* (London and New York, 2001), chs. 1–4.

relates that when the ideas of nationalism and self-determination arrived in Russia in the nineteenth century, many Russian intellectuals such as Nikolai Danilevskii, Sergei Solov'ev, and Pavel Miliukov argued that the Russian empire was in fact a nation state. The Bolsheviks rejected this, seeing the Russians as the oppressor nation within the Russian empire and structured the Soviet Union as, in form, a federation of ethnically based republics so as to meet the aspirations of the non-Russians. From Stalin's time, though, it became clear that the ethnic Russian people was the core group within the USSR. Tolz agrees with Hosking that ethnic Russians identified with the USSR as a whole, rather than with the RSFSR, which, unlike the other republics, lacked key institutions such as its own Communist party or Academy of Sciences. With the emigration of Russians from the Russian heartland into the other republics, Russians identified more with the Soviet Union as a whole than they had with the old empire.⁴⁰

Tolz is right to draw attention to the view emerging from the 1960s that Russia and ethnic Russians were being discriminated against in the Soviet Union. It is difficult to agree, however, that this represented the beginning of an anti-imperial Russian nationalism.⁴¹ The Russians who had moved to other republics and complained about discrimination in job allocation had rarely learned the local language. The writers of 'village prose' who complained about the destruction of Russian ethnic traditions by Soviet industrial progress turned out, in the final years of the USSR, to be among the staunchest defenders of the Union. The struggle of El'tsin and the radicals of Democratic Russia for the sovereignty of the Russian Republic in 1990–1 was linked more to the desire to speed up the process of political and economic reform in Russia than to a wish to end the Soviet Union as such. Archie Brown suggests that El'tsin's readiness 'to cede territory that had been part of a greater Russian state for centuries' was because 'with no union there would be no Gorbachev' and El'tsin would be the undisputed leader.⁴²

The questions arise as to whether the USSR was an empire, and if it was, whether it was a Russian empire. The first question depends ultimately on the definition of empire. In his impressive comparative study of empires, Dominic Lieven shows how the word has been given a variety of different meanings.⁴³ It seems that a necessary condition for an empire is multi-nationality. Susanne Michele Birgersson suggests that the distinguishing feature of an empire is the sharp division between the centre and the periphery, in which the former dominates the latter. She further argues that the Soviet Union was an empire; Russia, as the RSFSR, represented the centre, and the other republics the periphery. The Russians were the dominant nationality, both in the centre and in their role in the republics. The republics believed that Moscow was exploiting them.⁴⁴ This view of the whole RSFSR as the centre, the metropolis, is questionable. Siberia, robbed of its natural resources, was surely more a part of the periphery than Ukraine, but it belonged to the RSFSR. It could well be argued, as Birgersson concedes, that it was not Russia but the Communist bureaucracy in Moscow that was exploiting the republics, and indeed Russia

⁴⁰ Ibid., pp. 155–86.

⁴¹ Ibid., pp. 184–6 and 204–6.

⁴² Archie Brown, 'Transformational leaders compared: Mikhail Gorbachev and Boris Yeltsin', in Archie Brown and Lilia Shevtsova, eds., *Gorbachev, Yeltsin, and Putin: political leadership in Russia's transition* (Washington, 2001), p. 39.

⁴³ Dominic Lieven, *Empire: the Russian empire and its rivals* (London, 2000), pp. xi–xii, 3–26.

⁴⁴ Susanne Michele Birgersson, *After the breakup of a multi-ethnic empire: Russia, successor states, and Eurasian security* (Westport, CT, and London, 2002), pp. 22, 33–4.

itself.⁴⁵ While it is true that Russians predominated in the leadership from the 1960s, ordinary Russians did not benefit from this. The Russian peasant economy, Russian culture, particularly literature, and the Orthodox Church suffered enormously from the Soviet dictatorship. Living standards were higher in the Baltic republics, Georgia, and Belorussia than in much of Russia. Thus if one accepts that the Soviet Union was an empire, one must admit that it was an unusual type of empire, in which many Russians lived worse than other nationalities.

