TITLE: THE RELENTLESS PURSUIT OF THE NATIONAL STATE: INSTABILITY IN SOVIET AND POST-SOVIET EXPERIENCES

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper examines what is argued to have been a massive shift in the former USSR towards state-seeking attitudes and behaviors: attitudes and behaviors on the part of culturally-based groups that aim at gaining more direct control over, or access to, a state. The breakup of the Soviet Union was accompanied by a wave of conflicts unleashed by the proliferation of state-seeking behaviors and the ensuing frictions between new states attempting to consolidate their power, and culturally- and regionally-based groups demanding greater access to, and control over the state. The paper endeavors to conceptualize the notion of state-seeking as one dimension of nationalist politics, to dissect the shift in consciousness and behavior towards state-seeking in the region, and to examine some of its consequences for post-Soviet politics. It is argued that state-seeking is closely connected with a generalized crisis of the state, in which the state's "fundamental principles" come under challenge. This crisis is profoundly conditioned by previous patterns of state-building. Moreover, the crisis of the state not only creates the political opportunity structures necessary for challenging the existing state order, but also itself generates in part the need and desire for state-seeking activity.

An analysis of patterns of protest in the former Soviet Union at 6,461 protest demonstrations from 1987 through 1992 compares mobilization over state-seeking issues with mobilization over state-expansionist issues. It is shown that significant mobilization over state-seeking issues became a permanent part of Soviet politics from June 1988 on, accounting for an average of half of the monthly protest mobilization in the country as a whole through the end of 1990. Mobilization over state-expansionist issues, while prominent in the early part of the glasnost' mobilization wave, subsequently declined, reviving again in the post-Soviet period as groups within new nationalizing states pressed irredentist and expansionist claims. In the post-Soviet period a significant decline in mobilization over state-seeking issues at protest demonstrations occurred. However, an analysis of 1,684 mass violent events shows a significant rise in violence over republican borders accompanied the breakup of the USSR. As the paper demonstrates, state-seeking in the post-Soviet period became both more violent and more institutionalized within state politics.

The paper identifies three waves of state-seeking in the former USSR, each involving different categories of groups. Many groups underwent significant attitudinal change in the glasnost' period over what kind of state formation they wished to live in. In short, the events of 1989-1990 provoked a massive pursuit of the state, as groups who were relatively demobilized earlier over the issue mobilized with the purpose of nationalizing. The demise of
the USSR unleashed a new wave of state-seeking behaviors and set the stage for a new conflict between the consolidation of new states and the state-seeking behavior of those who remained dissatisfied with the forms of state that they had been designated. The essay examines three sources of state-seeking behaviors in the post-Soviet era: 1) minorities, locked out of separate statehood by the norms that produced the post-Soviet state system, who, in the wake of the collapse of the USSR, have been agitating for separate statehood; 2) new diasporas, created in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet state, who reject their status as minorities and seek to redraw the boundaries of states or to establish autonomous state formations within an existing state; and 3) exacerbated relations between center and locality, produced from the deterioration of the state and the resulting crisis of governability, which have encouraged locally-based groups to vie for control over the state. In all of these cases, changing political opportunity structures have had a significant impact on the emergence of state-seeking behaviors. Precisely because state-seeking behavior is dependent upon opportunity structures, state-seeking behaviors seem to explode at particular points in time, setting off what appears as a race for the state among numerous groups.
THE RELENTLESS PURSUIT OF THE NATIONAL STATE: 
INSTABILITY IN SOVIET AND POST-SOVIET EXPERIENCES

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The second condition of permanent political society . . .
[is] the existence in some form or other, of the feeling of
allegiance or loyalty. This feeling may vary in its objects
. . . [but] its essence is always the same; viz. that there be
in the constitution of the state something which is settled,
something permanent, and not to be called in question
. . . But when the questioning of these fundamental
principles is . . . the habitual condition of the body
politic; and when all the violent animosities are called
forth, which spring naturally from such a situation, the
state is virtually in a position of civil war.

John Stuart Mill, *A System of Logic* (1865)

The breakup of the former Soviet Union was more than simply the end of a regime. It
was the beginning of an era. When future historians determine the global significance of the
chain of events that stretched from 1988 through 1991 in the former USSR, they will be as
likely to focus on the death of communism as on the phenomenal growth in nationalist
mobilization that accompanied communism's demise and the persisting consequences which that
mobilization has had for the rest of the world.

