RUSSIA, CHECHNYA AND INTERNATIONAL NORMS:
THE POWER OR PAUCITY OF HUMAN RIGHTS?

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Executive summary

Throughout the 1990s, and continuing today, the United States and many European countries and organizations have, in their dealings with Russia, largely bracketed the well-documented, disproportionate and indiscriminate use of force by the Russian government against its own civilian population in Chechnya. This policy has had negative unintended consequences for the development of a variety of institutions in Russia that are associated with democracies, including elections, independent media, and the rule of law. Instead of international norms diffusing inside Russia, regional norms that are hostile to these institutions have become more robust in recent years.

This paper contributes to a debate on how international and domestic political dynamics interact, often producing mixed, and on occasion devastatingly negative, outcomes, rather than positive examples of the diffusion of international norms. After discussing analytical approaches to the study of international norms, the paper details the ways in which the Russian case diverges from the theoretical expectations. It discusses the specific types of norms violations that have occurred in Russia, as well as their impact domestically, and then specifies the external and internal barriers to the diffusion of international norms inside Russia. The evidence suggests correctives for both theoretical approaches to international norms and for strategies of engagement with Russia.
Introduction

In theory, the degree to which states comply with international norms testifies not only to the robustness of those norms but also indicates how central the norms are to what is commonly (and euphemistically) referred to as "the international community." Recent scholarship has shifted from establishing that norms, particularly those related to human rights, matter in international relations to specifying the mechanisms by which norms diffuse throughout this "community" and inside states. A growing body of literature argues that the international human rights regime, like the "process of global democratization," is "increasing in strength and robustness." By the 21st century, human rights norms appear stronger across Europe than they were 26 years ago at the dawn of the Helsinki process, and more widespread globally than 53 years ago during the drafting of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

In contrast with this growing body of literature, and with what may or may not be a global phenomenon, Russia increasingly looks to be an outlier. Instead of steadily diffusing norms, the last few

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3 Some scholars argue that such norms were particularly important in bringing about change in Eastern Europe and the collapse of the Soviet Union. See especially Evangelista, Unarmed Forces; Thomas, The Helsinki Effect. Risse, Ropp and Sikkink, in The Power of Human Rights, argue that, of the eleven cases looked at across many regions of the world, covering in one form or another the last several decades, all but one case shows progression towards compliance with human rights norms.
years have given rise to several external and internal barriers slowing and sometimes blocking the
diffusion of international human rights and democracy norms. Some barriers have a counterintuitive
dynamic, including an international environment that is actually permissive of (rather than punishing)
non-compliance with international norms governing the use of force. Some barriers, not surprisingly,
derive from the Soviet era, including increasingly strong regional norms and organizational cultures
hostile to, or at least ambivalent about, Western conceptions of human rights and democracy.

At many levels, evidence from Russia suggests not only that international norms and practices
spread, at best, in a jagged way through the international system, but that the tolerance for non-
compliance – particularly at the international governmental level – with democratic and human rights
norms is quite high. The impact of the transnational networks, and particularly activist non-
governmental organizations (NGOs) that help to spread norms at the micro-level (that is, within and
among specific groups of activists) has been substantial. The macro-level changes that recent studies on
norms and networks document, however, appear not to have occurred in the Russian case. This case
draws attention, instead, to the role that powerful states, such as the United States, play in supporting or
undermining norms. That role to a great extent eclipses the hard work done by advocacy networks.

In terms of policy implications, high-level government support that, in effect, overlooks or
minimizes the consequences of non-compliance with international norms and treaties comes with costs to
long-term security concerns. The United States has declared that “the consolidation of democratic
institutions and values in Russia over the long term is a vital U.S. national security interest,” and the U.S.
government and European powers have pursued the goal of integrating Russia into the Euro-Atlantic

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4 Russia is not an isolated case. See Michael Barnett, “The Politics of Indifference at the United Nations and
Genocide in Rwanda and Bosnia,” in Thomas Cushman and Stjepan Mestrovic, eds., This Time We Knew: Western

5 On transnational networks, see the pioneering work of Keck and Sikkink, Activists Beyond Borders. For an
extended discussion of how these networks function in the Russian case, see Sarah E. Mendelson, “Democracy
Assistance and Russia’s Transition: Between Success and Failure,” International Security, Vol. 25, No. 4 (Spring
2001), 69-103; Sarah E. Mendelson and John K. Glenn, editors, The Power and Limits of NGOs: Transnational
system. The day-to-day, incremental work done at lower governmental and non-governmental levels necessary in order for Russia to be integrated meaningfully into European structures is, however, undermined by the weak and often muted response by top officials of powerful Western democracies disregarding this non-compliance. The confusing behavior of international organizations (IOs), some of which are watch-dogs, on issues related to democracy and human rights, does further damage.

Put starkly: throughout the 1990s, and continuing today, the United States and many European countries and organizations have, in their dealings with Russia, largely bracketed the well-documented, disproportionate and indiscriminate use of force by the Russian government against its own civilian population in Chechnya. As one senior American diplomat implied, we will not jeopardize the relationship over that war. The policy of doing nothing has had negative unintended consequences for the development of a variety of institutions in Russia that are associated with democracies, and which the “international community” has helped support, including elections, independent media, and the rule of law. Instead of international norms diffusing inside Russia, regional norms that are hostile to these institutions have become more robust in recent years.

This paper contributes to a debate on how international and domestic political dynamics interact, often producing mixed, and on occasion devastatingly negative outcomes, rather than positive examples of the diffusion of international norms. For scholars of the post-communist states in Eastern Europe and

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Eurasia, international norms and advocacy networks fueled by liberal internationalism function in ways complex and contradictory, resembling at times organized, and even disorganized, hypocrisy rather than powerful hegemonic normative structures.³ The findings are hardly academic; they point to a pattern of increased acceptance of non-compliance with international norms by both the U.S. government and international organizations. The consequences for Russian policy-makers are that there appears to be no cost to violating treaties they have signed.

After discussing analytical approaches to the study of international norms and making clear how they relate to Russia, I detail the ways in which the Russian case diverges from the theoretical expectations. I discuss the specific types of norms violations that have occurred in Russia, as well as their impact domestically. I then further specify what I mean by external and internal barriers to the diffusion of international norms inside Russia. The evidence leads me to suggest correctives for both theoretical approaches to international norms as well as for strategies of engagement with Russia. I do this with attention to the international security costs of staying the course and not addressing issues related to non-compliance with human rights norms.