Tolz identifies five distinct definitions of the Russian nation in the post-Soviet period, derived from intellectual debate and political statements. The first is the Union, or imperial, identity, which sees the Russians as destined to create and maintain a multi-national state. This includes nationally minded Communists, particularly the supporters of Ziuganov in the Communist party of the Russian Federation (CPRF), who see the USSR as the legitimate successor of the Russian empire; rhetorical ultra-nationalists such as Vladimir Zhirinovskii, leader of the so-called Liberal-Democratic party of Russia, who has talked of regaining Poland and Finland and of Russian troops washing their boots in the Indian Ocean; and the Eurasianists. The political project of these people, in its maximalist form, is the restoration of the Russian empire or of the USSR. Russia, in whatever form, must again be a great power, and a strong state. Similar views have been held by figures within the Russian government who have advocated increasing integration among the member states of the CIS. While these ideas are clearly linked with the Soviet concept of the Russian people being the leading people within the Soviet Union, they do not seem to go so far as to equate the Russian nation with the whole population of the former Soviet Union. Rather less ambitious, secondly, are those who adhere to the view of the Russian nation as a community of Eastern Slavs; Russians, Ukrainians and Belarusians are all branches of the East Slavonic tree, speaking closely related languages and, by tradition, sharing the Orthodox Christian faith. This view is influenced by tsarist and Soviet historiography, which portrayed Russian history as beginning in Kiev and later moving its centre of gravity to Moscow. The political project takes the form of either a federation of the three states or of their union in a single all-Russian state. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn is the most well-known adherent of this view (although he also favours the inclusion of the Russian-inhabited part of North and East Kazakhstan). Problematic in this approach is that some Ukrainians and Belarusians adhere to forms of Catholicism, having been converted from Orthodoxy by Polish or Lithuanian rulers, and some Ukrainians define their Ukrainian identity precisely in opposition to Russia. The third definition of the Russian nation includes all who use Russian as their first language, regardless of ethnicity. This would lead to a redrawing of Russian frontiers, to include Russian-speaking parts of at least Ukraine, Moldova, Kazakhstan, Latvia, and Estonia and most, if not all, of Belarus. This would also have the effect of removing most of the North Caucasus, including Chechnia, from Russia. This project does not seem to have the support of any significant political force in Russia. The fourth definition is racial, including only those who are Russian by blood. This is aimed above all at excluding Jews and peoples from the Caucasus and Central Asia. Such views are propagated by small fascist organizations which are the modern successors to the Black Hundreds of late tsarism, and more recently the *Pamiat'* (Memory) group: the paramilitary Russian National Unity, the National Bolshevik Party of the writer Eduard Limonov (not mentioned by Tolz), and the National Republican Party

⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 36–7.

of Russia. The fifth version is civic, embracing the citizens of the Russian Federation. Tolz rightly points out that El'tsin, Putin and some of their ministers, while in theory committed to this civic definition, have in practice on occasion implicitly extended it to ethnic Russians and the so-called 'Russian-speaking population' resident in the former Soviet republics, only a few of whom are citizens of the Russian Federation. The use of the term 'compatriot' (*sootechestvennik*) to refer to these people is linked to claims by Russian politicians to have a certain duty to defend the rights of these minorities, against the ethnic elites of the former Soviet republics as they pursue a 'de-colonizing' process.⁴⁶ Inclusion of these 'compatriots' in the Russian nation seems to provide a sixth definition.

Nevertheless, it is the civic version of Russian identity, within the borders of the Russian Federation, that remains the official version of Russian identity, as noted above. From December 1991, El'tsin's administration made serious efforts to inculcate this identity into Russian society, which was not easy. As Robert Service points out, 'the RSFSR had little pull on the imagination of its citizens'.⁴⁷ Moreover, as recently as March 1991, 71.3 per cent of the participants in a referendum had voted to preserve the USSR. Kathleen Smith has analysed the symbols and myths created under El'tsin to legitimize the new state and the regime. One area she discusses is the difficulties of creating new holidays to commemorate the founding events of the Russian Federation: the anniversary of the defeat of the hard-liners' coup of August 1991 against Gorbachev, the anniversary of the 1993 Constitution and Independence Day. As the 1990s passed, and El'tsin himself lost support, fewer people identified with his victory in 1991, or with the dissolution of the Supreme Soviet and the adoption of the new Constitution. Free Russia Day, or Independence Day, was established to mark the passing by the Russian Congress of People's Deputies of the Declaration of State Sovereignty of the RSFSR in June 1990. It also coincided with the anniversary of El'tsin's first election as RSFSR president in June 1991. But from the start, this holiday lacked credibility. What had Russia gained its independence from? Clearly, the Soviet Union. But the Soviet Union was widely identified with the Russian state, and it was increasingly believed in Russia, after the initial euphoria of December 1991, that rather than gaining independence, Russia had lost prestige and superpower status. El'tsin himself was one of the principal symbols of the state, and anti-communism, in practice, was its legitimating ideology. The discrediting of El'tsin personally, the rising support for the Communists, and the nostalgia for Soviet power undermined the new symbols and the legitimacy of both the state and the regime.⁴⁸

El'tsin achieved greater acceptance from the population by restoring the imperial tricolour flag and the imperial two-headed eagle as the state emblem. His attempt to introduce Mikhail Glinka's 'Patriotic Song' by decree as the national anthem was, however, unpopular.⁴⁹ By 1995 the leadership was beginning to understand the error of allowing the Communist opposition to monopolize the nostalgia for the Soviet past. In time for the fiftieth anniversary of the Soviet defeat of the Nazis, the red banner with the hammer and sickle was officially recognized as a state symbol and was flown in Red Square on Victory Day, as in Soviet times.⁵⁰ Realizing that anti-Communism was not enough to

⁴⁶ Tolz, *Russia*, pp. 235–60.