It is the central theme of this paper that one of the most important developments in
Eurasian politics in recent years has been a massive shift, both at the elite and mass levels,
towards what I have chosen to call state-seeking attitudes and behaviors. By state-seeking
attitudes and behaviors, I have in mind not only the desire on the part of a group for the
creation of its own independent state, although obviously that element looms large in any
understanding of the breakup of the USSR. But state-seeking attitudes and behaviors also
encompass other types of demands as well: for the creation of autonomous state formations
within another state; for merging the territory of a group to that of another state; for upgrading
the sovereignty and authority of existing territorial units with the purpose of group
empowerment; or for changing the rules of the state to gain group control over and access to
state resources (for instance, changing the official language or altering group representation in
positions of power). The common denominator here is the desire on the part of an ethnic or
State-seeking in this sense may be understood as one of several co-existing, relational dimensions of behavior that fall under the rubric of nationalism. State-expansion (efforts to augment the borders and authority of the state to encompass new territories or groups) and societal engineering (efforts to alter the character of society in order to enhance the position of a particular group) are two other dimensions of behavior that are also characteristic of nationalist politics; others undoubtedly exist as well. Each of these may intersect or overlap with one another. The common element that binds them is that they all deal with the assertion of claims for defining or redefining the physical or human boundaries of the polity, which is the essence of nationalist phenomena. And as they are group-based behaviors, they also have a tendency to evoke their own counter-mobilizations aimed at thwarting them. Conceiving of nationalism in this way—as containing several overlapping and intersecting dimensions of behavior based on how a group seeks to relate to the state, with each of these dimensions itself containing a variety of types of claims and having the ability to provoke its own counter-mobilization—allows us to compare the evolution of nationalist behaviors both between and within these dimensions of nationalism, as well as between them and the counter-mobilizations that they call forth. Of course, none of these forms of behavior is new—either in the world at large or in the post-Soviet world more specifically. Nevertheless, the degree to which mobilization over these issues has exploded in recent years in the former Soviet Union differentiates this period radically from that which preceded it and makes it akin to other periods of world revolutionary change.

The generalization of state-seeking attitudes and behaviors in ethnic politics marks a distinct shift from the period of Soviet power, when these issues were taken as relatively fixed. Indeed, it was the attempt to coopt, institutionalize, and arrest non-Russian state-seeking behavior in the aftermath of the collapse of the Tsarist state that brought about the emergence of the Soviet federal system in the first place. That system was relatively successful at undermining state-seeking; it did so not only through severe repression and limiting group access to and control over state institutions, but also ironically by generalizing state-seeking norms through providing territorial-administrative entities to large numbers of peoples. The unravelling of this formula has caused severe problems for the formation of stable polities throughout the Eurasian region. One of the most profound legacies of Leninism in post-Soviet politics has been a general propensity to seek the resolution of issues of cultural pluralism through the multiplication of territorial autonomies. Ironically, the revolt against communism was supposed to be a revolution against the state, not a struggle for it. The demise of the USSR
has often been portrayed in the West as the breakdown of the state and as part of a generalized crisis of government whose implications reach far beyond the USSR's former borders. This crisis did not end with the breakup of the USSR. In the post-Soviet world we have witnessed an extraordinarily large number of conflicts unleashed by the proliferation of state-seeking behavior and the frictions that have ensued between new states attempting to consolidate their sovereignty and groups challenging this sovereignty and demanding greater access to and control over the state.

**STATE-SEEKING AND THE GENERALIZED CRISIS OF THE STATE**

Figure 1, (page 16) examining mobilization over state-seeking and state-expansionist issues at protest demonstrations in the former Soviet Union from January 1987 through September 1992 (n=6,461), provides us with a general picture of how dimensions of nationalist behavior evolved over time in the former Soviet Union. State-seeking and state-expansion are frequently related activities; as Rogers Brubaker has argued, they have often been two sides of a more general form of triadic politics characteristic of the region that encompasses the actions of national minorities, national homelands, and nationalizing states. Frequently, groups within national homelands seek to expand the boundaries of the state in order to encompass state-seeking diasporic minorities in other states. At the same time, as Figure 1 indicates, the development of these two dimensions of nationalist politics has been far from identical.

As Figure 1 shows, state-seeking was a fixed feature of Soviet politics from approximately June 1988 on, accounting for (on average) about half of the monthly protest mobilization in the country as a whole through May 1991. State-seeking constituted the most important element of the nationalist mobilization that engulfed the former Soviet Union during the years of its demise. While significant mobilization in favor of state expansion (in particular, irredentist mobilization) occurred early in the glasnost' mobilizational wave, state-seeking soon became a more prevalent form of behavior and arguably the fundamental force behind the country's breakup.

Mobilization over state-seeking issues remained an important element of protest mobilization well beyond the demise of the USSR, lasting at significant levels until July 1992, when demonstration activity in the former Soviet Union began to drop off altogether as a form of political participation. By contrast, state-expansionist mobilization, after declining significantly from mid-1989 through 1991, underwent a revival of sorts after the collapse of the USSR, as groups within new nationalizing states pressed irredentist and expansionist claims against other states. The decline in mobilization over state-seeking issues at demonstrations in
1992 represented more of a shift in participatory repertoires than an end to state-seeking as such. In the post-Soviet period, state-seeking both grew more violent and became more institutionalized within official politics than was the case in the late Soviet period. In some parts of the former USSR, democratization and the broadening of the political opportunity structure that it represented allowed elites to pursue state-seeking goals through state institutions themselves. In these cases, state-seeking migrated from the streets to legislatures and local government institutions. In other regions mass violence rather than peaceful protest became the central element in state-seeking behavior in aftermath of the breakup of the USSR. As Figure 2 (providing information on the ostensible causes of 1,684 mass violent events from January 1987 through June 1992, page 17) indicates, the post-Soviet period was characterized by a growing politicization of conflict over republican borders; efforts to change republican borders have constituted the most frequent cause of mass violence in the post-Soviet period, increasing at an extremely rapid pace with the breakup of the USSR. The vast majority of these conflicts involve minorities seeking to leave the current state in which they are located and to attach their territory to that of a different state. As independent states came to play a more central role in the pressuring of state-seeking and state-expansionist claims, violence in some cases became an increasingly prevalent characteristic of disputes over borders. The explanation lies both in the appropriateness of various repertoires of participation to achieving state-seeking goals, as well as the ability of the state itself to act as an organizer of violence. The intrusion of the state into state-seeking activities has meant a significant increase in the level of organization of violence, as well as the destructiveness of the weapons involved. Moreover, for some groups demonstrations and the disruption they seek to cause seemed an appropriate tool of politics when the locus of decision-making over border issues rested in Moscow; as Moscow’s ability to influence the outcome of these disputes waned, the target of protest shifted more directly onto groups that were less likely to be affected by the politics of disruption.

