The Legacy of German Reunification and the End of the Cold War on the Russian Identity: 1991-1995

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German reunification was one of the most dramatic events in the collapse of the inferential communist system; however, it was by no means the final act. In the two years that followed the collapse of the German Democratic Republic (GDR), the rest of the Soviet satellites in Eastern Europe began abandoning the communist system, a process that by December 1991 came to an end with the complete dissolution of the USSR. Russia, however, as the largest and leading constituent of the Soviet Union, was arguably the most impaired by the chain of events as it became caught in a political impasse between dictatorship and democracy. Indeed, in light of Putin's policies, it would seem that Russia has yet to overcome the legacy of Soviet authoritarianism. As Mikhail Gorbachev reflected in his memoirs in 2000, "Russia has not yet found a reliable, democratic, and truly free road of development; it is still burdened with authoritarianism. It has not yet found a road that would enrich its citizens, not ruin them, a road that ensure their political and damaged social rights, rather than restrict and limit them."[1] This essay will explore the path that Russia undertook between 1991 and 1995 following German Reunification to redefine itself politically, economically, militarily, and socially. It will conclude that during this period Russia proved much better at tearing down old institutions than in building new ones.

From Dictatorship to Democracy: Brief Political Overview (1991-1995)

Mikhail Gorbachev came to power in 1985 and forever changed the face of the Soviet Union. A committed Marxist, Gorbachev wanted to save the reputation of socialism. He therefore introduced *perestroika* and *glasnost* to generate "a qualitative renewal of society and overcome the totalitarian structure blocking the road to democracy."[2] In 1986, he created the Congress of People's Deputies to help democratize Russia. Not all the positions in the Congress were elected, however. One third of the seats were still reserved strictly for Communist Party members.[3]

Gorbachev as a political personality was arguably both indecisive and contradictory in his actions. By 1990, he had brought more conservative figures

[1] Mikhail Gorbachev, *On My Country and the World* (NY: Columbia University Press, 2000), 78.
[2] *Ibid.*, 30.
[3] Suny, *The Soviet Experiment: Russia, the USSR, and the Successor States (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 498*.

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into his inner circle and was losing many of his reformist allies, most notably Aleksandr Yakovlev and Edward Shevardnadze. On December 20th, 1990, Shevardnadze publicly resigned his post to protest against what he perceived was a dictatorship led by Gorbachev.[4] The Baltic States continued rallying for independence and this further weakened Gorbachev. Former deputy Prime Minister and architect of Russia's economic "shock therapy" Yegor Gaidar described the situation from 1989 to 1991 as an, "intensification of the socialist crisis." He questioned whether "the communist elite [would] manage to cope with the crisis, move development onto an evolutionary track, and prevent an explosion of social unrest."[5] During these three foundational years the entire composition of Europe changed. Unlike the GDR, which was supported by its affluent and stable neighbor (the FGR), Russia was left to rebuild on its own.

By 1991 the days of the USSR were numbered, as Russia's grip on the Baltics and the other nationalities weakened by the day. The year began on a turbulent footing when on January 8th Lithuanian workers marched to their parliament to protest price hikes, and demand the resignation of their government.[6] Despite Gorbachev's tendency to avoid violent intervention, fourteen were killed and over one hundred were wounded in the incident.[7] A week later, in Latvia, five more were killed in a similar uprising.[8] Gorbachev wavered and was inconsistent in his responses to similar movements in the other satellites. The union was crumbling, and support for Gorbachev in Russia had reached an ultimate low. [9]

Between 1991 and 1993 the main figure that dominated Russian politics was its president, Boris Yeltsin. Yeltsin was born in 1931 in the village of Butka of the Sverdlosvsk Oblast. His father was a construction worker and his mother was a seamstress. In the following months, Russia was polarized between support for Yeltsin and marketization, and support for Gorbachev and the reinforcement of law and order. In addition to this, questions arose as to whether or not the Soviet Union would remain intact after the collapse of its communist satellites in Eastern Europe.[10]

On March 17th a referendum was held throughout the Soviet Union.[11] The question was, "Do you consider necessary the preservation of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics as a renewed federation of equal sovereign republics, in which

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[4] *Ibid.*, 506.
[5] Yegor Gaidar, *Days of Defeat and Victory,* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1996), xxiii.
[6] Suny, 506.
[7] *Ibid*.
[8] *Ibid*.
[9] *Ibid.,* 511.
[10] *Ibid.*, 507.
[11] *Ibid*.

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the rights and freedom of an individual of any nationality will be fully guaranteed?" The results were overwhelmingly in favour of preserving the union, although six of the fifteen republics (Armenia, Georgia, Moldavia, Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia) refused to participate. [12] By the spring five republics – Armenia, Estonia, Georgia, Latvia and Lithuania – had officially declared independence from the USSR.[13] Former deputy Prime Minister Gennedy Burbulis recounted in 2011, "In Russia, democratic forces wanted an end to Soviet totalitarian rule. Our aim was not to allow the chaotic dissolution of the USSR, but to transform it into a confederation that would afford each republic considerable self-determination under its aegis."[14]

As Yeltsin's popularity grew, Gorbachev had to reconsider his strategies. On April 23rd he met with Yeltsin and the leaders of eight other republics in Novo-Ogarevo and hastily worked out an agreement to finalize the draft of the union treaty, prepare a constitution, and establish the conditions for elections within the USSR.[15] Gorbachev wavered and ultimately accepted the rights of any of the satellites to determine their own destinies and opt out of the union if they so desired.[16] Throughout this series of actions, Gorbachev walked a very dangerous line of trying to appease both reformers and conservatives.