⁴⁷ Robert Service, *Russia: experiment with a people, from 1991 to the present* (London, 2003), p. 44.

⁴⁸ Kathleen E. Smith, *Mythmaking in the new Russia: politics and memory during the Yeltsin era* (Ithaca, NY, and London, 2002), pp. 30–56, 78–101.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 160.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 85–91; R. W. Davies, *Soviet history in the Yeltsin era* (Basingstoke and New York, 1997), pp. 73–5.

achieve legitimacy, in 1996 El'tsin established a commission to try to find a new national idea for Russia. After more than a year, this commission could produce no more than vague words about patriotism.⁵¹ As president, Putin sought to find a wider base for legitimacy by ending El'tsin's anti-Communist stance. He praised the achievements of the Soviet Union, and brought back the Soviet state anthem as the Russian anthem, with some changes in the words. Although this alarmed the pro-Western intelligentsia, it was a popular move.⁵² Keeping the tsarist flag and eagle, Putin sought to build a Russian multi-ethnic identity on the basis of positive elements within both the imperial and the Soviet traditions, and create a consensus.⁵³

The principal intellectual advocate of civic national identity, the director of the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology, Valerii Tishkov, has produced a contemporary history of ethnic relations in the former Soviet Union which is simultaneously a manifesto against ethnic nationalism. Warning that 'Russia is not a "national state" of ethnic Russians', he argues for the maintenance of the ethnically based republics within Russia, since to abolish them would be to antagonize Russia's ethnic minorities. Nevertheless, he opposes 'the privileged status of titular groups in the republics' as incompatible with civic identity.⁵⁴

Russian nationalism undoubtedly grew after the collapse of the Soviet Union. It was not simply nostalgia for the Soviet Union, but reflected disillusionment with Western economic prescriptions for Russia, and, even among liberal Russians, a feeling of betrayal by the West at the enlargement of NATO into Eastern Europe. Mikhail Molchanov describes Russian nationalism as 'a reaction to the shocks of postcommunist development'.⁵⁵ Many Russian nationalists see Russia as a victim of a Western, or sometimes Jewish, conspiracy to destroy the USSR and thereby to weaken the Russian economy. (Anti-Semitic feelings within the nationalist wing of the Communist party are enhanced by the relatively high proportion of Jews among the oligarchs.) Russian nationalist sentiment within the opposition to El'tsin's regime is the subject of a number of studies published from the late 1990s. Wayne Allensworth, Judith Devlin, and Stephen Shenfield have produced monographs which all discuss Ziuganov's Communists, Zhirinovskii, the Eurasianists, and the smaller neo-fascist and paramilitary groups on the fringe of the political system.⁵⁶ Allensworth places Russian nationalism in the context of globalization, and emphasizes the desire of nationalists to defend Russian culture against homogenization. He provides a sympathetic account of Solzhenitsyn's ethnic nationalism, rooted in Orthodoxy and not threatening to the West, and his concept of a 'Russian Union' of the Eastern Slavs.⁵⁷

⁵¹ Michael Urban, 'Remythologising the Russian state', *Europe-Asia Studies*, 50 (1998), pp. 969–92.

⁵² Robert Service, *A history of modern Russia: from Nicholas II to Putin* (London, 2003), p. 545.

⁵³ Shevtsova, *Putin's Russia*, pp. 144–5.

⁵⁴ Valery Tishkov, *Ethnicity, nationalism and conflict in and after the Soviet Union: the mind aflame* (London and Thousand Oaks, CA, 1997), pp. 259–60.

⁵⁵ Mikhail A. Molchanov, *Political culture and national identity in Russian-Ukrainian relations* (College Station, TX, 2002), p. 165.

⁵⁶ Wayne Allensworth, *The Russian question: nationalism, modernization and post-Communist Russia* (Lanham, MD, and Oxford, 1998); Judith Devlin, *Slavophiles and commissars: enemies of democracy in modern Russia* (Basingstoke and New York, 1999); Stephen D. Shenfield, *Russian fascism: traditions, tendencies, movements* (Armonk, NY, and London, 2001). Notable surveys of Russian nationalism which include analysis of the early post-Soviet years are John B. Dunlop, *The rise of Russia and the fall of the Soviet empire* (2nd edn, Princeton, NJ, 1995) and Walter Laqueur, *Black Hundred: the rise of the extreme right in Russia* (New York, 1993).

⁵⁷ Allensworth, *Russian question*, pp. 57–97.