The development and proliferation of state-seeking behaviors in the former Soviet Union was closely connected with the emergence of a generalized crisis of the state—a crisis questioning what Mill identified as “the fundamental principles” upon which the state is built. I understand these “fundamental principles” as including not only the ideas and practices upon which state legitimacy rests, but also the territorial and human boundaries of the state. Fixed territorial boundaries are one of the central features of the modern state, and all modern states claim to represent a body of citizens constituted as a nation. In the Soviet case, a generalized crisis of the state not only provided the social space necessary for elites to engage in mobilization over state-seeking issues; it also in itself helped to generate the need and desire for a fundamental rethinking of the human and physical boundaries of the polity. Moreover, this
crisis of the state was itself considerably deepened by the proliferation of state-seeking behaviors. A generalized crisis of the state continues into the post-Soviet period, and the enduring ambiguity surrounding the proper boundaries of political communities has formed the main battleground over which post-Soviet national conflicts have been fought. This ambiguity persists in large part because of the historical legacies of empire-building and state-building in Eurasia. As an overland (rather than overseas) empire, Russia could not so easily segment its nation-building and colonial policies, had a difficult time defining who was a citizen and who was a subject, and could not delineate the physical borders of Russia from its occupied territories. Moreover, nationalism came late to the Eurasian land mass: even at the time of the Russian revolution, local, religious, clan, and class identities vied with nationalism for mass loyalties, and in many cases nationalist elites were unsuccessful in mobilizing populations on the basis of ethnicity. The ambiguity of ethnic and territorial boundaries was further accentuated by the Leninist model of state-building and the dual reality of state-building and empire-building that it sustained. If nationalism is essentially about the definition of the physical and human boundaries of the polity, historical experience in this part of the world has led to wholesale confusion and contestation over the definition of those boundaries.

The emergence of a generalized crisis of the state within the former Soviet Union was accompanied by an enormous remaking of national consciousness. No more sharply was this demonstrated than in the proliferation of state-seeking attitudes and behaviors. With the onset of glasnost', groups previously denied access to or control over the state quickly began to clamor for change. While a handful of groups had exhibited a mass desire for independent statehood (e.g., the Balts), for gaining autonomous territorial units (e.g., the Crimean Tatars), or for changing the status of their territorial unit (e.g., the Abkhaz) long before arrival of glasnost', the same cannot be said for most groups. With some exceptions, most nationalities remained largely demobilized over state-seeking issues throughout most of the Soviet period, and ethnic politics was a game played out by a small coterie of dissidents located on the fringes of the political system. Since the inauguration of glasnost' almost every group experienced massive attitudinal change and/or mobilization over the issue of the kind of state formation in which they deserved to live.

In reality, the breakup of the USSR was not a single surge of state-seeking, but rather involved successive waves of state-seeking, some of which carried over into the post-Soviet period. Figure 3 (page 18), which examines protest mobilization over state-seeking issues among various categories of ethnic groups, shows a sharp differentiation in the timing and pattern of protest mobilization among ethnic groups and in the emergence of a state-seeking agenda. Not surprisingly, peoples without any representation within the Soviet federal system
protested fairly consistently throughout this period over state-seeking issues, although at extremely low levels of mobilization. The absence of access to the state and in some cases geographic dispersal made it difficult for the stateless to engage in effective mobilization of their populations. Levels of protest mobilization over state-seeking issues (as well as protest mobilization overall) were fairly closely tied to the shape of the Soviet federal system itself—further proof of the ways in which Soviet nationalities policies helped to construct the very conditions that eventually undermined the USSR. Balts, Georgians, and Armenians mobilized relatively quickly over state-seeking issues, peaking in late 1989 and early 1990 and declining over the course of 1990, as nationalist governments came to power through the ballot box. By contrast, other titular republican peoples mobilized much later over state-seeking issues (peaking in 1990 and 1991) and only after significant mobilization occurred over other issues. By 1990, most protest in favor of secession was being carried out not by Balts, Georgians, and Armenians, but by Ukrainians, Azerbaidzhanis, Moldavians, and even Russians. Even those who participated in this “revolution of the mind” were surprised by their own behavior. As a liberal Russian Jewish intellectual recounted to journalist John Morrison in May 1990: “If you had told me two years ago I would be out on the street at demonstrations shouting ‘Rossi-ya, Rossi-ya,’ I would have thought you were crazy.”

