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CONTENDING CONCEPTIONS OF NATION AND STATE
IN POST-COMMUNIST RUSSIAN POLITICS

Executive Summary
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This study concerns the struggle now under way within Russian political society to define a national identity for the new Russian state. Accordingly, its focus falls on efforts to produce a distinct national consciousness that have been undertaken by the most developed political parties within the various "centers" that have appeared on the political spectrum: a liberal center (here represented by the Republican Party of Russia [RPR]), the social-democratic center (represented by the Social Democratic Party of Russia [SDPR]), the opposition center (represented by the Democratic Party of Russia [DPR]) and the right center (represented by the Russian Christian Democratic Movement [RCDM]).

Relying on interviews with the leaders of these parties, as well as on texts (programs, speeches, commentaries, and so on) that they themselves have provided as authoritative versions of their respective parties' positions on the matter of Russian statehood, the analysis has sought to determine the discourses that underlie and structure these texts. In short, the object has been to isolate for each a basic system of propositions and normative principles (a discourse) on which a given text would depend in order to communicate meaningful statements on the issue at hand. In so doing, two things have become apparent. First, despite differences in approach to, and emphasis on, the question of Russian statehood, the RPR, SDPR and DPR all participate in what might be called a "national-democratic" discourse. Their root conceptions pivot on the normative imperative of popular sovereignty,
expressed through democratic institutions, as the sole means for resolving the current crisis of
statehood. Their emphasis is, then, on a process that is believed to lead to a result - one
version or another of association for Russia's constituent units, a parliamentary or a
presidential republic as the case may be, and so forth - rather than on a specific scheme that
must be brought to fruition. In reply to the question of Russia's political identity, the
tendency in their discourse is to join democratic ideals to the country's emerging national
consciousness.

Second, the discourse of the RCDM stands in sharp contrast to that of the other three.
Inasmuch as it contains a ready-made identity organized around "the Russian idea" - a
primitive, irrational and emotive construct said to embody the unique essence of
Russianness - it implicitly and explicitly regards all other visions of nation and state in Russia
as the handiwork of dark forces colluding to extinguish the flame of national life. In so
doing, however, it also appears to be (re)generating a closed discourse which - quite unlike
that of the "national-democratic" orientation - shields any and all of its empirical propositions
from criticism. This closure follows from the boundary introduced between "Russian"
(something uniquely "ours" and good) and "other" (foreign, harmful, treacherous,
destructive), associating the former with the prescriptions of the RCDM and linking "other"
(other ideas, other political parties, other countries) with all that would visit ill on "us". For
this reason, its discourse can be labelled, "national-authoritarian". Rather than viewing
national identity and state organization as the outcomes of an open process that in principle
involves all individuals (qua individuals), the discourse of the RCDM is hinged to an alleged
organic solidarity - extant objectively but dangerously diminished by the exsanguinating
forces of Communism and other "foreign" malefactors, such as Western-style democracy - which must be reconstituted in the world if Russia is to survive.

The implications of this study suggest that a certain political advantage may be passing to the RCDM and others in the "right center" who have fashioned a national identity free of both the taint of discredited Communism and the responsibility for social hardships that contextually accrue to the "national-democrats" associated with the present government and the setbacks it has experienced in the economic and state-building fields alike. Should further dislocations in Russian society tip the political balance more toward political extremism, the discourse of today's right-center may increasingly come to occupy center stage.
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On the seemingly limitless list of problems confronting the young Russian polity, none stands out in sharper relief than does the crisis of national-political identity. Expressions of this identity crisis, to be sure, are interlaced with other immediate concerns, such as the catastrophic situation obtaining in the economy and the consequent tendency to assign blame to conspicuous, if not significant, others. Inter-ethnic flare ups - the explosive potential of which is suggested by the recent attack by Russians in uniform on non-Russian merchants in the country's two largest cities - serve as particularly unpleasant reminders of this nexus.

But embedded as it may be in the welter of severities that more and more define daily existence in Russia, the crisis of national-political identity assumes a certain salience of its own. For a political framework within which meanings can be generated, values assigned, actions undertaken and the inevitable hardships endured would hinge on a provisionally compelling answer to - and, accordingly, some consensus on - the question: Who are we?

We might gauge the import of this question in today's Russia, as well as the contention that surrounds each of the responses to it that have been put forward, by briefly examining its socio-psychological, historical and political dimensions. Firstly, national-political identity can be understood as a particular variant of group identity, both establishing psychological moorings for the self in a world that would otherwise represent a sea of chronic anxiety, and providing a basis for social action. In the same way that group identity might function to define and socially integrate the self, so too might perceived threats to the group be experienced as threats to the self, requiring counter-actions to defend and enhance the
group in question. National communities sometimes experience these threats in a directly physical fashion "from without" (war, invasion). Equally, they might take a purely symbolic form as collapse "from within" (revolution). In the second case, germane to the contemporary situation in Russia, national identity would become a site for contending conceptions seeking to fill with one or another "new" national myth the symbolic void resulting from the implosion of the old order.

Secondly, the historical dimension of the problem overlaps the socio-psychological one in some important ways. On the one hand, prior to 1991, the Russian people had constituted the predominant group in the Empire and, thereafter, in the USSR. In either instance, the political entity housing this people was not a nation state. In the case of the Empire and in the Soviet Union as well, the very idea of a secular Russian state had no official currency - although a veritable babble of nationalistic conceptions springing from the pens of the intelligentsia often accompanied the state's supra-national pretensions. To the degree that Russians regarded the USSR as "their" state, its collapse would trigger a disruption of the self/group identity relationship mentioned, above. Additionally, in the context of this collapse, the question - Who are we? - is ramified further. As we see below, past attachments can easily engender replies along the lines of: "We are the people who inhabit traditional Russian lands". Here, "traditional" represents a code referring not to the present boundaries of the Russian Republic but to the greatest territorial expanse of the previous Empire or the USSR. Although this response to the question of identity does not conform to conventional notions of statehood, it nonetheless carries a powerful symbolic connotation in the Russian case, harkening back to some national greatness than can and should be
recovered, as well as summoning Russians to a reunification with some 25 million of their
countrymen living in the other former union republics.