While Allensworth focuses on ideas, Devlin successfully shows the significance of these ideas in the political history of Russia from Gorbachev up to the 1996 elections. Both highlight the role of Aleksandr Prokhanov, the editor of the newspaper *Den'* (The Day), and, after it was banned, *Zavtra* (Tomorrow), in promoting Eurasianism as an ideology among the Communists from the 1980s. The original Eurasianists were Russian émigrés who in the 1920s developed the idea that Russia was a unique civilization, which they called Eurasian. It combined Eastern Slavs and Turkic peoples, and the Orthodox and Islamic religions. These ideas were developed in the USSR initially by Lev Gumilev, who emphasized the benefits to Russia of the 'Mongol yoke', which had supposedly saved Russia from the Catholic West. With the discrediting of Communist ideology and the decline of the Soviet Union, Prokhanov sought to replace international class struggle with national and civilizational struggle against the West. He wanted to reconcile Red and White, the Communist and the tsarist. Gumilev's ideas provided Prokhanov with a new justification for a return to an imperial state, without the Marxist-Leninist ideology of the Soviet era. Prokhanov further argued that the West was encouraging Islamic fundamentalism in Central Asia in order to weaken the USSR and then Russia. Aleksandr Dugin took Eurasianism further; using the ideas of Sir Halford Mackinder and Karl Haushofer, he claimed that there was an age-old conflict between the continental heartland, based on Eurasia, and the oceanic powers, primarily the British Empire and then the USA. His lengthy textbooks on geopolitics have become required reading in the Russian General Staff Academy.⁵⁸

Shenfield's *Russian fascism* covers a far broader range of Russian nationalist thought than its title suggests, but it does contain a detailed analysis of the far-right paramilitary Russian National Union, which took part in the defence of the Russian Parliament against El'tsin in October 1993.⁵⁹ There has not been a serious full-length study of Zhirinovskii and his party, perhaps because of the contradictions between his statements, his errant behaviour and the fact that his political star seemed to be waning, until the December 2003 elections. Insofar as it is possible to clarify his programme, he is advocating a multi-ethnic Russia, restored to the borders of the USSR or the Russian empire, in which the ethnic Russian people will be the backbone, and the non-Russians will lose any claim to regional autonomy.⁶⁰ Much more consistent were the views of General Aleksandr Lebed', the subject of a biography by Harold Elletson.⁶¹ Lebed', who died in a helicopter crash in 2002, came to prominence as a defender of the Russian diaspora. This led him to oppose the war in Chechnia, since his ethnic nationalism meant that he did not consider the republic to be part of Russia. He claimed the war was started by Moscow's gangsters against Chechen gangsters and it threatened to turn Russia's Muslims against Moscow. Meanwhile, Allensworth suggests that Lebed's brand of 'reform nationalism' might lead to the construction of a multi-ethnic civic nationalism in Russia, without imperial aspirations.⁶²

Naturally, of all the nationalist groups the CPRF has received the most scholarly attention, as the most successful party in two of the first three post-Soviet elections to the State

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 243–62; Devlin, *Slavophiles*, pp. 14–20, 112–14, 138–44; Shenfield, *Russian fascism*, pp. 191–9.

⁵⁹ Shenfield, *Russian fascism*, pp. 113–89.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 85–112; Allensworth, *Russian question*, pp. 181–213; Robert Service, 'Zhirinovskii: ideas in search of an audience', in Geoffrey Hosking and Robert Service eds., *Russian nationalism, past and present* (Basingstoke and New York, 1998), pp. 179–97.

⁶¹ Harold Elletson, *The general against the Kremlin: Alexander Lebed: power and illusion* (New York, 1998).

⁶² Allensworth, *Russian question*, pp. 300–10.

Duma (1995 and 1999), and arguably the only true political party in Russia, in terms of a nationwide functioning organization.⁶³ Joan Barth Urban and Valerii Solovei produced the definitive volume on the party's history from its foundation up to Ziuganov's defeat in 1996.⁶⁴ An autobiography of the Communist leader himself, together with his major writings, has been translated into English.⁶⁵ Luke March's monograph has brought the story up to the Putin era and set the CPRF in the comparative context of Communist successor parties. He asks why the party failed to reform itself into a modern social-democratic party and return to power as the Communists in Lithuania, Poland, and Moldova succeeded in doing. He argues that Ziuganov occupied a substantial niche within the Russian electorate which was accustomed to some sort of ideological fusion between Marxism and nationalism, reinforced by the indigenous nature of Communism in Russia. The size of this niche was, however, limited. The working class and the trade unions were demoralized; at the same time the Communists, despite their nationalism, were still too Communist in their symbols and policies to appeal to the Whites, the nationalist anti-Communists, in the way that Prokhanov had wished. While El'tsin could live with Communist success in the State Duma, the resources of the state and the oligarchs were mobilized to keep them out of presidential power. When Putin began to carry what March calls the 'statist-patriotic banner', the Communist position was further undermined.⁶⁶

One issue on which the Russian nationalist opposition, including the CPRF, repeatedly criticized El'tsin was the neglect of the ethnic Russian and Russian-speaking population in the 'near abroad'. In particular, the refusal of Estonia and Latvia to offer automatic citizenship to people who arrived in those countries during the Soviet occupation and their descendants has been seen as a hostile act across the Russian political spectrum. Several volumes address what is rather loosely known as the Russian 'diaspora'.⁶⁷ Igor Zevelev has considered the relationship between the diaspora and Russian identity, arguing against Hosking and the idea that Russia should become a nation-state on the Western European model. Since nations are closely linked with ethnicity, to make Russia into a nation-state would fuel ethnic nationalism and promote the desire to bring the Russian minorities back into the Russian state. This could be done only by enlarging Russia's borders, leading to conflict between Russia and its neighbours. Zevelev points out that El'tsin and Putin are so committed to the existing borders of Russia that they have waged two wars in Chechnia to maintain territorial integrity. At the same time, El'tsin ignored the appeals of the ethnic

⁶³ This argument is made in Luke March, *The Communist party in post-Soviet Russia* (Manchester and New York, 2002), p. 9.