This second wave of state-seeking mobilization—a time when attitudes towards the state were highly unstable—unleashed the so-called parade of sovereignties, when myriad territories of the former Soviet Union went about formally declaring themselves “sovereign,” whatever this most ambiguous of terms actually meant. Indeed, its meaning varied enormously from place to place, in many instances signifying little more than a desire for greater control over local affairs. Not only union republics, but autonomous republics, autonomous districts, urban wards, and even islands participated in this orgy of autonomy-seeking. It was also at this time that most autonomous republics unilaterally declared themselves union republics.

This second stage in the development of state-seeking nationalism was characterized above all by a significant broadening of the peoples involved in state-seeking. As Figure 3 shows, in early 1991 peoples associated with autonomous republics and provinces began to mobilize over state-seeking issues as well. To some extent, this was a matter of demonstration effects. But other processes were also at work. The growing influence of majority nationalizing movements in the union republics in turn led to efforts by minorities within those republics to separate and gain protection and representation in the context of other state formations. In 1990 and 1991, for instance, both Ossetians and Gagauzy grew active in agitating for separation from their respective union republics in reaction to the rise of nationalism in Georgia and Moldova respectively. New categories and identities, such as Russian-speakers (russko-
govoriashchie) were called into being as a result of the nationalizing policies of republics: these also became a basis for state-seeking mobilization at this time. Even a year before the State Emergency Committee’s aborted attempt to seize power, state-seeking had become so common a form of behavior that it was widely parodied in the Soviet press. In short, the events of 1989-1990 provoked a massive pursuit of the state, as groups that were relatively demobilized over state-seeking issues earlier mobilized in search of the national state.

STATE-SEEKING VERSUS STATE-BUILDING

A new chapter in attitudes towards the state in this region of the world opened up with the collapse of the USSR in August 1991. At that time, state-seeking attitudes and behaviors became universalized, and a new set of conflicts set in: between the consolidation of new states and the state-seeking behavior of those who remained dissatisfied with the forms of state which they had been designated.

Immediately following the August coup, there was a general consolidation of opinion around the former union republics as new national states. This was particularly so among the titular nationalities of the former union republics, but was not confined to them. It generally affected all populations that had been disaffected from the communist regime, regardless of ethnicity. In the December 1991 referendum on Ukrainian independence, for instance, 90.3 percent of the inhabitants of Ukraine voted in favor of secession. Significantly enough, even the heavily Russified Donetsk and Odessa provinces showed 83.9 and 85.3 percent majorities respectively in favor of independence, while 54.1 percent of the voters of Crimea province, populated by a majority Russian population, voted in favor of independence. By contrast, in the post-Soviet era, many of these populations eventually became disaffected from their new homelands and openly began to question the legitimacy of the region’s new borders.

Of course, for many peoples independence was unwanted and unexpected, coming without warning and without any effort on their part to achieve it. In a number of these instances populations that had largely been immune to the secessionist disease up to August 1991 (such as the Central Asians) often experienced a radical shift in attitudes in favor of the birth of new states and the collapse of the Soviet center. Whereas before the August coup there was little sentiment in favor of secession in Central Asia, referenda in favor of secession overwhelmingly passed in each of these republics by the fall of 1991.13 Local communist politicians—often of the most conservative ilk—recycled themselves as national saviors and as founders of national states. In essence, nationalist consciousness and the national state was brought to these peoples from above, through a combination of the actions of elites and the uncontrolled flow of events.
Much of the politics of the past several years in the former Soviet Union can be viewed as an enormous effort at state consolidation, whereby the union republics of the former USSR, having attained international recognition, have sought (often unsuccessfully) to create the basic institutions and practices characteristic of states around the globe: bureaucracies, armies, monetary regulation, police, tax collection, postal service, border control, citizenship control, foreign embassies, etc. Most importantly from the point of view of our topic, state-building ran into a third wave of state-seeking unleashed as a direct result of the collapse of the USSR.

There have generally been three sources of state-seeking in the post-Soviet era. First, in the aftermath of the collapse of the USSR, a number of minorities of the former Soviet Union accelerated their agitation for separate statehood and even in some cases declared it unilaterally—this time running directly into the opposition of the former union republics, who only months before were themselves agitating for independence from Moscow. The Soviet federal system, as arbitrary as it was, has served as the basis for legitimation of the post-Soviet state system. The collapse of the Soviet Union led fairly quickly to international recognition of the state independence of the fifteen union republics. But other than Stalin’s self-serving decisions about which peoples’ deserved their own union republics and which would have units subordinated to union republics, there is no justification for why peoples with union republics deserve independence and those without do not. Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, for instance, were not originally assigned union republican status when the USSR was created, but were instead autonomous republics within the Russian Federation. Had they not been separated by Stalin into union republics in 1936, it is doubtful that they would be independent states today. There is no inherent reason, other than Stalin’s manipulations, for why 1 million Estonians should deserve independent statehood while 6 million Volga Tatars should not. The post-Soviet configuration of states and the internal structure of the post-Soviet states may in this respect be considered one of the remaining bastions of Stalinism that has yet to be stormed.