Post-Soviet challenges to theoretical approaches to norms

The existing literature on international norms and advocacy networks amply documents their importance in affecting policy outcomes in several cases, such as ending human rights abuses in Chile and South Africa. A Latin Americanist working on human rights or a scholar of the anti-apartheid movement has evidence that international norms have power. Journalists are even writing about the

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“Pinochet effect,” referring to efforts in Chile, Argentina and Uruguay to investigate the human rights abuses of leaders.9

Implicit in much recent scholarship is the steady march towards ever-greater compliance as human rights and democracy norms “cascade” increasingly at this moment in “world time.”10 With so many conditions identified as necessary and sufficient for the diffusion of norms present in Russia, international relations scholars would expect to see international norms grow particularly strong. Specifically, “principled-issue networks” exist around many aspects of both democracy and human rights and have become increasingly dense in the decade since the collapse of the Soviet Union, while some date as far back as the Helsinki Final Act.11 Domestic activists are connected to these networks in ways that vary depending on the issue. Russian presidents, both Boris Yeltsin and Vladimir Putin, have appeared to care what Euro-Atlantic decision-makers think of Russia, expending effort hosting and visiting European and North American leaders, seeking and gaining membership in many Euro-Atlantic clubs.12 Russia has depended on and has received billions of dollars in financial assistance. Western governments and


10 On world time and cascades, see Finnemore and Sikkink, “International Norm Dynamics” and Risse, Ropp, and Sikkink, The Power of Human Rights.

11 These networks involve groups “working internationally on an issue, who are bound together by shared values, a common discourse, and dense exchanges of information and services.” Thomas Risse and Kathryn Sikkink, “The Socialization of International Human Rights Norms Into Domestic Practice: Introduction,” in Risse, Ropp, and Sikkink, eds., The Power of Human Rights, p. 18. With funding from the U.S. government, organizations like the National Endowment for Democracy, the International Republican Institute and the National Democratic Institute have been engaged in developing these networks. For a longer listing, see M. Holt Ruffin, Alyssa Deutschler, Catriona Logan, and Richard Upjohn, The Post-Soviet Handbook: A Guide to Grassroots Organizations and Internet Resources, Revised Edition (Seattle: Center for Civil Society International in association with the University of Washington Press, 1999).

12 This was the dominant impression shared by a group of Canadian journalists who interviewed Vladimir Putin before his December 2000 trip to Canada. Author’s interview, Chrystia Freeland, deputy editor, Globe and Mail, March 2001.
foundations have spent hundreds of millions to support democracy and human rights work. Russia is a signatory to important human rights conventions.

Evidence from Russia challenges this argument about cascading norms in numerous ways. The "Pinochet effect" in Russia seems to refer to the desire by many to see their ruler mimic the Chilean dictator. Notably, there has never been a single legal case -- not one conviction, zero accountability -- on behalf of the millions of Soviet citizens killed under Stalin. Instead, in a 1999 poll that asked Russians to choose the "most outstanding personalities of all times and all nations," Stalin ranked fourth with 35%, up from 11% in 1989. More people have significantly greater negative feelings towards people who have gotten rich since the collapse of the Soviet Union than towards people carrying portraits of Stalin. President Vladimir Putin was reported to have toasted Stalin on his birthday in December 1999, and in May 2000, the Russian state issued commemorative coins in honor of Stalin as a "war hero."

The puzzle here goes far beyond nostalgia for Stalin. Because institutions generally associated with liberal democracies have proliferated Russia looked as if it was conforming to international norms.

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13 GAO Report to the Chairman and to the Ranking Minority Member, Committee on Banking and Financial Services, House of Representatives, "Foreign Assistance: International Efforts to Aid Russia’s Transition Have Had Mixed Results," November 2000.

14 Most important are the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the OSCE Final Act (1975), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1994), the UN Resolution of the Right to Democracy (1999), and the Warsaw Declaration (2000). The original rights outlined in the 1948 Declaration and repeated in the other documents include: freedom from "arbitrary arrest, detention or exile" (Article 9), the right to a "fair and public hearing" (Article 10), the right to "freedom of opinion and expression" including the "freedom to . . . seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media regardless of frontiers" (Article 19), "the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association" (Article 20), the right to "periodic and genuine elections" (Article 21).


15 One survey in 1999 found that 55% felt negatively toward people "who got rich in the last ten years" versus 29% who felt negatively towards "people carrying portraits of Stalin." 52% felt positively towards Stalinists. Figures come from a series of polls conducted by the All-Russian Center for Public Opinion in Edward Skidelsky and Yuri Senokosov, Russia on Russia: Issue Two: The Fate of Homo Sovieticus (London: The Social Market Foundation and VCIOM, 2000) p. 60, p. 50.

16 Ian Traynor, "Russia's new strongman puts Stalin back on a pedestal," The Guardian (UK) May 13, 2000, as carried on Johnson's Russia List.
and standards. The political landscape of Russia looks different from a decade ago: there is no longer one-party rule, and citizens regularly turn out for elections. Local NGOs have mushroomed. The media is no longer exclusively controlled by the state. According to the Constitution of the Russian Federation, citizens' rights are protected in a number of ways. Based only on a superficial reading of the institutional landscape, in fact, one could argue that Russia is conforming to international norms.

To date, Western states treat Russia in myriad ways as if it were a state governed by rules consistent with international law and custom. The OSCE and other international groups regularly approve elections (despite manipulation), and the war in Chechnya has not affected in any serious way Russia's relations with the organizations to which it belongs. In fact, as evidence of Russian violations mounts, the response by "the international community" seems to diminish.

**Violations of norms and the impact on institutions**

Closer inspection of Russian political institutions reveals a picture that is different from superficial appearances. Political parties have multiplied, yet they do little but campaign for re-election. Political opponents engage in elections, but these are increasingly dogged by evidence of fraud. Few of the thousands of NGOs actually advocate on behalf of others. The rule of man more often typifies Russia than the rule of law. These might all be designated as run-of-the-mill democratization problems were it not for the many additional ways in which Russia dramatically contrasts with other triumphant cases of spreading norms.

Instead, this is a story about regression in human rights and civil liberties over the last several years. Since the late 1990s, federal authorities have grown increasingly bold in their threats to civil liberties and human rights. Independent media outlets have been especially targeted by the state, as the

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17 On conforming, see Finnemore and Sikkink, "International Norm Dynamics," p. 903.

April 2001 take-over of the national television channel, NTV, the newspaper Segodnya and the magazine Itogi demonstrated. In addition to journalists, the list grows each month of environmentalists, human rights activists, students and academics – Russians, as well as Americans and Europeans – who have been investigated, intimidated, interrogated, jailed, accused of treason, beaten or fled the country, all by the federal authorities.

The most problematic example of non-compliance with international human rights norms concerns the way the Russian Federal Forces have prosecuted the second, on-going war in Chechnya. While there is little doubt that Russia faced a difficult, increasingly dangerous and often deadly problem in Chechnya, there is also much evidence that the way in which the Russian government has dealt with Chechen rebels has involved troops repeatedly violating both the Geneva Convention and the International Declaration of Human Rights. Some argue this war is a genocidal one. It is certainly one

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19 Gazprom, which is largely owned by the Russian state, and was a majority share holder in the Media-Most holding company that owned NTV, Segodnya and Itogi, maintains that the takeover was about debt. Boris Fyodorov, former deputy prime minister and representative of minority shareholders on the Gazprom board, on April 19, 2001 speaking at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (www.ceip.org) asked why, if the takeover was debt related, did the new owners strip it of its assets, dismiss the most valuable, talented personnel, and change a publication, Itogi, that was profitable. Television stations ORT and RTR, as Laura Belin, an observer of media affairs for RFE/RL noted in an exchange on the Johnson’s List, May 6, 2001, also have large amounts of debt with Gazprom but are pro-Kremlin in their coverage. They have not been harassed.