⁶⁴ Joan Barth Urban and Valerii D. Solovei, *Russia's Communists at the crossroads* (Boulder, CO, and Oxford, 1997); also Richard Sakwa, 'The Communist party of the Russian Federation and the electoral process', *Studies in Public Policy*, No. 265, Centre for the Study of Public Policy, University of Strathclyde, Glasgow, 1996.

⁶⁵ Gennady Zyuganov, *My Russia: the political autobiography of Gennady Zyuganov*, ed. Vadim Medish (Armonk, NY, and London, 1997).

⁶⁶ March, *Communist party*, pp. 257–71 (quotation, p. 266).

⁶⁷ Vladimir Shlapentokh, Munir Sendich, and Emil Payin, eds., *The new Russian diaspora: Russian minorities in the former Soviet republics* (Armonk, NY, and London, 1994); Paul Kolstoe, *Russians in the former Soviet republics* (London, 1995); Neil Melvin, *Russians beyond Russia* (London, 1995); Jeff Chinn and Robert Kaiser, *Russians as the new minority: ethnicity and nationalism in the Soviet successor states* (Boulder, CO, and Oxford, 1996); Charles King and Neil Melvin, eds., *Nations abroad: diaspora politics and international relations in the former Soviet Union* (Boulder, CO, and Oxford, 1998); David D. Laitin, *Identity in formation: the Russian speaking populations in the near abroad* (Ithaca, NY, and London, 1998); Igor Zevelev, *Russia and its new Diasporas* (Washington, 2001).

Russian majority of the Crimea for their republic to be allowed to secede from Ukraine and join the Russian Federation. Zevelev suggests three scenarios for the future development of Russian identity: neo-imperial, ethnic, and civic. While he clearly favours a civic identity, he recognizes that none of the prerequisites, such as common traditions or an effective state, are present in contemporary Russia. As an alternative to policies of isolationism, ethnic nationalism and imperialism, Zevelev argues for some form of integration between Russia and the former Soviet republics, which he thinks would reduce the importance of the diaspora issue.⁶⁸

David Laitin's study of Russian speakers in four former Soviet republics focuses on the development of their separate identities. They feel themselves essentially abandoned by Moscow and have been forced to come to terms with different situations. Laitin suggests that Russian speakers in Estonia and Latvia may assimilate in the long term, while in Kazakhstan they may retain a Soviet or Russian-speaking identity, separate from the Kazakhs. In Ukraine, Laitin predicts a consociational relationship between ethnic Russians, Russian-speaking Ukrainians, and Ukrainian-speaking Ukrainians. For the time being, however, Laitin sees the Russian-speaking communities continuing to be significant political entities in all four states.⁶⁹

Under El'tsin, Western criticism of Russia's policy in Chechnia, NATO enlargement, and the war against Yugoslavia in 1999 impeded Russia's efforts to integrate with the West.⁷⁰ The Russian leaders tended to respond to unwelcome Western moves by promising to follow the Eurasianist path of increasing integration within the CIS. Generally, however, these policies were ineffective, because of the resistance of some CIS states and the unwillingness of Russia to commit resources. Bobo Lo describes it as a myth, widely repeated in official pronouncements, that El'tsin gave top priority in foreign policy to the CIS.⁷¹ Already after the first Chechen war, as Roy Allison and Andrei Zagorski find, Russia began to strengthen the borders of the Russian Federation, instead of following the previous policy of focusing defence on the outer frontiers of the CIS.⁷² This has not excluded, however, either Russian peace-keeping activities in CIS countries, sometimes seen as the manipulation of conflict in order to maintain influence, or the refusal to withdraw forces from Moldova and Georgia in accordance with those governments' wishes.⁷³

⁶⁸ Zevelev, *Russia*, pp. 13–27, 157–8.

⁶⁹ Laitin, *Identity*, especially pp. 353–63.

⁷⁰ Mark Webber, ed., *Russia and Europe: conflict or cooperation?* (New York, 2000); J. L. Black, *Russia faces NATO expansion: bearing gifts or bearing arms?* (Lanham, MD, and Oxford, 2000).

⁷¹ Bobo Lo, *Russian foreign policy in the post-Soviet era: reality, illusion and mythmaking* (Basingstoke and New York, 2002), p. 72; Martha Brill Olcott, Anders Åslund, and Sherman W. Garnett, *Getting it wrong: regional cooperation and the Commonwealth of Independent States* (Washington, 1999).