Finally, along with these socio-psychological and historical factors, we can distinguish
a political moment that further exacerbates the process of national identity formation in
postcommunist Russia. We might recall in this respect the fact that a new identity is not
unrelated to the demise of the old. On one hand, as Rachel Walker has argued, identity
problems in all postcommunist societies have been generated in large measure by that which
preceded them. In the same way that the official ideology of Marxism-Leninism functioned
to suppress, rather than to address, the question of identity, the Communist party precluded
the appearance of social communication that might constitute the category, "we", by
monopolizing the position of subject within the constrained and distorted system of
communication that it controlled. Consequently, as Marxism-Leninism became discredited
and the party lost its dominant role in society, the hitherto suppressed problem of identity has
emerged with great urgency and explosive potential."

On the other hand, as Igor Kon has remarked, the suppression of expression
exercised by the party - at least during the Brezhnev period - was not total. Although
political communication in the proper sense of the term was forbidden, criticism of social
phenomena from a purely moral, yet apolitical, perspective was tolerated, if not
encouraged, in the latter part of the Soviet era. Its appearance tended to structure social
thinking in a way that elided practical responses to those problems that were thematized - for
practical responses required the imprimatur of the authorities - in favor of a grand quest for
"the good". Inasmuch as "the good" gradually - or suddenly, as the case may have been -
acquired the nuance of something unrealizable within the existing system, large segments of
the intelligentsia began to look elsewhere - either to the past or to the West - for a new
(utopian) point of reference. Felt complicity in the wrongdoing of the now-exposed Soviet
order, according to Kon, only intensified an interest in forgetting that seized great numbers of
the intellectual establishment. And, of course, the other side of "forgetting" would be
represented either by "remembering" (the past) or "envisaging" (a future modeled on
Communism's apparently triumphant nemesis, the West).

The collapse of the USSR in the wake of the failed August coup focused the problem
of national-political identity in a particularly acute way. The contagion of separatist demands
within the Russian Republic - appearing in certain "national autonomies" such as Tatarstan
and Checheniya, later in efforts to create a Siberian Republic, a Far Eastern Republic and so
forth - promised to sunder the newly-formed Russian state in much the same way that its
predecessor, the USSR, had broken apart and expired. At the same time, a host of new
voices have been on hand to address the question of national identity, namely, organized
political forces in the form of parties, movements and blocs. As important as past debates
fought out by intellectuals in their respective books, journals and pamphlets may have been to
framing the issue, the advent of organized political forces with a presence in parliament and a
potential for reaching the mass public has represented a qualitatively new stage in the contest
for the establishment of Russian national-political identity. It is these forces and their rival
conceptions of what the Russian state represents that constitute the object of this study.
Scope and Method

Previous research has identified four political groupings or "centers" within the spectrum of Russian political society in the aftermath of Russian's Sixth Congress of People's Deputies (April, 1992). Here, we set out briefly the groupings in question according to the particular positions that they have assumed with respect to the fundamental issues dominating Russian politics at this juncture - the issues of state structure and property relations. Their issue orientations are discussed at some length in the succeeding section.

1. The Right-Center. This grouping is anchored in the Russian Popular Assembly, itself a bloc principally comprised of the "patriotic" association, the Russian Social Union - an extra-parliamentary organization spawned by the parliamentary faction, "Russia" - and two parties - the Russian Christian Democratic Movement and the Constitutional Democratic Party - that had been part of the "democratic movement" until November 1991, at which time they left the Democratic Russia coalition, charging it with "national-state nihilism".

2. The Left-Center. This "center" is based on New Russia, a coalition that includes the Social Democratic Party of Russia, the People's Party of Russia, the Social-Liberal Party and the Peasant Party of Russia. While retaining their membership in the ranks of "the democratic forces", these parties have distanced themselves considerably from Democratic Russia due to a combination of programmatic and organizational differences.

3. The Liberal-Center. Democratic Russia - minus, of course, those parties, groups and personages that have terminated or suspended their membership since its Second Congress (November 1991) - occupies this position on the political spectrum. Once the umbrella
for effectively all political parties in the "democratic" front, by summer of 1992 the Republican Party of Russia had become the last party of any size to maintain an active membership in the organization.  

4. **The Opposition-Center.** This appellation refers to the genesis of this bloc - its opposition to the monetarist cast of the economic reform pursued by the Government team headed by Egor Gaidar - rather than to the political progress it has enjoyed since formally constituting itself as Civic Unity in June 1992. The bloc itself is comprised of Renewal, a party created in May 1993 on the basis of the Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs (headed by Arkadii Vol'skii), the Democratic Party of Russia (which had left Democratic Russia along with its then coalition partners - the Russian Christian Democratic Movement and the Constitutional Democratic Party - but subsequently refused to follow these parties as they moved rightward to ally with certain "patriotic" forces), and the People's Party of Free Russia (led by Russia's Vice-President, Aleksandr Rutskoi).

The method adopted to analyze the conception of national-political identity pertinent to each of these four "centers" in contemporary Russian political society involves both a theoretic orientation and a specific research strategy. With respect to the former, I proceed from the insight of structural and post-structural analysis that language constitutes the world and that subjectivity is itself constituted by language use. Following, in this vein, the approach articulated by Murray Edelman, we can regard politics as a manifestly linguistic phenomenon that is defined by conflicts over meaning. As far as the object of our investigation is concerned, then, we understand the conceptions of state and nation proffered by each of the four political "centers" in question to be texts that generate a particular set of
meanings relevant to the issue of national-political identity. Moreover, the generation of such
texts is regarded as a social, rather than as an individual, enterprise in which meanings are
(re)constituted out of available cultural materials (other "texts"), negotiated in conjunction
with others (real or imagined) and put forward in opposition to other competing texts.