20 See Sergei Grigoryants, “Russian Authorities Force Public Organizations to Become Underground,” Report by the Glasnost Foundation, available at www.glasnostonline.org/eng_projects/registration.htm; author interviews, Yuri Dzhibladze, president, Center for the Development of Democracy and Human Rights, March 24, 2000; Masha Lipman, deputy chief editor, Itogi, May 18, 2000. For examples of non-Russians being harassed, see Joshua Handler, “Under Suspicion,” IEEE Spectrum, Vol. 7, No. 3, March 2000, pp. 51-53. Nikolai Patrushev, the head of the FSB, in an interview on the Day of the Chekist, December 21, 2000, in Komsomolskaya Pravda, said the FSB had information that Handler had been spying in Russia. (Email correspondence from Handler to the author.) Other examples include a rise in the number of foreign missionaries expelled from Russia, and a program officer from NDI fleeing the country in 1999 after repeated harassment and threats from the FSB. The British de-mining organization, Halo Trust, was accused of treason. Author’s interview with Halo Trust Program Officer, May 31, 2000. RFE/RL Security Watch details many of these cases and is available at www.rferl.org.

21 On the tendency of the West to ignore the problems in Chechnya before the second war, see Anatol Lieven, “Through a Distorted Lens: Chechnya and the Western Media,” Current History, October 2000, 321-328. Many groups have gathered testimony on the abuses by federal forces including Human Rights Watch (HRW) Amnesty International, Physicians for Human Rights, the Russian groups Memorial, and Soldiers’ Mothers in St Petersburg, the French groups Doctors of the World and the Nobel Peace Prize recipient Doctors Without Borders. See for example, Human Rights Watch, Burying The Evidence: The Botched Investigation into a Mass Grave in Chechnya, May 2001; The “Dirty War” in Chechnya: Forced Disappearances, Torture, and Summary Executions, March 2001
marked by impunity. The minister of defense, former KGB Colonel Sergei Ivanov, expressed his sympathy with Colonel Budanov, the highest ranking military officer to date to be put on trial for the murder of a civilian. Of this officer, who had confessed to killing a Chechen woman, Ivanov lamented that he was a "victim of circumstance." 23

Russian and Western NGOs have documented the disproportionate use of force, and the indiscriminate targeting of civilians, in addition to "mop-up" operations that regularly involve looting, ransom and rape. They have detailed forced disappearances and "filtration camps" where rebels and civilians are routinely tortured. Human Rights Watch and the Russian human rights organization Memorial has charged that the Russian government buried evidence of mass graves discovered in a location controlled by the Russians, next to a military base in Chechnya in February 2001. A video tape filmed by Memorial before the corpses were buried shows gun shot wounds to the head, hands bound, and skin peeled back. 24 There is even some evidence that the Russians may have used chemical weapons against the civilian population, despite being signatories to the Chemical Weapons Convention. 25


23 Ivanov, in May 2001, was in a meeting with editors from five newspapers, when he noted that "just before the murder took place, ten servicemen from his regiment had been killed by a sniper. As a commander, he couldn't stand idly by while his soldiers were killed." Quoted in Sergei Grigoryants, "Human Rights Activists Letter to President Putin," available at www.glasnostonline.org/news_en/2001/may/20/01.html. Military justice and impunity have been common. (Author's interview with Deiderik Lohman, Director of HRW Moscow, September 2000.)

24 Human Rights Watch, "Burying The Evidence." Author's viewing of tape, "Mass Graves in Chechnya."

25 Dr. Omar Khanbiev, Chechen Minister of Health, speaking at RFE/RL, May 17, 2001, attended by author. Khanbiev treated, in August 2000, patients whose symptoms match exposure to chemical weapons, with the one exception that they also include hallucinations. Memorial has also gathered information on chemical poisoning in the village of Stari Atagi, one of the villages where Khanbiev treated patients in August 2000. Documents are available at http://www.memo.ru/hr/hotpoints/N-Caucas/statagi/statagi.htm. Khanbiev’s account of his, and 17 other nurses’ and doctors’ forced disappearance into a filtration camp in February 2000, was first told to the author by Anne Nivat, the French journalist, in an interview in March 2000, shortly after she herself had been deported by
The abuses, and the overall non-compliance with human rights treaties, have had fairly profound consequences for democratic development inside Russia. The war was an important part of electoral politics in 1999 and 2000, propelling Vladimir Putin to power. It has played an important role in the government’s ever-expanding conception of what it considers information vital to Russian national security, a trend I refer to as the securitization of information. The government has been clear on what it sees as the acceptable boundaries of reporting on the war, and these include no critical investigative work, no discussion of atrocities, limited information on casualties, and the inclination to discuss the war as little as possible. Russian journalists who have gone outside these boundaries have been punished.

The war has helped simultaneously to embolden the power ministries and to diminish an already fragile rule of law. It has helped institutionalize a culture of impunity among the 80,000 Federal Forces currently stationed in Chechnya, which will make efforts at military reform simultaneously all the more difficult, and all the more urgent. In addition to whatever pain and suffering has already been inflicted, the communities inside Russia that are home to these troops will likely experience the aftermath of such a war for as long as there are veterans of what the Russian government calls the “anti-terrorist operation” living in their midst.

26 One of the first indicators of this trend came in a July 1999 interview with Putin when he was then head of the FSB in which he indicated that environmental NGOs inside Russia tended to be in the employ of foreign intelligence agencies. Aleksandr Gamov and Yevgenia Uspenskogo, “Vladimir Putin: Gosudarstvennyi perevorot Rossii ne grozit,” (Russia is Not in Danger of a Coup d’etat), Komsomolskaya Pravda, July 8, 1999, 8-9.

27 See in particular, Vladimir Putin’s discussion of the Radio Liberty correspondent Andrei Babitsky’s coverage of the war in Vladimir Putin, First Person: An Astonishingly Frank Self-Portrait by Russia’s President (New York: PublicAffairs, 2000). There are some reports that regional newspapers were “informed orally that it is prohibited to publish any information concerning Chechnya.” (See “New Restrictions on News From Chechnya,” GDF/IFEX, September 12, 2000, available at www.gdf.ru.)

In Chechnya and Ingushetia, the war has created a humanitarian crisis that Russia has not begun to deal with. This involves the total destruction of a city, and all the infrastructure of a republic, including hospitals and schools. The war has created a large internally displaced population, estimated as high as 400,000. This population shows signs of developing a TB epidemic.