⁷² Roy Allison, 'The military and political security landscape in Russia and the south', in Rajan Menon, Yuri E. Fedorov, and Ghia Nodia, eds., *Russia, the Caucasus, and Central Asia: the twenty-first century security environment* (Armonk, NY, and London, 1999), pp. 27–60; Andrei V. Zagorski, 'Traditional Russian security interests in the Caucasus and Central Asia: perceptions and realities', in *ibid.*, pp. 61–84. This volume is the second of three in the series *Eurasia in the 21st century: the total security environment*, ed. Dag Hartelius and Alexei G. Arbatov, for the EastWest Institute, New York, all published in 1999.

⁷³ Dov Lynch, *Russian peacekeeping strategies in the CIS: the cases of Moldova, Georgia and Tajikistan* (Basingstoke and New York, 2000); Peter Rutland, 'Paradigms for Russian policy in the Caspian region', in Robert Ebel and Rajan Menon, eds., *Energy and conflict in Central Asia and the Caucasus* (Lanham, MD, and Oxford), pp. 181–2; Levon Chorbajian, ed., *The making of Nagorno-Karabagh: from secession to republic* (Basingstoke and New York, 2001).

III

This section discusses Russian identity in relation to the Chechen wars, Islam, and finally Russia's place between East and West. Russia's two wars against Chechnia (1994–6 and 1999 to the present) have brought forth a crop of studies.⁷⁴ Most of these histories convey a sense of moral outrage at the behaviour of the Russians towards the Chechens, from the wars of the nineteenth century to control the mountain peoples, which brought the first deportations of the Chechens, through Stalin's deportation of them to Central Asia in 1944, up to the bombings of the Chechen capital Grozny conducted on behalf of El'tsin and Putin. Some accounts highlight the depth of corruption in the Russian Army, with troops raising cash by kidnapping Chechens for ransom and selling arms to Chechen fighters.⁷⁵ The origins of both recent wars remain murky. John Dunlop's *Russia confronts Chechnya*, which takes the story to 1994, shows the continuity of the policies pursued over 200 years, of resettlement, deception, portrayal of the Chechens as a bad people, and mass murder. The consequence was resistance and rebellion from the mountain peoples, and from the 1930s the formation of a specifically Chechen national consciousness. Dunlop shows how the struggle between Gorbachev and El'tsin in 1990–1 promoted the desire for more independence in the republics within the RSFSR. El'tsin encouraged the republics to 'take as much independence as you can swallow'. After the August 1991 coup, he welcomed the overthrow of the Chechen-Ingush Communist leader by the Chechen separatist leader, General Dzhokhar Dudaev. When Dudaev declared independence in November 1991, El'tsin tried to overthrow him, but the Russian Supreme Soviet ruled out the use of force and Moscow tolerated Chechen independence until 1994.⁷⁶ Dunlop considers the impending flow of oil from Azerbaijan through Chechnia to be a major factor precipitating the pressure from the 'party of war' in Moscow for an attack on Dudaev in that year. He criticizes both El'tsin and Dudaev for their unwillingness to compromise, and especially faults El'tsin for refusing to meet Dudaev.⁷⁷ Anatol Lieven recognizes the importance of the oil issue but also cites the desire of circles around El'tsin for a 'small victorious war' that would raise his popular support before the presidential elections. The main point of Lieven's study is the weakness not only of Russian nationalism, but of the Russian state and the Army. Despite the wishes of the leaders, the people did not want to fight an imperial war.⁷⁸ As a result, the Russian Army was defeated in 1996 and Lebed brokered a settlement, promising that Russia would leave Chechnia alone until 2001.⁷⁹

Between 1997 and 1999, however, the Chechen authorities under the new elected president, Aslan Maskhadov, lost control to field commanders who sought to turn Chechnya into an Islamic state under sharia law. Criminal gangs kidnapped Russians and foreigners, extending their activities across Russia. In August 1999, two of these field

⁷⁴ John B. Dunlop, *Russia confronts Chechnya: roots of a separatist conflict* (Cambridge, 1998); Lieven, *Chechnya*; Carlotta Gall and Thomas de Waal, *Chechnya: a small victorious war* (London, 1997; American edn, *Chechnya: calamity in the Caucasus* (New York, 1998)); Sebastian Smith, *Allah's mountains: politics and war in the Russian Caucasus* (London, 1997); Ben Fowkes, ed., *Russia and Chechnya: the permanent crisis* (Basingstoke, 1998); Vanora Bennett, *Crying wolf: the return of war to Chechnya* (London, 1998); Anna Politkovskaya, *A dirty war: a Russian reporter in Chechnya* (London, 2001); idem, *A small corner of Hell* (Chicago, 2003); Matthew Evangelista, *The Chechen wars: will Russia go the way of the Soviet Union?* (Washington, 2002); Tracey C. German, *Russia's Chechen war* (London and New York, 2003).