The second point about method, a specific research strategy, involves three issues
related to the various political conceptions of nation and state and how they might be studied.
First, since each of the four "centers" that have been identified represents a coalition of
forces rather than a single or uniform organization, to which member of the respective
coalition should one turn in order to acquire the most articulate version of each of their
respective conceptions? Here, the judgement is that in each case that coalition partner
(political party) which is most developed in terms of its age, organizational structure,
membership and activity would represent the most fully articulated position for the respective
"center", itself. Accordingly, the Russian Christian Democratic Movement (RCDM) has
been selected as representative of the right-center; the Social Democratic Party of Russia
(SDPR) serves to illustrate the conception of the left-center; the Republican Party of Russia
(RPR) articulates the position of the liberal-center; and the Democratic Party of Russia (DPR)
represents the opposition-center.17

Second, which specific texts should be included in the analysis of the conceptions of
state and nation pertinent to each of these "centers"? The tack taken, here, has been to let
the representatives of the respective parties themselves make this decision. Accordingly, the
programs, speeches and articles that serve as our texts for analysis were selected by top
officials in these parties as those tracts which best articulate the position of each of their parties on the question of state and nation in contemporary Russia.

Finally, additional information on our topic was gathered in the course of interviews conducted in July and August 1992 with leaders of the parties in question. These interviews revolved around a thematic question: What is your party’s conception of gosudarstvennost’ ["statehood" in a strong sense that encompasses national-political identity as well] and how is it distinguished from the conceptions of other parties? Follow-up questions were then employed to probe the initial responses of party leaders. In all cases, these interviews contributed significantly to reaching a fuller understanding of their respective positions on this issue.

Democratic Myths of State and Nation

The images of state and nation projected by the four parties in our sample can readily be identified as contemporary variants of two distinct patterns of national myth-making familiar to students of nationalism. The first, associated with the American and French revolutions of the eighteenth century, might be called the "national-democratic" orientation. Here, members of a nation are regarded as those sharing a particular commitment to certain universal human values - liberty, equality and fraternity, in the well-known shibboleth - that are thought to be immanent within the community in question. The nation is regarded as worthy inasmuch as it reveals its commitment to these values in a struggle against an oppressive other - monarchy, empire - that actively denies these values and, hence, the nation itself. Such palpable markers as language or skin color play no role in defining the national
community in this conception. Rather, the existence of, and value attributed to, the nation is derived from its putative relation to these abstract ideas. As a consequence, this conception can be regarded as "outward looking". Its core values belong (potentially) to all people; other nations and states acquire either positive or negative significance insofar as they display these same values. In principle, these values do not so much point inwardly toward a group revered for its intrinsic worth but outwardly toward a universal human community based on common ideals.

The second orientation which appeared historically on the heels of, and in reaction to, the first might be called "national-autocratic". Here, national identity appeared as the counter-point to a universal human community. Associated with the use of nationalism to generate allegiances to dynastic systems threatened internally and externally by national-democratic ideas, this version of nation constructed itself out of such visible or audible markers as physical features and language, while impressing cultural memory and popular legends into the service of myth-making for the state. Under this conception, it is not the participation of the national community in some universal scheme of values but some (allegedly) inherent quality of the (national) group that establishes its worth and sets it apart from, if not above, other nations.

Three of the parties in our sample - the RPR, the SDPR and the DPR - share a discourse on the theme of nation and state that would place them squarely within the national-democratic category. In terms of our above discussion, their act of "forgetting" (the Soviet period) has taken the form of "envisaging" a new Russia based on ideas derived from the West - the primacy of the individual over class or ethnic group, popular sovereignty, rule of
law and so forth. The fourth party in our sample, however, does not participate in this discourse. Rather, the RCDM's act of "forgetting" involves a "remembering" - of national-cultural specificities, of some past greatness of the Russian people which must be revived within a uniquely Russian state - which would locate it within the national-autocratic tradition. Given this division between the parties in question, we outline in this section the perspectives on state and nation particular to the parties of national-democratic orientation, reserving an analysis of those of the RCDM for the section that follows.

**The Liberal Orientation of the RPR.** The consistency of the RPR's liberal orientation is noteworthy. Its discourse on the question of state and nation is anchored in the principle of maximum "personal freedom for each member of society" within a minimalist state based on "social partnership and pragmatism". Accordingly, it regards "the rights of the individual - conferred by birth - [as] above the rights of nations, classes and other group interests" and portrays the authentic state, along with all other public structures, as created freely by individuals in order to protect and secure the free exercise of their rights, which may include the protection of "national rights" should the individuals, qua individuals, be so disposed.