External and internal barriers to norms diffusion

Several barriers, external and internal to Russia, both inhibit the diffusion of international norms and have contributed to non-compliance. Below I identify two main external barriers to the diffusion of international norms: the permissive international climate for non-compliance, especially the role of powerful states and IOs, and the dysfunctional behavior of important nodes in transnational advocacy networks. I then discuss internal barriers to the diffusion of international norms associated with democracy and human rights. Specifically, regional and organizational norms left over from the Soviet period continue to have strength and compete directly with international norms. Decision-makers and many local authorities continue to embrace Soviet conceptions of empire, power and interest that are hostile to international norms surrounding democracy and human rights. Russia is a battleground between domestic networks that contest the democratic norms and transnational networks actively trying to diffuse them.

The permissive international environment

Because agendas in international politics are more competitive than is generally acknowledged in international relations literature, one finds more inconsistency in policies and less community than many studies suggest. Regardless of theoretical orientation, international relations scholars tend to treat the international “system,” “community,” or “society” analytically as if it were, more or less, a coherent

29 Author’s conversations with Anne Nivat, April 2001; “Tuberculosis Sweeps Ingushetia with Influx of Chechen Refugees,” AFP, May 9, 2001. See also Paul Quinn-Judge, “In the Ruins of Grozny,” March 26, 2001, Time.com, as carried on the Johnson’s List.
whole. This assumption is revealed in talk about networks getting a norm-violating government on “the international agenda.” In reality, there are multiple international agendas, including trade agendas that are exceedingly mixed on democracy and human rights, and traditional security agendas where these issues tend to fade if they compete with the possibility of getting a nuclear weapons treaty signed.

Among liberal democracies, foreign policies are especially deeply contradictory. Throughout the 1990s, for example, decision-makers in the Clinton administration highlighted the importance of democracy in Russia but supported Boris Yeltsin no matter what. The administration consistently underfunded programs aimed at political and social activists, but was loathe to criticize or address many instances of blatantly un-democratic behavior, such as the way force was used in the first war in Chechnya. While officials talked about democracy, they rarely met with the people who worked on these issues inside Russia. Instead, they embraced the leaders who threatened the very institutions the Americans professed to be supporting.

The contradictory nature of policy toward Russia was not exclusive to the Clinton administration. President Putin enjoys nights at the opera with Tony Blair and was the toast of the town at the July 2000 G-8 meeting in Okinawa. Russia was present at the meeting despite the fact that it has neither a strong, industrialized economy nor a robust democracy. Putin declined to meet Mary Robinson, the UN High

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30 While scholars such as Thomas Risse and Kathryn Sikkink refer to the “international society” as a “smaller group than the total number of states in the international system” and while recognizing that foreign policy is rarely consistent, even their model assumes a level of commonality across states that evidence does not support. On the international society, see their “The Socialization of International Human Rights Norms,” p.11.


32 Krasner, Sovereignty; Moravcsik. “The Origins of Human Rights Regimes.” While Keck and Sikkink, in Activists Beyond Borders, and Risse, Ropp, and Sikkink, in The Power of Human Rights, acknowledge this phenomenon, they do not adequately address its implications for their argument. Specifically, the robustness of a set of norms is called into question if powerful Western states regularly violate them, ignore them or undermine them.

33 There is growing sensitivity to this issue in the United States. A Washington Post editorial called for disinviting Russia to the July 2001 G-8 meeting arguing that “there should be no place at a summit of Western democracies, or any European political council, for a government that has suppressed freedom of speech, built up a secret police apparatus and waged a brutal campaign of repression like that in Chechnya.” “Consequences for Russia,” Washington Post, April 18, 2000. Congressman Tom Lantos also requested Russia’s suspension. “U.S. Congressman Wants to Suspend Russia from G-8,” Reuters, May 8, 2001.
Commissioner for Human Rights, when she was in Russia in April 2000 to investigate war crimes, but then Putin was hosted at tea with the Queen of England weeks later.

In addition to inconsistent decision-making, one finds numerous pathologies in IOs. NATO used force in Kosovo to stop human rights abuses, but in Chechnya, where evidence suggests the number of civilians afflicted is much greater, it is nearly silent. The secretary general of NATO led a rapprochement with Russia shortly after some of the worst atrocities of the second war in Chechnya. NATO officials refuse, like Clinton administration officials did, to call abuses in Chechnya war crimes. NATO officials continued their rapprochement with Russian defense officials even after these same officials had hosted an indicted Serbian war criminal.

Aside from NATO, the response of other members of "the international community" to Chechnya highlights numerous ways in which they are dysfunctional. The UN Commission on Human Rights in 2000 issued a resolution that satisfied no one and had little impact. The Parliamentary Assembly of the

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35 Physicians for Human Rights 1999, PHR, News Release, “Medical Group Releases Final Data on Russian Atrocities in Chechnya; Calls on Clinton to Take a Stand on War Crimes,” June 2, 2000 available at <www.phrusa.org>. In an interview with the author, when asked to compare the destruction in Kosovo to that in Chechnya, a program manager from Halo Trust hesitated, but then gasped, "it was a joke.” Based on his work for Halo Trust in Bosnia from 1993-1995, in Kosovo from June-August 1999 and in Chechnya from September-December 1999, he claimed that what he saw in Chechnya was the “worst destruction anywhere.” Author interview, May 31, 2000.

36 Dragoljub Ojdanic, the Yugoslav defense minister, convicted of war crimes by the Hague Tribunal, was hosted in early May 2000 by the Russian Defense Ministry. NATO's Permanent Joint Council met later in the month with officials from the Russian Defense Ministry in Florence.

37 While the UNCHR did pass in 2000 a resolution (25 in favor, 7 opposed and 19 abstentions) calling for a national investigation into abuses, human rights groups considered the resolution to be weakly worded. The vote followed Mary Robinson's visit to Russia. There, she was prevented from seeing what she wanted to see, and Putin refused to meet with her. But instead of insisting in strong, clear language on the need for a national and an international independent commission to investigate human rights abuses, she only spoke of the need for an investigation. According to human rights groups, she "dropped the ball": without an international commission working along side
Council of Europe (CoE) suspended Russia’s voting rights in April 2000 and then restored them in January 2001, despite no change in behavior. During the May 2001 visit of the CoE Secretary General Walter Schwimmer to Moscow, the website, strana.ru, which has close ties to the Kremlin, noted that “here it is planned to talk not so much about Chechnya as about the entire range of Russia’s relations with the Council of Europe,” expressing satisfaction that Schwimmer had decided not to go to Chechnya, and that the CoE meeting to be held in Istanbul later in 2001 would place “no special emphasis on Chechnya.” The CoE’s Committee of Ministers has taken an especially accommodating approach to the Russians. Romano Prodi, president of the European Commission, saw “reasons for optimism,” in the European Union’s relationship with Russia, citing Putin’s commitment to “reform and open(ess) to European ideals.”