Although secessionist sentiment certainly exists among many of Russia’s minorities, so far only the Volga Tatars and the Chechens have been bold enough to approach declarations of secession. After the collapse of the USSR Chechnia became de facto an independent state, governed by the corrupt authoritarian regime of Dzhakhar Dudaev, a general in the former Soviet airforce who established his control over the region in fall 1991 and imposed a personal dictatorship. For three years Russia hardly exercised any control over the region, and repeated attempts by Yeltsin to reimpose rule from Moscow failed. Finally, in frustration Yeltsin ordered an invasion of the region in December 1994, unleashing a bloody war whose consequences are likely to persist for a long time. The international community, of course, did not rush in to recognize the Dudaev regime, in large part because of the fear that this would set
in motion the further disintegration of Russia. Chechnia’s declaration of independence, however, has unleashed other processes of state-seeking throughout the Northern Caucasus, weakening further Russia’s control over this volatile region.

In the case of Tatarstan, the government of former communist boss Mintimer Shaymiyev for several years defied Moscow’s control; rather than complete secession, it preferred to remain associated with Moscow by means of international agreement. In March 1992 Tatarstan held a referendum on whether it was “a sovereign state and a subject of international law,” despite the fact that the Russian Constitutional Court had declared the referendum illegal. After 61 percent of the electorate voted to recognize Tatar sovereignty, the republic refused to sign the Russian Federal Treaty. In November 1992 Tatarstan adopted a new constitution that declared it a sovereign state “associated with the Russian Federation” on the basis of an international treaty. During negotiations over the new Russian constitution in the summer of 1993, the Tatar delegation walked out in protest of what it viewed as backtracking by the Yeltsin government on the issue of Tatar sovereignty. The Tatars insisted that it was the right of the republics to create a new federation government and not of the center to determine the extent of powers of the republics. Eventually, under heavy pressure from Moscow, the Shaymiyev government signed a bilateral treaty with the Russian Federation in February 1994. However, the agreement itself was ambiguous as to what it actually signified. The Yeltsin government claimed that it was an internal agreement, whereas Tatarstan described it as a treaty between two sovereign states. Under the agreement, Tatarstan retained the right to conduct its own foreign policy and foreign trade, to decide questions of republican citizenship, and to exempt its youth from service in the Russian army. While the treaty may have put a temporary hold on the quarrel, the issue of defining Tatarstan’s relationship with Moscow could easily reemerge in the future.

A second source of the persistence of state-seeking behavior in the post-Soviet period has been the instant diasporas created by the collapse of the USSR. When the Soviet Union disintegrated in August 1991, 38 million former Soviet citizens who lived outside the union republic of their own nationality (including 25 million Russians) were suddenly thrust into the status of being a minority in another ethnic group’s state. While in some cases these minorities have not been excluded from the political process (as in Ukraine), in other cases they have been treated as social or even legal aliens, leading to massive out-migration (as in Central Asia) and, in instances of compact settlement, the growth of regional and separatist movements (as in Estonia and Moldova).

In the case of the Russian minority in Northern Estonia, over 90 percent of the participants in a referendum held in the cities of Narva and Sillamæe in July 1993 voted in
favor of declaring their towns autonomous territories within Estonia. The Estonian government
declared the referendum invalid.\textsuperscript{15} Within a week of Ukraine’s declaration of independence in
August 1991, the Supreme Soviet of the majority-Russian Crimea declared its republic’s state
sovereignty, albeit as a constituent part of Ukraine. In May 1992 the Crimea proclaimed its
independence from Ukraine, only to have the declaration immediately annulled by Kiev. There
is widespread support in the region for some degree of Russian sovereignty over the area. A
1993 poll conducted by Ian Bremmer in the city of Simferopol’ found that 75 percent of
Russians and 42 percent of Ukrainians in the city preferred that the Soviet Union still exist.\textsuperscript{16}
In July 1993, the Russian parliament unilaterally declared Simferopol’ to be a Russian city. In
January 1994 Crimea held a presidential election in which Yuri Meshkov, leader of the
Crimean independence movement, won 75 percent of the vote. Subsequent parliamentary
elections brought Meshkov’s supporters to power with 67 percent of the vote. A simultaneous
referendum also showed that 82 percent favored dual Russian/Ukrainian citizenship for
inhabitants of Crimea. Meshkov and his group attempted to introduce a separate Crimean
citizenship and currency. In response, the Ukrainian parliament annulled these laws and
threatened to dissolve the local government if it did not bring its constitution into line with
Ukraine’s. By fall 1994, however, a split had developed within Meshkov’s own movement,
with the parliament voting to strip him of his powers, while Meshkov called for the parliament
to dissolve itself. This, along with the election of Leonid Kuchma, who is widely seen as
favoring the Russian-speaking community in Ukraine, has taken some of the wind out of the
Crimean separatist movement.

The self-declared Gagauz Republic and the Dniestr Moldavian Republics remain
unrecognized by any government, although four Russian provinces have concluded economic
agreements on their own with the Dniestr Republic. The Pridniestr republic has at times refused
any kind of relationship with Chisinau, while at other times has hinted that it would remain
within Moldova if a confederation could be arranged. The Moldavians, by contrast, at first
insisted on a unitary state, but have now come to embrace some kind of federal arrangement.
In the meantime, the Moldovans have reached a compromise arrangement with the Gagauz,
giving them extensive autonomy and reserving for the Gagauz the right to secede if Moldova
were to change its international status (i.e., merge with Romania).