Having defined the political universe as the product of voluntary association among free individuals, the RPR eschews all ready-made solutions to the problems of Russian statehood. Indeed, it regards the problem as unsolvable in itself. In consonance with its liberal orientation, then, it looks to individuals for a solution, and regards negotiated agreements based on the mutual recognition of self-interest as a motor for a process of conflict resolution that will extend over a considerable period of time. Accordingly, the RPR
insists on the right to self-determination for all within the Russian Federation who choose to exercise it. But consonant with its principle of pragmatism, the RPR does not foresee in the immediate future that social partnership required for proper state formation as somehow springing to life whole and fully intact. Rather, it depicts the old Soviet order as "totalitarianism and a unitarist-conservative center" with which the peoples of the former USSR have contended in order to assert their freedom. Over the course of the struggle against this center, the forces of narrow nationalism have been unleashed. These have dismembered the USSR and now threaten to repeat the same result in Russia. In order to reduce the risk of violence and dislocation inherent in this situation, the RPR appeals to international law and, paradoxically, to the contradiction inherent within it. With respect to the first appeal, it endorses the Helsinki Accords on the inviolability of borders in Europe, implicitly opposing either Russian territorial claims on the former union republics or restrictions on the right of self-determination. This position is justified along pragmatic lines: It is better to have friendly neighbors outside the borders of the state than enemy nations inside a unified and indivisible state. We hope in future that a reborn Russia will become that legal, democratic and enlightened state to which all the peoples of the former USSR will be drawn toward union. Its second appeal observes that the principles of the sovereignty of states and a people's right of self-determination represents for Russia an insoluble contradiction today for which any imposed solution will produce in Russia another Ulster. Hence, the RPR accepts the idea of national-territorial regions for those of the country's non-Russian minorities wishing to remain in the federation, and self-determination for those who do not, applying to these
collectivities the same logic of agreement through negotiation and social partnership that it ascribes to the individuals celebrated in its discourse.  

The Left Orientation of SDPR. Like the RPR, the particular orientation brought by the SDPR to the present crisis surrounding the formation and nature of the Russian state tends to regard the problem in itself as resistant to any a priori solutions. Similarly, it shares with the RPR the overriding objective of Russia's return to the world community, a return predicated on the quest for "a community based on the humanist ideals . . . of freedom, justice and solidarity." Since it believes that "our Russian-style cart" is of little service in this respect, it advocates "learning from others while preserving our human dignity." In this regard, the value of "Russianness" in the thinking of the SDPR would seem to count for even less than the rather negligible semiotic value awarded it in that of the RPR.

The crux of the difference between the RPR and the SDPR on the problem of Russian statehood would appear to result from the fact that whereas the liberal orientation of the RPR awards primacy to individuals, that of the SDPR allows for other factors that may completely overshadow the individual's role within a particular historical context. Such a context, in its view, has obtained both in the USSR and in postcommunist Russia. The particular power configuration associated with the term "nomenklatura" would represent the key to understanding it.

The idea of the nomenklatura as a self-appointed power group carrying out repressive and parasitic activities in those places where it has monopolized economic and political power has dominated SDPR thinking since the very inception of the party. Consequently, the SDPR frames the issue of the state by grounding it in a prior question: "Whose state"? That
is, it begins its analysis of the crisis of Russian statehood by interpreting the issue as the problem of national separatism within Russia. Like the RPR, it endorses the principle of national self-determination; and like the RPR, it sees negotiated agreements as the only alternative to the "path leading directly to calamity." But unlike the RPR, it draws a qualitative distinction between contracting individuals, on the one hand, and contracting collectivities, on the other. For in the latter instance it sees an opportunity for the forces of the nomenklatura - or, in its updated terminology, "postnomenklatura monopoly" - to stimulate and harness nationalist emotions for the purpose of maintaining a variant of the old order - an order which negated the very values associated with its brand of democratic nationalism - as well as their privileged position within it. Therefore, the SDPR's endorsement of the abstract right of self-determination is qualified by the application of a concrete standard - Who is organizing and who stands to benefit from this self-determination, and what is its relation to the universal values of freedom, justice and solidarity? In sum, the SDPR and RPR share a common discourse on the matter of Russian statehood, one marked by both pragmatism and a search for the socio-economic roots of the national question dividing Russia today. Their differences on particular concerns related to the problem of the state seem to stem from their respective ideological orientations, whether social democratic or liberal.

The Statist Orientation of the DPR. According to its program, the primary reason for the formation of Civic Union as a political center opposed to Russia’s Government concerns the baneful effects of that Government’s economic policies on the country’s "national-state structures", and their incitement of separatist tendencies. The DPR has long distinguished
itself within Russia’s democratic movement by the attention that it has paid to the desideratum of maintaining a unified state. While making common cause with the RPR and SDPR during the struggle against the Communist regime, the DPR had nonetheless dissented from their view that the overthrow of Communism would invariably entail the break-up of the USSR.41 Largely out of concern for this very prospect, in December 1990 it had formed with the RCDM and the Constitutional Democratic Party a separate bloc within Democratic Russia - Popular Consensus - aimed at preserving the union while disposing of the Communist authorities.42 In certain respects, its thinking on the question of the state represents the reverse of that shared by the RPR and the SDPR. Whereas the latter portray the authentic state as emerging out of a rightly ordered society - whether liberal or social democratic - the DPR regards all social values as conditioned in the first instance by the existence of "a strong democratic state".43 Rather than defocusing the issue of the state and searching for solutions in the socio-economic sphere to the problem it presents, the DPR foregrounds the state, arguing that "the question of statehood [gosudarstvennost'] has become a major [factor] defining the direction of the movement of political forces. It is senseless to discuss the remaining [problems] without having solved this one".44

The DPR regards the dissolution of the USSR and the "harsher form" of disintegration toward which Russia is currently heading45 as the result of a continuation by the democratic forces of the same "destructive policies" - those of national-territorialautonomies with the right to self-determination - inaugurated by the Communists.46 Consequently, it considers the indivisibility of Russia to be "axiomatic"47 and views as the optimal structure a unitary
state with administrative divisions established by the center independently of national composition.\textsuperscript{48}

Aside from major differences on the surface level of narrative that would separate the views of the DPR from those of the other two parties discussed, a closer examination of the "logic" of the DPR's position would indicate that, by and large, all three parties share a common discourse. Indeed, it is this commonality that enables them to argue with one another. For instance, although the RPR and SDPR stand for a federal solution and the DPR for a unitary one, the DPR accepts federalism as the only viable alternative for the immediate future and expects a unitary state, encompassing all of the old USSR, to grow out of negotiations based on enlightened self-interest.\textsuperscript{49} It further shares in this respect the views of the SDPR, interpreting the appearance of separatist movements as resulting from the machinations of the old nomenklatura inciting the forces of mindless nationalism.\textsuperscript{50}

Although the DPR is far more solicitous toward allegedly Russian national traits - "kindness, well-wishing [toward others], good spiritedness, a broad nature" - that would serve as factors promoting inter-ethnic harmony in a future union, these features are cited more as incidental pluses than as claims to some national greatness or civilizing mission.\textsuperscript{51} Finally, even its stand against the right of self-determination is based on its own application of the principle of "the rights of the individual over [those of] the group or nation".\textsuperscript{52} While the RPR and SDPR might reject the conclusion drawn here by the DPR, they would fully endorse the premise from which it has been derived.