The reasons behind the permissive international environment are complex and need to be addressed more extensively in research. A preliminary investigation suggests that norms are weak for a variety of reasons, including the tendency of decision-makers in Western states to see compliance as a value to be favored but not as an interest to be pursued and enforced. Russian diplomacy in these organizations seems to specialize also in “divide and conquer” techniques, as one human rights activist observed. Outcomes often look to be most satisfactory to the Russian government.

a national one, few think a national review will be independent of the Russian state. (Author interviews with human rights NGOs in Boston, New York and Moscow). The 2001/24 UN resolution on Chechnya was more strongly worded but more states voted against it (22 in favor, 12 opposed, and 19 abstentions).

38 Viktor Sokolov, “Coming Closer to Europe will help Russia to Come Closer to America,” May 22, 2001, www.strana.ru, as carried on the Johnson’s list.


41 Rachel Denber of Human Rights Watch, author interview, May 31, 2000. For example, at the November 2000 meeting of the OSCE in Vienna, Russia, “using the OSCE’s own rules,” blocked the adoption of resolutions on “Russia’s obligation to withdraw troops from Moldova, close down at least two military bases in Georgia, observe the southern flank ceilings set by the Treaty on Conventional Forces in Europe and cooperate with international efforts to restrain the dictatorship in Belarus.” Vladimir Socor. “There’s a Bear in the Woods,” Wall Street Journal Europe, December 8, 2000, as carried on the Johnson’s List.
Additionally, international human rights norms get squeezed out of the policy mix for complicated domestic political reasons. Within certain branches of the United States government, there appears to be significant resistance to holding states accountable to international law for fear that the same could be done to the United States. Ken Roth, the president of Human Rights Watch, argues that there is a growing “unilateralism” on the part of the United States when it comes to human rights. The American government line tends to be that “there is enough international law.” Roth finds that many treaties are in essence designed to have “zero” impact domestically in the United States.

Additionally, bureaucratic politics within institutions drives policy-makers, in essence, to “sabotage” the development of organizations like the International Criminal Court. While the Department of Defense may have an interest in preventing genocide, it has a greater interest in protecting its soldiers. The dynamics of unilateralism and bureaucratic politics contributes inadvertently to the undermining of human rights treaties and conventions and the values they embody.

Finally, but in no way least of all, Russia’s residual material power has affected the international response, or lack thereof. While Russia does not have the same degree of military might that the Soviet Union had, its nuclear weapons continue to be a factor in the politics of decision-making. Put simply, American decision-makers have appeared reluctant to jeopardize potential cooperation on nuclear issues. The United States government (and NATO leaders) had more latitude to try to stop human rights violations in Kosovo than in Chechnya. And because power in the post-Soviet era is not merely related to the threat of destruction, because Russia is the largest exporter of gas in the world and the third largest exporter of oil, it plays an increasingly important role in energy politics in Europe. French criticism of

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the war in Chechnya, which had been sharper than in other states, was muted considerably in October 2000, as oil prices rose and winter approached.44

Dysfunction within Western NGOs

The permissive climate created by powerful states and IOs is not the only external barrier to international norms diffusion. Within advocacy networks that might be expected to generate pressure on issues related to democracy and human rights in Russia, Western NGOs fall prey to their own pathologies.45 In terms of enforcing compliance with human rights and democracy norms, most troubling is the fact that despite working towards similar goals, the democracy assistance community and the human rights organizations both in the United States and in Russia are almost entirely disconnected.46

This factor has meant that while the human rights organizations have for the most part done an admirable job collecting and disseminating information on atrocities and abuses, the democracy assistance community has barely responded, and certainly not worked with these organizations to strategize about how to support fragile institutions threatened by gross non-compliance. It has not been viewed as a central part of their work, despite the fact that, increasingly, the war has had negative consequences for a variety of institutions, from elections to the media.47

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44 “Facing Energy Crisis, Europe has Forgiven Russia for Chechnya,” AFP, October 31, 2000.

45 The networks, as documented in Keck and Sikkink, Activists Beyond Borders, were important in stopping abuses in other cases.


47 There are exceptions to this. Carl Gershman, the president of the NED, and Nadia Diuk, senior program officer for Central and Eastern Europe and the New Independent States at the NED, are examples. See for example, Nadia M. Diuk, “Helsinki Accords Work Today: Human Rights Return As An Issue,” Washington Times, May 24, 2001, p. 25.
Human rights organizations as a whole are intensely overwhelmed by their work. Too few people are tasked with enormous issues, jumping from campaign to campaign, from the war in Chechnya, to “conflict diamonds,” to trafficking of women and children, to violence in the Middle East. The competition for funding from external sources means that as NGOs swing from campaign to campaign, and are often reluctant to collaborate or cooperate among themselves on the sharing of information, even if timely release could help save lives. They may have extensive data on human rights abuses in Chechnya but are often slow to get important reports issued, for a variety of financial and staffing reasons. Others that do release information designed to pressure policy-makers into using the words “war crimes” in reference to Chechnya, refrain from organizing larger campaigns to stop the war for fear of being perceived as “political.” As human rights groups, they are “not for peace, per se.”

Old norms

Not only are international norms applied unevenly by those who share them in the United States and Europe, but regional norms in the post-Soviet space continue to have influence among both the general population and elites. Although not well understood, this dynamic, fueled by poverty that itself feeds nostalgia, is observable in many surveys, and its impact affects the diffusion of international norms and the work of transnational networks in important ways. For example, the Soviet historical legacy competes with Western concepts of human rights, particularly for those who have been negatively

48 HRW work with Memorial seems to be an exception.

49 HRW letter to the American Committee for Peace in Chechnya. Author thanks Scott Lindsey for sharing the letter.

50 Of the Almond and Verba study on post-war Germany, David P. Conradt, “Changing German Political Culture,” in Gabriel A. Almond and Sidney Verba, editors, The Civic Culture Revisited (Newbury Park Calif: Sage Publications, 1989), p. 225, writes “in neglecting to examine directly or systematically the effects of history upon political culture, (Almond and Verba) were unable to deal satisfactorily with the problem of change. If there is a relationship between a country’s ‘traumatic history’ and its political culture, what happens to political values over time as the traumatic events become increasingly remote to an increasingly large segment of the population?” Conradt found that trauma decreased in salience as the economy developed. In the Russian case, trauma seems to be heightened in salience as the economy has faltered. 

Evidence suggests that this trend increased in the late 1990s. In another survey conducted in 1998, when asked “what political system suits Russia best?” over 50% responded either the pre-perestroika Soviet system or the perestroika-era Soviet system. Only 18% answered “Western-type democracy.”

A 1999 survey by Timothy Colton and Michael McFaul puts the number of Russians who prefer the Soviet system at 25%, and Soviet “but in a different, more democratic form” at 41%. Only 9% want “democracy of the Western type.”