While Russian minorities have received the bulk of the attention in the West, it would be
wrong to think that the diaspora issue is confined to Russians alone. The borders of union
republics are not ethnic borders, and practically every republic has some minority whose status
has been called into question by the transformation of the union republics into national states.
In Central Asia, there is a sleeping diaspora issue which was the cause of considerable
communal violence in the *glasnost* period, but the in post-Soviet period has not yet grown into an inter-state issue. A recent summit of Central Asian leaders in August saw the signing of a joint declaration on the inviolability of borders; the signatories committed themselves not to alter former Soviet borders and to prevent activities by groups or individuals on their territory who seek to do so.\(^7\)

A third cause for the growth of state-seeking behaviors in the post-Soviet period has been the crisis of governability that has engulfed the entire former Soviet Union. It has severely exacerbated relations between center and locality and has encouraged locally-based groups to vie for control over the state. One sees this not only in the federal crisis that has consumed Russia, but also in the strained relations between Kiev and its Russian minority, and even in the bloody civil war in Tadzhikistan (which is as much a battle among regionally-based cliques as an ideological and religious struggle).

The federal crisis that consumed Russia in 1992 and 1993 confirms the critical role played by political opportunity structures in fostering state-seeking behavior. As the parliament and president became embroiled in a paralyzing power struggle, power drifted to the regions, creating new possibilities for staking claims to state authority. Ironically, it was the 1992 federal treaty and Yel’tsin’s state-building strategy which, in a period of confusion at the center, became major threats to the cohesion of Russia. Signed by all the regions and almost all of the republics of the federation (Only Tatarstan and Chechnia rejected it.), the federal treaty provided, among other things, for extensive local control over natural resources, land, and foreign relations for those territories granted republican status, while territories that were governed as provinces were denied these. This was part of Yel’tsin’s state-building strategy: to rely upon the republics in building power and consolidating a new Russia. Indeed, one examination of Russian government spending and revenues showed that republics received more money from the government than they had contributed in taxes, while roughly a dozen provinces have received a fraction of their contribution. Tatarstan, for instance, paid only 93 million rubles in taxes in 1992, at the same time as receiving 38 billion rubles from the government.\(^8\) Policies such as this in turn led to a reaction by the provinces, which are, of course, predominantly Russian. The power of the republics, according to one Russian observer, had “given rise to a situation that can be defined as *de jure* codification of Russians’ statelessness in Russia.”\(^9\) This division between republics and provinces became the major issue standing in the way of the acceptance of the Yel’tsin constitution, and it set in motion a rush by provinces to declare themselves sovereign republics. In June 1993 official representatives of forty provinces signed a declaration indicating that they could not initial a
new draft constitution for Russia unless their territorial units were given equal status with the republics.\textsuperscript{20}

In 1993 center-periphery relations in Russia so deteriorated that six provinces and cities (Amur, Vologda, Sverdlovsk, Kaliningrad, Primorskii krai, and St. Petersburg) unilaterally declared themselves republics, and others promised to follow suit.\textsuperscript{21} In the case of Vologda province, a referendum was held in April 1993 in which 80 percent of the electorate voted for turning the province into a “state-territorial entity.”\textsuperscript{22} The heads of Irkutsk and Krasnoiarsk provinces openly discussed uniting their provinces into a single East Siberian Republic. The Cheliabinsk Provincial Soviet voted to transform the province into the Southern Urals Republic, and a referendum was scheduled on the issue of the “republicanization” of Chita province. Smelling gold at the end of the republican rainbow, the leaders of six Central Black Earth provinces threatened to declare themselves a republic if they did not receive special credits, price guarantees, and tax dispensations from Moscow.\textsuperscript{23} At the same time, the republics were claiming that their rights were inadequate as well. As one regional leader put it, the notion of sovereignty for republics and territorial units of the Russian Federation had become “a bomb under Russia’s future,” leading to potentially endless conflicts over center-periphery relations.\textsuperscript{24} So serious was the challenge to Russia’s territorial integrity that Yel’tsin saw fit to warn regional leaders in August 1993 that “the Russian Federation is not a piece of Swiss cheese” and that if Russia could not be kept together peacefully, “it could be done by naked force, by a dictatorship.”\textsuperscript{25}

The growth of regional separatism and the transformation of provinces into sovereign states were only two manifestations of a broader trend towards state-seeking behavior that encompassed Russia in 1993. On the eastern shores of Sakhalin, the indigenous Nivkhi declared their own autonomous governmental unit, against the desires of the local Russian inhabitants. The Taimyr Regional Soviet declared its secession from Krasnoiarsk krai, and the Khanty-Mansi and Yamal-Nenets Autonomous Regions, both within Tiumen’ province, declared themselves sovereign.\textsuperscript{26} Chukhotka similarly seceded from Magadan province. The key issue that united all of these cases was natural resources and the question of who would control their exploitation and export from Russia. In some areas of Russia, in particular, in the Kuban’ and in Volgograd province, Cossack Hetman rule was introduced. In March 1993 Yel’tsin assigned the functions of military training and policing in the Northern Caucasus to Cossack forces. While the Cossack population did not see itself as a separate entity from Russia, there was widespread talk that “an independent Cossack republic will come into being” in the Northern Caucasus;\textsuperscript{27} in some areas it already existed \textit{de facto}. The Don Cossacks agitated for the creation of a separate Don Cossack Province that would cut across Russia and Ukraine.
The political crisis between the parliament and the president was resolved in September and October 1993, when Yel’tsin dissolved parliament and stormed the Russian White House. The subsequent hardening of the political center led to a sharp drop in the staking of state-seeking claims. Indeed, to the disconcertment of many republics, Yel’tsin cut out of the new constitution any reference to republican sovereignty. He also ordered provincial legislatures to dissolve themselves and to hold new elections by March 1994. This met with considerable opposition, but was carried out. In February 1994 Yel’tsin succeeded inquieting the Tatarstan issue by concluding a bilateral treaty with the republic. In the views of most analysts, Yel’tsin has successfully reversed the trend towards disintegration of the federation. The real issue, however, is how long this state of affairs will last, given the close connection between disarray in the center and state-seeking in the regions. As patterns of state-seeking in this region of the world demonstrate, should the Russian government once again become paralyzed, a proliferation of state-seeking behaviors by Russia’s provinces would once again become likely.