To conclude this section, we make three general observations that should help to establish the contrast evident between the national-democratic discourse shared by these three
parties and that of the RCDM that we take up, below. First, due to their previous association of the ideas of state and nation with the Communist regime against which they had fought, there had been a marked reluctance among Russia’s democratic forces to thematize these issues. It was not until the very end of the 1980s that Russian national interests began to gain currency among Russia’s "democrats". Second, when the national idea was taken up by the "democrats", it appeared as a rather vague indictment of the Communist regime allegedly responsible for destroying Russian culture and traditions and impeding a renaissance of Russian national life. In short, the national idea was thematized as an absence - due to Communism - that only required Communism’s overthrow in order to fulfill itself. The emphasis on the individual that we have observed in the discourse of the national-democrats and their relative neglect either to produce or to employ national symbols of group identity would testify to this particular political history. Moreover, this history underscores a vulnerability on the part of the national-democrats with respect to their opponents on the right. Having developed their idea of "Russia" within the framework of their struggle against the Communist regime, the force of that idea appears to have spent itself along with Communism’s collapse. The national-democrats now lack an opponent against whom this idea might again be deployed. Finally, and relatedly, since their political project heralds material progress through the creation of a market economy - said to engender that society of free individuals which functions as a primary term in their discourse - the ideology of the national-democrats is open to assessment on the basis of visible results. As we see in the following section, the discourse of the RCDM neither shares this liability nor lacks for opponents allegedly threatening that Russia which they would protect and enhance.
The RCDM’s Myth of National Salvation and Rebirth

Although a number of themes long associated with Russian right-wing ideology reverberate through the rhetoric of the RCDM and its affiliates in the Russian Popular Assembly, we might begin our discussion of the RCDM’s ideas on state and nation by distinguishing them from those of other groups on the extreme right excluded from this study. First, unlike the extreme right and its demonization of Jews, RCDM ideology is not overtly racist. It locates the struggle for an authentic Russian nation and state on the level of culture and politics rather than on that of biology. Second, the RCDM has entered a coalition with others on the right somewhat reluctantly. Its leadership would have preferred to maintain the party’s earlier alliance with Russia’s “democratic” forces, but found this impossible by reason of the latter’s alleged betrayal of Russia’s state interests. Finally, the RCDM and its new-found partners have attempted to disassociate themselves from the extreme right wing in Russian politics, anticipating a date in the near future when they themselves will take power. This prospect, and the related need to draw allies from other segments of the political spectrum - especially from those identified as “statists” in the previous section - may constitute a moderating influence on RCDM rhetoric.

These qualifications notwithstanding, an unbridgeable gulf separates the conceptions of nation and state found among Russia’s national-democrats from that evident in the conceptions of the RCDM. At the level of language, the sharpest way to categorize these differences would be to note that whereas the discourse of the national-democrats is skewed toward the practical dimension, that of the RCDM leans heavily, if not entirely, on the
Indeed, apparently practical concerns - whether economic problems, the hardships endured by refugees, the preservation of historic sites and so forth - surface in RCDM rhetoric only insofar as they testify to the damage inflicted by nefarious others on a particular community that has repeatedly demonstrated its worthiness in the eyes of God.

The rhetorical strategy displayed by the RCDM and its partners in the right-center involves loading onto the positive axis of narrative all things associated with the Russian (russkii, rather than rossiiskii) nation, piling onto the negative axis all things connected with foreign or "other", and then associating their political opponents with this second set of terms. Since there is no apparent limit to the number of problems the right-center is keen to thematize and for which they would lay blame on foreign and domestic others, this strategy tends to result in manifest absurdities once the list of problems has been itemized and the time has arrived for proposing some solution. But the eclipse of the practical dimension of the RCDM's discourse by the noological one conceals this fact. For within the structure of its language, that which might otherwise be taken as muddled, contradictory or absurd functions instead to generate yet more alarm over the fate of "our Russia . . . which has summoned us to unify" in her defense.

A particularly rich and concentrated example of this discourse can be found in an as-yet-unpublished article by party leader, Viktor Aksyuchits, entitled "The Test of the Russian Idea". The basic (but unstated) thesis of this tract is that an ordinary consciousness is incapable of apprehending "Russia's great, historic mission" in the world. This mission "concerns an apostolic consciousness", and the thrust of the essay obviously aims at engendering such in the reader by reference to things seen and unseen, as well as to those
that must be regarded in a radically new way in order to be rightly known. It begins in the
gender of the Russian folktale with a statement of the tragic misfortune that has befallen the
Russian people. The author then immediately goes on to heighten narrative tension by
claiming that at this historical juncture when national salvation depends on the Russian people
recovering "their historical memory and national self consciousness", all of Russia's "enemies
have unfurled an unprecedented campaign of lies and slander against Russian history, culture
and the dignity of the Russian people". In calling the attention of the Russian people to this
mortal threat, the author thereby has established for himself a rhetorical position from which
to generate a national myth as generous in the positive qualities awarded to all things Russian
as it is fulsome in the heinous traits assigned to Russia's enemies.