⁷⁵ See the accounts by Politkovskaya and Gall and de Waal in the previous note.

⁷⁶ Dunlop, *Russia confronts Chechnya*, pp. 7–123.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 153, 164–223.

⁷⁸ Lieven, *Chechnya*, pp. 84–96.

⁷⁹ Evangelista, *Chechen wars*, pp. 40–5.

commanders, Shamil Basaev and an Arab known as Khattab, led an attack across the border into Dagestan, a predominantly Muslim republic within the Russian Federation, with the aim of ultimately creating an Islamic state across the North Caucasus. Soon afterwards, explosions occurred in blocks of flats in Moscow and other Russian cities, killing several hundred people. The Russian authorities blamed Chechen terrorists for these explosions and began the successful campaign which re-took Grozny and propelled Putin to power. Russian opinion at this time was behind the war, which the government portrayed as necessary to defend the security of the Federation. Meanwhile, evidence emerged that seemed to suggest that the FSB itself had planted explosives in a block in Riazan, but had been foiled by vigilant residents. Matthew Evangelista's account of the origins of the second war gives some credence to the view that the FSB deliberately organized the explosions with the aim of justifying a conflict with Chechnia. He also draws attention to the alleged links between Basaev and the oligarch Berezovskii, who at that time was strongly supporting Putin.⁸⁰

Was Chechen independence potentially the first stage in the disintegration of the Russian Federation? The leaders of Tatarstan and Bashkortostan, republics of two of the most important Muslim nationalities within Russia, had been conciliated since 1994 by the signing of bilateral treaties with Moscow, which had led to the system of asymmetrical federalism characteristic of the El'tsin period. The demands of the Tatars and Bashkirs were as much regionalist as nationalist or religious. It was only in Chechnya that the leadership was so intransigent, willing to resort to armed struggle, and to appeal for an Islamic holy war, as Dudaev did from 1994 in order to win Muslim foreign support.⁸¹ Gail Lapidus, describing how regional leaders after the 1998 crash unilaterally promoted autarchic measures, spoke of Russia facing 'an uncontrolled and seemingly uncontrollable unravelling of central power'.⁸² But, Evangelista argues, El'tsin and Putin managed to solve disputes with the regions by negotiation and political pressure, and this might have been done with Chechnia as well.⁸³ As Galina Yemelianova sadly concludes in her *Russia and Islam*, 'The Russo-Chechen war ... has inflicted terrible damage to Russian federalism and Russian-Muslim relations.'⁸⁴ Dmitri Trenin, whose book *The end of Eurasia* is a passionate rejection of the possibility of reviving the empire, makes the telling point that, since the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, the Russian Army has fought only against Muslims. He argues now that 'Russia's prime task is integrating its own Muslims and making them feel like Russians.'⁸⁵

The Russian government never described the war as one against Islam; Putin, indeed, appointed the senior religious leader, the Mufti of Chechnia, Akhmed Kadyrov, to be the leader of the administration⁸⁶ and then in 2003 ensured his election as president of Chechnia. (Kadyrov was assassinated in May 2004.) Nor was it described as a war against Chechens, but a war against bandits and terrorists. By the late 1990s, however, the political

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 46–85.

⁸¹ Mikhail A. Alexseev, 'Assymetric Russia: promises and dangers', in Mikhail A. Alexseev, ed., *Center-periphery conflict in post-Soviet Russia: a federation imperilled* (New York, 1999), pp. 247–79; Galina M. Yemelianova, *Russia and Islam: a historical survey* (Basingstoke and New York, 2002), pp. 175–93.

⁸² Gail W. Lapidus, 'Assymetrical federalism and state breakdown in Russia', *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 15 (1999), pp. 74–82, at p. 76.

⁸³ Evangelista, *Chechen wars*, pp. 86–123.

⁸⁴ Yemelianova, *Russia*, p. 200. See also Hilary Pilkington and Galina Yemelianova, *Islam and post-Soviet Russia: public and private faces* (London and New York, 2003).

⁸⁵ Dmitri Trenin, *The end of Eurasia: Russia on the border between geopolitics and globalization* (Washington and Moscow, 2002), pp. 281–2.