Lest one fall into the trap of believing that the post-Soviet scramble for the state is simply a Russian phenomenon, it is worth reviewing the situation in two republics—Ukraine and Azerbaidzhan—to see how state-seeking remains the product of a generalized crisis of the state throughout the region. Indeed, state-seeking has been an almost knee-jerk reaction to national and regional problems of the most varied sort. In addition to the Republic of Crimea examined above, the miners of the Donbass region of Ukraine, who called for the resignation of the Kravchuk government because of excessive taxes and price rises, advocated as well special autonomous status for the Donets Region within Ukraine, largely as a means for protecting economic interests and language rights.28 The Subcarpathian Ruthenians began to agitate for the creation of an Autonomous Republic of Subcarpathian Ruthenia.29 And Russian communities in four provinces of southern Ukraine have called for combining into a state to be known as Novorossiia, or New Russia, in fear of Ukrainian domination.30 While Ukraine may not yet look like Russia’s Swiss cheese (and like Russia, it has experienced some hardening of the state more recently under Leonid Kuchma), no one doubts that under the right circumstances it could still come to resemble Gruyere.

During the June 1993 revolt of Surat Huseinov in Azerbaidzhan, the Talysh, a group of about 22 thousand Iranian-speakers that was once thought to have been completely assimilated by the Azerbaidzhaniis, used the confusion to declare into existence a Talysh-Mugan Autonomous Republic on the frontier between Azerbaidzhan and Iran. The local revolt continued for two months before it was put down by the new government of former communist boss Gaidar Aliev.31 The Lezgins, Sunni Muslims who, since 1922, have been divided by the Azerbaidzhani-Russian border, have also come to challenge Azerbaidzhan territorial integrity.
with the coming of independence. Depending on who does the counting, there are somewhere
between 466,000 and 1 million Lezgins in the former USSR; while the Azerbaidzhanis
claim that only 175,000 live in Azerbaijan, the Lezgins themselves claim that as many
as 700,000 live there and have been subjected over the years to forced cultural and
linguistic assimilation. While there had been some agitation among Lezgins in the Soviet
period, only with the breakup of the USSR have Lezgins grown politicized over the issue of the
unification of all Lezgins within an independent Lezgistan. The Azerbaidzhan government
reacted sharply against these developments, causing sharp tensions with Russia. And of
course, the Armenian revolt within Azerbaijan rages on. Certainly the Russian Federation,
with its 89 member units (of which 17 are national republics) and its huge expanse, represents a
degree of complexity not found in the other former republics of the Soviet Union, and for that
reason alone is particularly vulnerable to state-seeking behavior. But other republics as well
have been experiencing these same forces, perhaps not on the same scale, but certainly in the
same spirit and with many of the same consequences.

CONCLUSION

It is clear from the above discussion that in the case of the former Soviet Union we are
dealing with an unusual explosion of state-seeking behavior. And yet, while the former Soviet
Union provides us with one example of how state-seeking behavior has proliferated in recent
years, it is by no means the only. The late twentieth century has witnessed a more generalized
rush to the state not unlike that which was witnessed in East Europe at the end of World War I
and throughout most of the Third World in the aftermath of World War II.

How does one explain this new wave of state-seeking conduct, as well as its
universalization as a form of behavior within particular contexts? What do the Soviet and post-
Soviet experiences tell us about why state-seeking attitudes and behaviors proliferate?

The Soviet and post-Soviet evidence point to the close connection between state
disintegration and state-seeking. Indeed, the two appear as opposite sides of the same coin. As
we’ve seen, this is in part because the crisis of the state creates the political opportunity
structures necessary for challenging what Mill calls “the fundamental principles” of the state,
making what once seemed impossible fall within the realm of the imaginable. Issues of state
formation defy easy settlement, and the mere fact that they are raised itself alters significantly
the political opportunity structure facing those who seek to mobilize populations over these
issues. Precisely because state-seeking behavior is dependent upon political opportunity
structures, state-seeking behavior seems to explode at particular points in time, setting off
bursts of state-seeking and what appears as a race for the state among numerous groups.
Analogous phenomena occurred during earlier eruptions of state-seeking behavior in the twentieth century.