Following Yuri Lotman, we can view this form of communication as "I-I" rather than
"I-(s)he". It is encoded against, and unintelligible to, the "other". Rather, its structure is
predicated on, and seeks to conjure, a special group of people engaged in "hyper-semiotic
autocommunication". For those within this speech community, the text "aims to become one
'great word' with one single meaning". In the present case, "the Russian idea" functions as
this "one 'great word'" while the "I-I" community would refer to those capable of
understanding it and applying it in the cause of their salvation. The pivot of this rhetorical
form hinges on its construction of a world in which "other" is defined as enemy poised to
wreak incalculable harm on "us". All negativity is associated with this enemy; all that is
good he would destroy; he seeks our ruin because we are good.

Aksyuchits unfolds this plot in his narrative by locating the Russian idea in a
community based on sobornost', a Russian version of Gemeinschaft connoting a freely
established unity marked by harmonious variety. This community is said to be unique both because it has been constantly under threat (folkloric equivalent: worthiness proven by subjection to repeated tests) and because it has been summoned to fulfill a great historical mission (folkloric equivalent: marked as "hero"). In order to accomplish each of these purposes, the community requires gosudarstvennost' (statehood), just as gosudarstvennost' is an inherently positive construct informed by the community's virtues of endurance and harmony (p.2). The conception of state and nation developed out of these primary terms is then built up by oscillations in the narrative between "constant threat" - which constructs the positive qualities of gosudarstvennost' by counterposing itself to this negative - and "historical mission" which articulates the manifestation of the positive qualities themselves.

Examining, first, the negative dimension of the narrative which, by reversal, constitutes the positive features of gosudarstvennost', we note how the text establishes a boundary known as "the organic mode of life" and then ascribes evil and destructive qualities to everything outside of this boundary. By means of various tropes, such malevolence is thereby associated with universal human values - for these are outside "the organic mode of life" - and with those who espouse them. The category, "international lumpens", plays an especially important role in this respect. "Lumpens" - from Marx's sub-proletarian declassé social elements - are said to exist outside "the organic mode of life" and to gravitate toward utopian ideologies that lead society to perdition. The "international lumpen regime" which the author claims had seized power in Russia in 1917, has extirpated national life and its very memory to an unprecedented extent. Following the failed coup of August 1991 it has not been removed from power. Rather, its first echelon has merely been replaced by its second
Russia’s enslavement by the “international lumpens” has not, therefore, ended; it has simply changed forms. Its perpetrators now call themselves "democrats" and "nationalists" but they are actually Russia’s old enemies employing new tactics to bring on further destruction. They have conspired to deprive her of her historic territories by sundering the USSR into separate states (p. 5). In Russia’s regions, they repeat this process with declarations of sovereignty and independence, "transforming Russia into the black hole of humanity, on the edges of which neither the little Baltic states, nor Europe, nor far off America can sit [without being pulled in]" (p. 7). Finally, they collude with foreign powers eager to pounce on an exsanguinated Russia, dismantling all the means of national life - education, culture, industry and so forth - and converting her into a mere supplier of raw materials for the West (pp. 9-10). Aksyuchits highlights the catastrophic aspect of this scenario by contrasting the palpable image of "the face of Russian cities" with the vistas of today’s Moscow whose streets - while "alien forces" remain in control - "look either like an Eastern bazaar or like Broadway" (p. 11). Not unexpectedly, only the rebirth of a strong Russian state can arrest and reverse this national calamity (p. 12).

The purely positive moment in the narrative is largely established by denial.7 In the same way that Russia is exculpated for her Communist past - the "international lumpens" not Russians have been responsible for that - so all potentially negative features of Russian history is said to be just the opposite of what Russia’s enemies would have them to be. Russian chauvinism has never existed.54 Unlike the imperialism of Western states which exploited, murdered and oppressed, the Russian Empire was a beneficent structure that protected and nurtured the many nations within it (pp. 2-3). Moreover, the Russian state
appears for those within it explicitly as the functional equivalent of God, externally fettering their destructive impulses as God in man's heart might do this internally (pp. 7-8). Finally, the implications of Russia's crisis of statehood are believed to extend to all humanity. Only the resurrection of a Russian state based on the Russian idea can extricate mankind from its global crisis, for this idea is "communitarian and universally human" (p. 12).

Conclusions and Prospects

It remains here to situate and to offer a word of assessment on these conceptions of nation and state which contend with one another in today's Russia. Hitherto, the ideas comprising the national-democratic variant seem to have enjoyed the advantage of their association with the prominent role played by the democratic movement in establishing a Russian state and in defending it against the coup d'etat of August 1991. But we would do well to recall the fact that "democracy" as a defining element of nation and state in the discourse of this group has derived its particular force largely by virtue of its counter-position to the odious category "communism" from which Russia would be liberated. With this victory won, the national-democratic conception of state and nation has suffered the loss of its significant other and, accordingly, much of its own significance. It is uncertain as to whether efforts to revive and sustain it - such as the national commemoration of the anniversary of the victory over Communism staged in August 1992 - will yield much fruit. In the aftermath of Communism, then, the national-democratic conception would seem to face its greatest challenge. Having established for themselves a political credibility on the basis of a discourse heralding the advent of material progress, once the principal obstacle to it - the wasteful and irrational
Communist system - had been removed, those of national-democratic persuasion now find themselves at a distinct disadvantage before their opponents on the right. Not only are they easily saddled with responsibility for social and economic crisis now unfolding in Russia, but their basic values of individualism and democracy can be portrayed as destructive foreign notions that have led to national debacle.