In 2000, Alexei Grazhdankin, the deputy director of the All-Russian Center for Public Opinion (VCIOM), argued that the response of the authorities and society to the tragedy on board the Kursk submarine in which 118 men died, reflected a lingering “Soviet system of values.” For example, the president’s approval rating was not significantly affected, despite outrage over the mishandling of the catastrophe that included misinformation and delays in telling the public about the sinking, withholding the names of those on board the submarine until one newspaper successfully bribed a naval official for the list, delays in accepting assistance from NATO-member states, and Putin’s decision to stay on vacation during what was widely viewed as a national crisis. “Perhaps we’ve become callous, but certainly few


52 Fedorov, “Democratization and Globalization,” p. 4. The response in the early 1990s to the same question indicated “more than 70%” in favor of democracy. Fedorov, p.3, writes “the opinion polls of the 1990s confirmed that by the end of the decade the Russian public was less supportive of democratic values than it was at the beginning of it.”

53 Timothy J. Colton and Michael McFaul, “Are Russians Undemocratic?” Draft manuscript May, 2001, p.4; Table 5. In this paper, the authors argue, however, that these findings reflect that the Russian population is not as negative about democracy as is commonly argued.
here place a high value on human life," Grazhdankin gloomily concluded. The focus of the public is on whether Putin improves their living conditions. "If Putin has half the elite shot, but living standards rise, people will carry him in their hands." 54

The polling firm VCIOM found that through the first ten years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the salience of "our past, our history" had risen to become the first factor respondents pointed to when you think about our people." 55 By 1999, "a significant number, if not majority" believed "Soviet leaders were not only more able, but also more honest, authoritative and solicitous than post-Soviet leaders." 56 Nearly ten years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, state security was (still) considered much more important than individual rights, and social rights were more important than civil or political rights. Russians found "the right to free education, medical care, social security in old age and in the event of illness" (68%) and "the right to a well-paid job in line with one's training" (53%) vastly more important than "freedom of religion" (8%), "the right to have access to information" (9%), "the right to elect representatives to the bodies of power" (8%). 57

54 Ekatarina Larina, "Putin Political Fallout seen Short-lived: Mistakes Likely to 'Be Forgiven,'" *The Russia Journal*, August 26-September 1, 2000 as carried on the Johnson’s Russia List.


56 Ibid., p. 18. Notably, "assessments of the Stalin and Brezhnev eras have markedly changed for the better" (p. 23); Leonid Sedov, "Attitudes To Government" in Skidelsky and Senokosov, eds., *Russia on Russia*, p. 49, writes that in 1999, 65% of those polled said that Soviet leaders were "more authoritative" than post-Soviet ones; 65% thought that Soviet leaders "cared more for the common people," 47% thought they were "stronger and resolute," and 46% thought they were "more honest."

57 Senokosov, "The Burden of Greatness" in Ibid., p. 11. These findings contrast with Colton and McFaul, "Are Russians Undemocratic?" where they ask only about freedoms associated with political (and not economic) rights, and where the numbers are very high. In Senokosov's work, 50% of the population felt that the army exerts "too small" an influence on Russian society and 37% felt that state security bodies exert "too small" an influence (pp. 10-11). See also the gap in the elite and mass surveys conducted at the end of 1992/early 1993 and from late 1995 through summer 1996. Kullberg and Zimmerman in "Problems of Russian Democracy," p. 324, argue that "a substantial segment of the Russian electorate has not accepted the westernizing liberalism of those who led the democratic revolution and has instead opted for socialism or authoritarian nationalism and the corresponding 'red' and 'brown' political parties."
Residual regional and organizational norms are necessary and sufficient in explaining how local activists respond to new ideas and practices generated by transnational advocacy networks. The interaction of the local and international norms often presents a significant barrier to diffusion, yet it has gone largely unexplored in the literature.\textsuperscript{58} In cases where Western ideas and practices in some way complement the organizational culture of a specific local group, activists are receptive to them. If ideas and practices help solve specific problems (such as increasing a candidate’s electoral chances), local activists are particularly likely to adopt them. When ideas and practices appear to compete or clash with local customs or beliefs, however, even in cases where the logic of consequence might dictate the adoption of the new ideas and practice (that is, it would be the “rational” thing to do), activists initially reject them based on what March and Olsen have identified as a logic of appropriateness.\textsuperscript{59} In other words, local norms win out over international ones.

Many issues relating to democracy clash with historical legacies of the Soviet period. The legacy of antipathy towards parties has been extensively documented: White, Rose and McAllister found that while “trust in parties is normally considered a civic virtue ... in the Russian context it most often characterized Communist voters. Conversely, liberal reform voters are lowest in trust, because the party that most readily comes to mind is the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.”\textsuperscript{60} This aspect of the Soviet legacy has also negatively affected the impact of networks as they have tried to promote the development of horizontal ties within the country between, for example, human rights NGOs and political parties on


issues of mutual concern. As Lyudmilla Alekseeva, director of the human rights organization, the Moscow Helsinki Group claimed, ties with parties “will ruin our reputation.”

The battle of the networks

Certain aspects of the Soviet historical legacy relating to state power are increasingly embraced by federal authorities who form a type of counter-network to the networks of transnational advocacy. They aim to shore up a weakened Russian state (creating a “vertical power” structure) which has the effect of rolling back certain influences stemming from Western liberalism, such as a critical civil society. While they are by no means well-coordinated, at a minimum, domestic networks affect the conditions under which transnational norms and networks function inside Russia.

Until 1999, with the exception of environmental groups that were subject to harassment as early as 1995, most transnational networks existed in an atmosphere of benign neglect from the Russian Federal authorities. Activists were free to travel and develop ties. Networks proliferated. By 1999, the political climate had changed. Vladimir Putin and many individuals throughout the Russian federal bureaucracy attempted to strengthen state organs. Activists began to live in fear, despite the fact that Russia is awash in laws regarding rights, “institutionalized” in a constitution.

The rule of law in the late 1990s began to be used as a way of enforcing authoritarian trends rather than democratic ones. In Russia, federal, regional and local authorities used laws to try to constrict the fragile third sector. The example of the re-registration campaign used for indigenous NGOs

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61 Meeting attended by author, Moscow, December 14, 1999.

62 The Russian constitution is available at <www.fipc.ru/fipc/constit/>. One Russian human rights activists writes, “The people must first accept that they have rights, and understand that these rights are in the Russian constitution.” Annemarie Gielen, “Soldiers’ Mothers Challenge Soviet Legacy,” Give and Take (ISAR), V. 3 (Summer 2000, p. 20).

63 The building blocks of democratic states, including parties, media and civic groups, are inherently neutral – rather than exclusively positive – organizational structures. Sheri Berman, “Civil Society and the Collapse of the Weimar Republic,” World Politics (1997) 49: pp. 401-29, documents how they contributed to the development of a fascist state in Germany.
is illustrative. According to the Russian Constitution (Article 30) each individual has the right to participate in non-governmental associations. According to Russian law, the federal or local representatives of the Ministry of Justice were meant to re-register groups by June 30, 1999. Yet many Russian groups found that “regional and local authorities used the requirement for NGOs to re-register as an opportunity to get rid of ‘undesirable’ organizations which criticize the authorities’ actions in certain areas or suggest alternative remedies.” Russian activists estimate that less than 50% of all national organizations were re-registered by federal authorities. Service provision groups that work with the elderly or orphans have had fewer problems since they are seen as assisting the state; advocacy groups have been targeted because authorities view them as a threat to the state.