The crisis of the state also provides part of the context that makes state-seeking appear a relevant solution to pursue. It is not simply that state-seeking proliferates because it becomes possible (although in a few cases, such as the Balts, this is a sufficient explanation); state-seeking also proliferates in part because the disintegration of authority defines its own antinomy and itself calls into being efforts to reconstitute political authority on a different basis.

Finally, the crisis of the state in Eurasia, as we’ve seen, is itself the product of a particular historical legacy of state-building and empire-building that has fostered great ambiguity over the proper definition of the physical and human boundaries of polities. The proliferation of state-seeking is enhanced by this ambiguity and the contestation that it engenders. Moreover, the cultural expectations and norms that have emerged from previous patterns of state-building have also played a large role in fostering state-seeking behavior; the Leninist legacy of state-building helped to generalize norms of state-seeking, making it seem a natural solution to any and all issues of cultural pluralism.

Whatever its causes, the generalization of state-seeking behavior throughout this region of the world makes the long-term creation of stable polities problematic and in many cases elusive. Even if a semblance of stability could be achieved, in some polities cultural conflict is likely to continue to lurk beneath the surface, waiting for the moment when the state’s “fundamental principles” might once again be called into question. It is this inherent “softness” of the Eurasian state which defines the character of cultural politics in this region of the world and ensures that there will be few easy solutions to the disorder unleashed by the collapse of communism.
FIGURE 1. MOBILIZATION OVER STATE-SEEKING AND STATE-EXPANDING ISSUES AT PROTEST DEMONSTRATIONS, JANUARY 1987-SEPTEMBER 1992

MOBILIZATION OVER STATE-SEEKING ISSUES

MOBILIZATION OVER STATE-EXPANDING ISSUES

Percent of total mobilization
FIGURE 2.
VIOLENT MASS EVENTS INVOLVING LOCAL, REPUBLICAN-LEVEL, AND SECESSIONIST TERRITORIAL DISPUTES IN THE FORMER USSR, JANUARY 1987-JUNE 1992

Number of events

Percent of all violent events

Conflicts over republican borders
Conflicts over secession from USSR
Conflicts over local land ownership
FIGURE 3. STATE-SEEKING MOBILIZATION AT PROTEST DEMONSTRATIONS BY CATEGORY OF ETHNIC GROUP, JANUARY 1987-SEPTEMBER 1992
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NOTES

1. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the conference on “Race, Ethnicity, and Nationalism at the End of the Twentieth Century,” sponsored by the Institute on Race and Ethnicity of the University of Wisconsin System, September 1993. Research on state-seeking protest mobilization was carried out under the auspices of grants from the National Science Foundation, the National Council for Soviet and East European Research, the International Research and Exchanges Board, and the Graduate School of the University of Wisconsin-Madison. The author gratefully acknowledges their support.


3. Take, for instance, the case of Nagorno-Karabakh. Armenians living in the region who sought to unite the province with Armenia were engaging in state-seeking behavior, while Armenians within Armenia who agitated for incorporating Karabakh into Armenia were engaged in state-expansionist behavior. At the same time, Azerbaidzhanis seeking to expel Armenians from the region were engaged in a form of societal engineering.


5. For more on the methodology behind this analysis, see Mark R. Beissinger, “Non-Violent Public Protest in the USSR: December 1, 1986–December 31, 1989,” report published by the National Council for Soviet and East European Research, Washington, DC, 1990. State-seeking issues were defined as protest mobilization over one of the following issues: against the original annexation of territory to the USSR or Russia; in favor of secession; in support of sovereignty for one’s republic or territory; for upgrading the federal status of an administrative unit; for the creation of an autonomous federal unit; for a redefinition of citizenship along national lines; for creation of national military units; for separate representation abroad for a republic; for withdrawal of the Soviet army from the republic; publication or renunciation of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact; Siberian regional separatism; for separation of a territory from republic; for foreign recognition of republican independence; for the creation of an independent communist party around a territorial unit; for local control over economic resources; renunciation of Soviet citizenship; for republican control over the KGB; for reunification with Iran; for reunification with Romania; for greater economic autonomy for a republic; for increasing the representation of a nationality within elite posts; in favor of preserving or extending non-Russian linguistic or cultural rights; for making the language of a group the official language; against the Novo-Ogareva agreement; against Russian government interference in local affairs; for creation of a presidency for local government; for creation of Russian presidency; for local control over law enforcement agencies; for restoration of the Soviet Union; for Russian domination in Russia; for secession of a republic; solidarity with Russian separatists in non-Russian republics; against discrimination against population of locality; for full citizenship
rights of Russian minority in republic; for introduction of dual citizenship; for making Russian a second state language; and for introduction of local citizenship. State-expansionist issues were defined as protest mobilization over one of the following issues: irredentist claims against another political unit; for defense of Russians living beyond Russia's borders; for restoration of the Soviet Union; solidarity with Russian separatists in non-Russian republics; for introduction of dual citizenship; for creation of new Russian empire; territorial claims against a foreign state; and for Russian intervention in other republican conflict.


10. Peoples of Dagestan were left out of the analysis because of the ambiguity surrounding whether they had an autonomous republic or were stateless.


15. According to the organizers of the referendum, voter turnout was 54 percent in Narva and 61 percent in Sillamae. The Estonian government claims that voter turnout in the referendum was less than half of the eligible electorate. See RFE/RL Daily Report, no. 135, July 19, 1993.