Herein lies the force of the right-wing’s discourse as exemplified in our discussion of the RCDM’s conception of *gosudarstvennost*. Paradoxically, its practical political significance consists in the fact that it only touches the plane of practical concerns in order to gather materials for elaborating its Manichaean claims concerning the nefarious work of Russia’s enemies, the consequent suffering of the nation and the unattended project of Russia’s mission in the world. In this respect, the absence of a practical program may count as the discourse’s foremost political strength. Whereas by its own pragmatic standard of demonstrable results, the national-democratic conception can be judged and found wanting, the same is not true of the national-autocratic one. For the latter derives its normative core from mystical principles such as the Russian idea which serve to (re)interpret whatever demonstrable results are under consideration. In any and all cases, failures, problems, calamities and so forth could never, within the structure of the discourse, trace themselves back to a flawed conception. Rather, this is the liability of national-democrats whose very ideas of democracy and self-determination can be held accountable for the break-up of Russia via popular referenda. Within the world constructed by the language of the right, however, these same failures, problems and so on can only appear as the work of those dark forces seeking Russia’s ruin. When transposed onto the symbolic realm, difficulties experienced in
the practical order serve to bolster, rather than to discredit, the claims of national-autocratic ideology.

To conclude, we note how during the present contest over Russian national-political identity a certain advantage seems to have passed to the right wing. In the same way in which Russian nationalism has historically found an antidote to backwardness and poverty in the celebration of something greater than a nation-state - an empire, a mission - to which Russia's name has been affixed, so the presentation of its symbols - the Russian state, the Russian idea - functions to shift consciousness from the mundane onto an eschatological plane in which the "real" Russia assumes larger-than-life proportions, offering ample sanctuary to those who have wearied of the struggle to cope, to fathom, and to endure. During a time of profound transition whose problems seem to dwarf all practical remedies and whose prospects appear in many ways to speak only the language of hopelessness, the purveyors of this conception of national-political identity can portray their construct as the single alternative to catastrophe. Should the pragmatic orientation of Russia's national-democrats falter and ultimately fail, then the initiative would appear to belong to this alternative, regardless of which political leaders or groups at the time may seize it.
Notes

*I wish to acknowledge with gratitude the financial support lent this study by the University of California’s Center for German and European Studies and the informative conversations that I have had with John McClure and Richard Jennings on some of the texts analyzed herein.

1. On Sunday, August 2, 1992, a large group of paratroopers celebrating their official holiday in Moscow descended on the outdoor market that has sprung up around the Yugo-zapadnaya metro station, smashing the kiosks of non-Russian proprietors and physically assaulting some of them. Kiosks and stands operated by Russians went untouched. Earlier, in July 1992, paramilitary police detachments in St. Petersburg reportedly took it on themselves to seize a produce market operated by non-Russians and then to declare a "half hour of communism", selling off to Russian customers at nominal prices the food that they had commandeered. On this second episode, see Evgenii Solomenko, "'Kavkazskii sindrom' v Pitere", Izvestiya (12 Aug. 1992).


3. Survey research in the USSR has recorded at the level of mass attitudes a sharpening of the issue of national identity as the Soviet Union entered a period of crisis and impending collapse. See, for instance, Leokadia Drobizheva, "Perestroika and the Ethnic Consciousness


7. The apparently *ex nihilo* reconstitution of the Cossack "nation" which dispatched armed units to Moldova to assist the Russian population there during the civil war might represent one instance of this. The savagery of the civil war in former Yugoslavia is perhaps another.

8. These remarks were delivered at a panel of the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies, held on 23 Nov. 1991.

9. An analysis of the major addresses delivered at the December 1989 USSR Congress of People’s Deputies by members of the opposition - the Inter-Regional Deputies Group - bears out this point. All references to the Soviet order were marked negatively, often with bitter sarcasm and ridicule, while all those to either the West or the pre-Soviet past appeared as positive. See Michael E. Urban and John McClure, "Discourse, Ideology and Party Formation in the USSR", in Urban, *op. cit.*, pp. 92-119.

10. For two quite different analyses of the structure of social consciousness endemic to Soviet
Communism which converge in reaching this conclusion regarding the propensity of utopia-centered systems of thought to be succeeded by systems of thought that are also oriented toward utopian ideas (regardless of how they might be disguised) see: Igor Arievich, "Nevyuchennye uroki", Novoe vremya, No. 39 (1988), pp. 24-25; I.E. Diskin, "Mozhno li segodnya sotsializm v SSSR", Obshchestvennye nauki, No. 1 (1991), pp. 15-25.


12. I have excluded from the political spectrum of Russia its fundamentally anti-political forces - communists and fascists. For an analysis of the orientation evinced by these parties and groups, see Joel C. Moses, "The Challenge to Soviet Democracy from the Political Right", R. Huber and D. Kelley (eds.) Perestroika-Era Politics (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1991), pp. 105-127.

13. For one authoritative account of why the Russian Christian Democratic Movement and the Constitutional Democratic Party bolted Democratic Russia in order to make common cause with their erstwhile opponents, see D. Rogozin (Deputy Chairperson of the Constitutional Democratic Party), "Pravyi tsentr - za vozrozhdenie Rossii", Obozrevatel', Nos. 2-3 (Feb., 1992), p. 3.


18. The interview sample included: Viktor Aksyuchits, Chairperson of the RCDM; Igor Averkiev, Deputy Chairperson of the SDPR and Aleksandr Perfil’ev, member of the Board (Pravlenie) of the SDPR; Valerii Khomyakov, Deputy Chairperson of the DPR; and Igor Yakovenko, Co-Chairperson of the RPR.