Many people in the Prosecutor General’s Office, the Ministry of Press, the Ministry of Justice and the Federal Security Service (FSB to use the Russian acronym, the successor to the KGB) share Putin’s politics. But Putin himself plays an extraordinary role in spreading fear among activists. First, as head of the FSB, then as prime minister and acting president and then as president, Putin made strengthening state power and rolling back civil society a priority. The July 1999 statement about environmental groups being in the employ of foreign intelligence agencies both reflected how FSB agents perceived environmentalists and helped create a permissive climate inside Russia for investigations into the activities of the indigenous parts of transnational networks. Putin’s conception of state power leaves little room for civil society; he has made it a priority to harass the media and has also established a legal

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basis for increasing government control over information by signing early in his presidency a "national security information doctrine." He has many times shown signs of being influenced by the organizational culture in which he grew up professionally, that of the KGB.

The role of historical legacy is, however, more complicated than simply saying the old ideational powers are resurgent. The Soviet Union will not be reconstituted despite, according to one survey in 2000, the wishes of 58% of the Russian population who feel that "it would be better if things in this country had remained as they were before 1985." Russia is not doomed forever by its historical legacy, but the legacy continues to have power even as new values and practices diffuse and are incorporated into the Russian consciousness. People and organizations are adapting to the new situation but often in incremental or contradictory ways. So while the majority of Russians believe the Soviet Union should not have been dissolved, and prefer the Soviet system to either Western style democracy or what Russia has today, one survey shows that 64% "support the idea of democracy" and 60% think that democracy would be a "very good way" or a "fairly good way" of governing Russia.

There is much evidence that even the communist party (CPRF) has incorporated various new norms and practices into its culture. As one scholar notes, "the CPRF organization has become

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68 See Putin First Person. Legro's discussion in “Military Culture and Inadvertent Escalation in World War II,” International Security (1994) 18, p. 115 is particularly relevant, where he defines organizational culture as "the pattern of assumptions, ideas, and beliefs that prescribe how a group should adapt to its external environment and manage its internal structure."

69 This figure is up from 44% in 1994 in Levada, "Homo Sovieticus," p. 15. Sedov in "Attitudes To Government," p. 50, notes that only 16% are not sorry the USSR collapsed. Colton and McFaul find in their 1999 survey that 73% fully agree or agree that "the Soviet Union should never under any circumstances have been dissolved." John B. Dunlop in "Reintegrating ‘Post-Soviet Space,’" Journal of Democracy Vol. 11, p. 46, p. 39, argues that while prohibited because of economic circumstances, Putin has a "new imperial project," the goal of which involves "reintegrating Russia with other former Soviet republics."

70 Colton and McFaul, "Is Russia Undemocratic?"
thoroughly entangled with the parliamentary apparatus.” In other cases, for example, in the Russian military, old organizational norms overwhelmingly continue to dominate, sometimes with devastating consequences. At a minimum, new norms relating to democracy and human rights compete with the old norms of empire, and the customs of Soviet political life.

Towards a better understanding of norms and networks

Even with dense advocacy networks, presidents who care about Western opinion, dependence on foreign assistance, and good laws in place, outcomes in post-communist states, and Russia in particular, diverge from expectations generated by much scholarly literature on the power of norms. Some post-communist states are slowly moving in the democratic direction (Poland for example), some have regressed (Russia but also Belarus), and others, according to human rights groups, exist in worse conditions than under the Soviets (Central Asia). Wherever one looks in Eastern Europe and Eurasia, however, the process of transition looks much less progressive than either policy-makers suggest or the scholarly literature predicts. Because of this, the findings here have implications for theoretical models concerning norms and networks.

The Russian case suggests that the likelihood of norms diffusion may be overstated in recent international relations studies, such as the prize winning *Activists Beyond Borders* or *The Power of Human Rights*. The norms that the scholarly literature assumes to be internationally the most robust, cascading and shared, such as human rights and democratic ones, appear to be rather weak, inconsistently

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72 On this see also Fedorov, “Democratization and Globalization,” p. 24. The way in which the Russian military handled the sinking of the Kursk in August 2000 is a particularly vivid example. For numerous accounts see <www.cdi.org/russia/>.

applied by powerful Western states and repeatedly challenged by historical legacies in places like Russia. One focus of this study has been to detail the fragility of the norms, but further work needs to be done on the conditions necessary to strengthen them. One approach might be to study how decision-makers in the United States and Europe, where these norms are thought to be robust, understand and relate to these norms. How do they compete with other norms and other priorities? How does the hypothetical use of force by Russia against the United States affect how American decision-makers think and talk about the actual use of force by Russia against its population?

The growing work on norms depicts globalization as the spread of ideas, rules and practices that underpin democratic values and human rights, affecting both societies and elites. Increasingly, and particularly in Eastern Europe and Eurasia, one often observes a less discussed but related phenomenon: internationalization. Capital and information travel, but their impact is often exclusively superficial. Ideas matter, but not in a substantive, dominant manner; they have little real influence on the lives of citizens.

Because ideas and institutions, in the form of laws, constitutions and other formal structures, appear to reflect or grow out of liberal internationalist norms, many decision-makers in the United States and Europe applaud them. They either assume emerging structures and political behavior to be consistent with democratic norms, or weighed down by political or psychological motivations, ignore evidence that suggests the opposite. Stephen Krasner identifies this dynamic as organized hypocrisy, but there may be a disorganized quality to it as well. At a minimum, there are multiple forces compelling decision-makers and organizations to act inconsistently, and to overlook the erosion of international norms concerning human rights in its many forms.

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74 Author thanks members of the Program On New Approaches to Russian Security for the January 2000 discussion on internationalization.

75 Krasner, Sovereignty, p. 52, p. 57, argues that rulers are driven by instrumentality to object when it suits them and ignore when it does not. Rulers in most political systems, however, do not choose by themselves which evidence to look at but are guided by layers of bureaucracy and dozens of advisors. Contingency plays a large factor in how issues are framed by bureaucrats and advisors, and ultimately, how they get on agendas.
In Russia’s case, the fact that it has political parties, elections, and NGOs, is a signatory to human rights declarations, and that Russian officials use human rights language, enables Western decision-makers to overlook systematic torture and killing, repression and general harassment of the political opposition. Even with the grossest of violations of their own and international laws, there has been no consequence for, nor coercion of Russia. The Western democracies have instead invited Russia to participate in the Ministerial Conference on Democracies in Warsaw (June 2000) and the G-8 meeting in Okinawa (July 2000) and Italy (July 2001).