⁸⁶ German, *Russia's Chechen wars*, pp. 160, 220 n. 2.

context had changed. The Taliban came to power in Afghanistan in 1996 and Russia was giving assistance to the ex-Communist regimes in Central Asia who were threatened by cross-border incursions.⁸⁷ By 2000, Russia was threatening air strikes against Islamic training camps in Afghanistan.⁸⁸ Yaacov Ro'i has argued that the Islamic threat to the Central Asian regimes in the 1990s allowed Russia to aim to regain its former imperial influence in the region, and to claim justification for increasing the powers of the executive and the security services at the expense of human rights.⁸⁹ The Chechen wars boosted the involvement of foreign Islamists in the Northern Caucasus, possibly with finance from the Gulf states,⁹⁰ and led to the Chechen separatists developing links with Osama bin Laden and the Taliban. Consequently the Russian leadership could present its struggle against Chechen independence as part of a struggle against international Islamic terrorism.⁹¹

As foreign policy specialists have shown, the al-Qa'eda attacks of 11 September 2001 on New York and Washington allowed Putin some success in aligning his fight in Chechnia with the American-led 'war on terrorism'. His willingness to co-operate with the West to the extent of raising no objection to the deployment of US forces in Central Asia has been seen by Bobo Lo as consistent with his 'Westerncentrism' in foreign policy matters, linked with his desire to make Russia strong by promoting ties with the European Union and integration into world economic institutions.⁹² Alex Pravda has noted that much of the political elite was critical of Putin's apparent subordination of Russia's interests to the West, and that public opinion was also sceptical.⁹³ Shevtsova points out that it was his authoritarianism that enabled him to move Russia towards the West.⁹⁴

Putin's co-operation with the USA during the war against the Taliban in 2002 did not mean that Russia was finally joining the West. In its relations with two Muslim states, Iran and Iraq, which America defined as part of an 'axis of evil', it followed its economic interests. Russia's opposition to the 2003 war against Iraq was shared by France and Germany, allowing Putin to avoid a confrontation with the West as a whole. Bobo Lo finds that Putin was not committed to a single identity in world affairs: 'he is European in Europe, transcontinental "strategic partner" when dealing with the United States, Asian and Eurasian in Asia, and cautiously integrationist in the CIS'.⁹⁵

⁸⁷ Lena Jonson, 'Russia and Central Asia', in Roy Allison and Lena Jonson, eds., *Central Asian security: the new international context* (London and Washington, 2001), pp. 95–126.

⁸⁸ Alexei Malashenko, 'Islam in Central Asia', in Allison and Jonson, eds., *Central Asian security*, p. 60.

⁸⁹ Yaacov Ro'i, *Islam in the CIS: a threat to stability?* (London, 2001), pp. 58–60.

⁹⁰ Anna Matveeva, 'The Islamic challenge in post-Soviet Eurasia', in Lena Jonson and Murad Esenov, eds., *Political Islam and conflicts in Russia and Central Asia* (Stockholm, 1999), pp. 38–40.

⁹¹ Mark A. Smith, 'Russia and Islam', Conflict Studies Research Centre, Sandhurst, Report F73, August 2001.

⁹² Bobo Lo, *Vladimir Putin and the evolution of Russian foreign policy* (London and Malden, MA, 2003), pp. 115–32.

⁹³ Alex Pravda, 'Putin's foreign policy after 11 September: radical or revolutionary?', in Gabriel Gorodetsky, ed., *Russia between East and West: Russian foreign policy on the threshold of the twenty-first century* (London and Portland, OR, 2003), pp. 39–57.

⁹⁴ Shevtsova, *Putin's Russia*, p. 219.

⁹⁵ Lo, *Vladimir Putin*, p. 131. For a longer historical perspective on discussions of Russian identity and foreign policy, see Iver B. Neumann, *Russia and the idea of Europe* (London and New York, 1996); Ilya Prizel, *National identity and foreign policy: nationalism and leadership in Poland, Russia and Ukraine* (Cambridge and New York, 1998); Astrid S. Tuminez, *Russian nationalism since 1856: ideology and the making of foreign policy* (Lanham, MD, and Oxford, 2000); Ted Hopf, *Social construction of international politics: identities and foreign policies, Moscow, 1955 and 1999* (Ithaca, NY, and London, 2002).

Internally, Russia's development in Putin's first term was away from the Western model. Critical voices in the media, which had emerged under Gorbachev and El'tsin, were gradually silenced. Opposition activity was allowed, but kept under control by an increasingly powerful security service. The imprisonment of businessmen for showing political independence showed how far Russia was from the rule of law. Elections were still held but, as in Soviet times, they were not allowed to change anything. The regime was reminiscent of Peter the Great, who introduced some Westernizing reforms while strengthening autocracy and serfdom. As well as pursuing economic reform, Putin sought to co-operate with the West to obtain trade and technology, in order to strengthen the state. The use of both tsarist and Soviet symbols reflected that the Russian Federation was far from being a nation-state. The leadership rejected ethnic Russian nationalism, seeing itself as the heir of the Soviet multi-national state; it was forcibly incorporating the Chechens, and was still putting economic and political pressure on some of the former Soviet republics. Putin's nationalism was state-centred and in some ways imperial. Russia's increasing authoritarianism was antagonizing its Western partners, who were ceasing to believe that Russia might soon evolve towards democracy.⁹⁶ Russia might be an economic and strategic partner of the West, but it was not becoming part of the West.

⁹⁶ On the limits to Russia's co-operation with the West, see Daniel Trenin, 'Russia and the West: what you see is what you get', *The World Today*, 60, no. 4 (2004), pp. 13–15.