20. We would do well to remember that the division between national-democratic and national-autocratic orientations employed here is an analytic distinction. As such it does not pretend to substitute for that which it categorizes, erasing in the process those aspects of their existence which do not conform to the division itself. Indeed, in the same way that the RCDM might employ certain terms (such as the value of the individual) associated with the national-democratic conception, so observers of the national-democratic group have called attention to certain habits of mind that remind one of the communitarianism espoused by the RCDM (see Yurii Afanas’ev, "Nomenklatura na ’skhodke vechevoi’", *Nezavisimaya gazeta* [2 Apr. 1992], pp. 1-2; Len
Karpinsky, "ABC of Russian Revival", *Moscow News*, No. 14 [5-12 Apr. 1992], pp. 6-7. The point is that the division might be considered valid to the degree that it isolates the primary terms in the discourse of each, regardless of individual narratives that might contain secondary terms that appear to contradict the basic ones, for the meaning of the secondary terms cannot be known outside of the structure in which they appear.


23. Ibid., pp. 13, 15.


25. Ibid., pp. 3, 7. Apropos this point, Igor Yakovenko remarked during an interview (4 Aug. 1992): "What does it mean, ‘self-determination’? Take Tatarstan. They may ‘leave’ Russia. And go where? To the moon? Obviously, Tatarstan will remain right where it is, integrated with Russian economically and culturally in a number of ways. On the basis of this, agreements between Russia and Tatarstan can be reached to the advantage of both sides. Over time, a strong relationship, even a reunification, can be achieved."

26. Ibid., p. 7.

27. *Programma deistvii...*, p. 16.


30. During an interview (28 July 1992), Igor Averkiev repeatedly made this clear, remarking that "there is no single conception of statehood today that is functional for Russia. Those with such conceptions, theories and ideologies already show that they don’t understand the problem. In our [SDPR’s] conception there are doubts and there are problems".

31. For the RPR, see Programma deistvii..., p. 2; for the SDPR, see The Way of Progress and Social Democracy: The Program of the SDPR (Moscow: Socium, 1991), pp. 10, 37-38.


34. The SDPR goes so far in this respect as to oppose "counterpoising Russian culture to [the] culture of other peoples". Ibid., p. 8.


37. What the Social Democrats..., p. 9.

38. The Way of Progress..., pp. 7-10.

39. Ibid., pp. 17-18. AleksandrPerfil’ev stated this quite cogently during an interview (28 July 1992), remarking that: "The old nomenklatura still holds power in Tatarstan. That’s why Tatarstan is seeking independence. On the one hand, the powers there realize that remaining in Russia may mean the end for them. On the other hand, they have been able to get the population to support the idea of independence by retaining the old Brezhnev system and, so, subsidizing basic goods. For example, I was recently in Kazan [the capital] and found sour
cream for 6 rubles. In the adjacent region it sells for around 180. So national independence really comes down to this. It's a vote for low-priced sour cream".


42. "Deklaratsiya konstruktivno-demokraticeskogo bloka 'narodnoe soglasie'",


45. Ibid., p. 8.

46. Travkin (ibid., p. 6) mocks his opponents in the democratic camp in this respect, pointing to the Russian refugees fleeing back to Russia from the other former republics to escape the threat of violence and wondering whether these people should not be rehoused with those democrats who, with "vampire voluptuousness", had elevated the right to national self-determination over that of the rights of the individual. Khomyakov made similar points during an interview.

47. Ibid., p. 6.

48. When asked why the DPR has taken a position in favor of a unitary state during an interview, Khomyakov gave three curious reasons: (1) "It's just our idea"; (2) "We have
modeled our conception on the USA because it works"; (3) "In the old Russian state order there were no [national] autonomies." When asked how he could square this last point with the special status afforded Poland and Finland in the Empire, he replied: "Yes, that is true. But these were different. They were not such small divisions [as in Russia today]."


50. Interview with Khomyakov.

51. Travkin (cited in note no. 44, pp. 7-8); Programme of the Democratic Party of Russia, p.1.

52. Programme (of the DPR), p. 7. In this same document the discourse of the DPR further dovetails with that of the RPR and the SDPR in taking the position that the state "is not obliged to deal with those tasks which the individual or a community of individuals can handle" (p. 2). Of course, the parties concerned would in some instances quarrel about which specific "tasks" should be included in this category, but they would at the same time all accept the general principle.


54. Leokadia Drobizheva offers the same assessment in her "Perestroika and the ethnic consciousness of Russians", pp. 107-108.

55. Party leader, Viktor Aksyuchits, mentioned this during an interview (31 July 1992). It also seems the case that the RCDM has experienced a number of defections from its ranks owing to the distastefulness of its partnership with other right-wing groups. Igor Surikov and Vladimir Todres, "Aksyuchits i Astaf'ev teryayut storonnikov?", Nezavisimaya gazeta (3 June 1992), p.2.

57. Aksyuchits noted this tactic during an interview.

58. This distinction between the fundamental dimensions of discourse has been developed by Greimas, *Structural Semantics*, pp. 136-145.

59. A good example of this can be found in "Zayavlenie Kongressa grazhdanskikh i patrioticheskikh sil Rossii", published as an insert to *Obozrevatel*, Nos. 2-3 (Feb., 1992), p.1.

60. For instance, the program of the Russian Popular Assembly discusses the ways in which the "old and new nomenklatura" (the latter signifying the Government of Boris El\'tsin) have wrought economic havoc for every sector of Russian society. By the time this narrative has run its course, it turns out that their primary economic goal - the creation of a large class of small businesspeople - can only be brought about by erecting a "war economy [as found] in developed states". "Programmnoe zayavlenie rossiiskogo narodnogo sobraniya", published as an insert to *Obozrevatel*, Nos. 2-3 (Feb., 1992), pp. 12-17.

61. Ibid., p. 17.


63. Interview with Aksyuchits.


66. In this respect, the narrative is identical to the dynastic form of national-autocratic ideology...

67. Lotman, *Universe of the Mind*, is particularly instructive on this score (p. 129).

68. See Aksyuchits' remarks before the Third Congress of the DPR, *Materialy III S"ezda DPR (7-8 dekabrya 1991 g.*., pp. 30-32. He made the same claim during an interview.