In contrast with expectations generated by both policy-makers and scholars, the way the Euro-Atlantic states have responded to Russia indicates it is perfectly possible to be “norm-violating” and to be a member of the “ingroup” (or at least invited to its functions). In contrast to what some scholars have found, there is little evidence that for Russia, “talking the talk” and developing certain institutions necessarily obligates, “entangles” or “entrap” its decision-makers.

Instead, rhetoric is often a substitute for real change. To date, there is little guidance from theory to distinguish when rhetoric is a sign of positive change towards compliance with norms or regression; language that supports human rights and language that denies abuses (even with evidence of abuses) are both cited as evidence of increased compliance with international norms.

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76 Risse and Sikkink, “The Socialization of International Human Rights Norms,” p. 38. Russia has membership or a special relationship with many liberal “clubs” including NATO, the G-7, the OSCE and the Council of Europe. For other examples, see Krasner, Sovereignty, p. 52, where he cites the favorable treatment of Iran by states even as American diplomats were held hostage; Moravcsik, “The Origins of Human Rights Regimes,” pp. 219-220, draws attention to democracies allying with dictatorships.


Conclusions and recommendations

Despite progress in certain areas, 25 years after the Helsinki Final Act, and 10 years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, neither gains in human rights nor democracy have been consolidated in Russia. Instead, there has been regression in recent years. This outcome contrasts with scholarly work describing cascading norms and robust advocacy networks in other areas of the world. The Russian case points to much evidence that international norms on human rights and democracy are not as strong as scholars or policy-makers have thought in “the international community”; these norms are haphazardly applied by decision-makers everywhere, and are increasingly challenged by regional norms in Russia. Most disturbingly, international norms appear weak precisely as transnational networks have grown, and Russia has been formally integrated into European institutions.

Rather than international organizations reflecting the balance of power in the international system, and in some way influencing Russia as it transitioned away from communist rule, Russia seems to have affected how these organizations have responded to its lack of compliance. Equally troubling, in the case of NATO’s air-war in Kosovo, these organizations themselves have been in non-compliance with international humanitarian law even as they responded to human rights violations. This all leads to confusion: which values exactly were Russian decision-makers meant to be embracing? The ones that encouraged the use of force to stop human rights abuses in Kosovo? The ones that were reluctant to even name war crimes in Chechnya? Because the logic and customs of democratic states are themselves ambiguous and contradictory, the diffusion of norms is problematic.

79 Speaking on Andrei Sakharov’s 80th birthday, his widow, Yelena Bonner fears that Russia has made little progress towards the ideals her husband stood for. As cited in “Sakharov’s Ideals Can Save Russia,” editorial, Moscow Times, May 23, 2001.

80 On the debate about likelihood of institutions reflecting the balance of power in the system, see Mearsheimer, “The False Promise of International Institutions”; Keohane and Martin, “The Promise of Institutionalist Theory.”

One might argue that Russia's political trajectory will be little affected by international behavior or international responses to its behavior. After seventy-five years of Soviet rule, Russians are simply slower at internalizing international norms than South Africans or Chileans, cases which scholars argue demonstrate the power of norms. If one waits another ten years, Russia will look different. Undoubtedly, Russia will be either more or less democratic, more or less rule-consistent. Russia in 2001 is in many ways less compliant with international norms than it was in 1992, but perhaps some momentous domestic event will result in galvanizing public opinion and pushing Russia back towards behavior consistent with Western conceptions of human rights and democracy. Without a critical media, however, the chances of this happening significantly decrease. Perhaps, instead, powerful Western states will begin to enforce compliance as a result of evidence from Chechnya.

Whatever happens in the future, to date, “the international community” has not kept up pressure on Russia. Two wars in Chechnya, both of which involved war crimes, do not qualify as low-level or routine abuses even if one coded manipulation of national elections, abhorrent prison conditions, widespread abuse in the military, harassment of NGOs and religious organizations, or the intimidation of journalists and academics as such. Based on the Russian case, the level and amount of norm-violation that is tolerated over time by so many parts of the international system suggests that the threshold for non-compliance is extremely high, and that international human rights norms are less robust than is commonly believed. Given that Russia continues to have ideational resources quite independent from liberal internationalism, there is little likelihood that Russia independently will begin to comply with these norms.

There are lessons here for those involved in decision-making, whether within governments or international organizations. Business as usual is ill-advised. There is evidence (the second war in Chechnya) that norms violations do not lessen when one is a member of a club, and in fact, can actually

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82 Dunlop, “Reintegrating ‘Post-Soviet Space’,” p. 46, argues that “the de facto ideology of the Putin regime seems to be Russian imperial nationalism with accretions of pan-Orthodox Slavism....”
increase. This increase in non-compliance and the general tolerance of it deserves attention and urgent action by the United States and Europe if for no other reason than the mix of terror and poverty in Chechnya will not in the future be relegated to Russia. Like the Taliban in Afghanistan, the consequences of the way the Russians have fought the Chechens threatens to turn into everyone's security problem. Turkey and Saudi Arabia have discovered the spillover effect of Chechnya through high-jackings and hostage-taking. The Russian government must be convinced not that it has no problem in Chechnya – it does – but that the way in which the government approaches this problem, the way the Federal Forces use force, is itself likely to be the catalyst for a spread – not the containment – of terrorism.

In this there is a special role for the United States. The State Department, in coordination with the National Security Council and the Pentagon, ought to be drawing up a strategy which focuses on more, not less, engagement with international organizations on these topics. The United States ought also to encourage Tony Blair to engage Vladimir Putin, but in ways that leave activists in Russia less isolated, and nationalists less encouraged. The Germans and the French can help also to make European institutions like the Council of Europe and the OSCE more responsive to evidence of non-compliance. The return of the OSCE presence to Russia ought to be a condition for continued membership. And finally, but no less important, this conflict, like those in Northern Ireland and in the Middle East, are unlikely to be resolved without serious, sustained efforts at international mediation.

The Russia case suggests that the precise role of powerful states and decision-makers in the diffusion of norms should be better specified. The fall of the Berlin Wall, for example, was intimately linked to change in Soviet foreign policy and decisions made by Mikhail Gorbachev not to use force. The embargo on South Africa became much more powerful as a tool once the United States joined it. Likewise, the power to help enforce compliance resides not with advocacy networks but with great powers like the United States. It is not enough for Russia, to care about its image in "the international community" (certainly a condition met by post-Soviet Russia). It is not enough for the networks to

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publicize norms violations, although they should continue to do so. The pressure to persuade Russia to be compliant must be more than “moral discourse.”

Networks, especially when dealing with a state as vast and still relatively powerful as Russia, are constrained in their ability to bring about change absent the support of states and IOs. In summary, without representatives of the great powers weighing in loudly and clearly against norm-violating behavior in Russia and elsewhere in the international system, the power of international norms and the transnational non-governmental networks is undercut. Those not persuaded by the power of norms, networks or even international organizations, they need only to recognize that until the war in Chechnya comes to an end, and even for some time after, the political trajectory of Russia – towards or away from democracy – remains in doubt. This uncertainty alone should push this issue to the top of everyone’s policy agenda.

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