On June 12th Yeltsin triumphed in the popular elections for President of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR), winning 57% of the vote.[17] The result of this development was that Russia's political system became both a parliament and a presidency. Furthermore, on July 11th, Gorbachev made another attempt to gather support for his union treaty. He set an official date for the signing, just before leaving on vacation to Crimea. Three days before the chosen date of August 21st, however, his plans were interrupted. A group of conservative communist leaders, the State Committee for the Emergency (GKchP), ordered Gorbachev's arrest, and sent tanks into the streets of Moscow.[18] This became known as the infamous August Coup. Yeltsin successfully avoided the men sent to arrest him and slipped away to the Russian White House.[19]

By August 21st the coup had failed, as the leaders hesitated to attack the crowds around the White House. The next morning Gorbachev delivered a press conference. From his presentation it was clear that he was oblivious to the changed political climate resulting from the coup, as he continued to speak as if the party and socialism were still viable institutions. The coup in turn positively

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[12] *Ibid.*, 517.
[13] Gennady Burbulis, "Meltdown," *Foreign Policy* (2011): 71.
[14] *Ibid.*
[15] Suny, 507.
[16] *Ibid.*, 508.
[17] *Ibid.*, 509.
[18] *Ibid*.
[19] *Ibid*.

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reinforced support for Yeltsin as a strong leader and a hero.[20] Burbulis suggests, "The coup was like the political Chernobyl of the Soviet totalitarian empire. Like the meltdown of a faulty nuclear reactor, the failed putsch blew the country apart, scattering the radioactive remnants of the Soviet system throughout the country."[21]

Between late August and December 1991, two competing governments existed in Moscow. The one led by Gorbachev slowly evaporated as the movements for independence in the republics weakened his policies. At the beginning of November, Yeltsin was granted extraordinary powers, and he proceeded to establish his own team of advisors. All that remained was for Gorbachev to officially resign. Yeltsin wrote, "[Gorbachev] thought he could unite the impossible: communism with the market, ownership by the people with private ownership, a multiparty system with the communist party of the Soviet Union. These are impossible unions. But he wanted to achieve them, and this was his basic strategic mistake."[22] On December 3rd, 1991, the Supreme Soviet approved the draft of the Belovezh Accord, the documented treaty that called for the official disintegration of the Soviet Union.[23] Shortly thereafter, on December 25th, Gorbachev resigned as president of the USSR and the Soviet Union split into its fifteen constituent republics.[24]

The Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) was created to replace the dissolved USSR. Historians Sakwa and Webber argue that although at its conception the CIS was intended to guide the Soviet states towards cooperative independence, the former Soviet bloc states had uncomfortable interactions with one another, due to the competing ethnic nationalism and the problems each faced in establishing a new nation.[25] The loss of the GDR and the satellites of Eastern Europe raised uncomfortable questions about what communism had actually accomplished for Russia. Indeed, one must ask what was the Soviet Union without its fraternal allies in Eastern Europe? Russia was left to decide what role it would play in regard to the Soviet successor states, Europe, and the world.

Throughout 1992, Yeltsin made a series of decisive political and economic decisions to try and stabilize the country. Due to economic shock therapy's apparent success elsewhere, first in Latin America and then in Southern Europe, Yeltsin and his economic team tried to introduce a similar initiative in Russia.[26]

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[20] *Ibid.*, 516.
[21] Burbulis, 76.
[22] Suny, 516.
[23] Gorbachev, 151.
[24] Michael Bressler, *Understanding Contemporary Russia* (Boulder CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2009), 145.
[25] Richard Sakwa and Mark Webber, "The Commonwealth of Independent States, 1991-1998: Stagnation and Survival," *Europe-Asia Studies* (1999): 379.
[26] Bressler, 148.

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On January 2nd, 1992 in conjunction with this economic projection, prices in Russia were liberated in an attempt to save the country from financial chaos.[27] By the spring of that year the reforms had yielded inconsistent results.[28] Although the immediate threat of famine and total economic collapse had been avoided, politically and socially the reforms were overall unsuccessful at boosting the country's economic performance. In April of that year, at the Sixth Congress of the People's Deputies of the RSFSR, the first formal assaults on the reformers were issued.[29]

Immediate disaster had been avoided, but the economic shortcomings triggered a campaign launched by the Congress against the President in an attempt to regain authority. Gaidar refers to this period in Russian history as *dvoevlasti*e, or dual power.[30] By the end of the year, as the reception of the reforms was generally poor, Gaidar was dismissed from his new position as deputy prime minister, and replaced by Viktor Chernomyrdin.[31]

The popularity and prestige of both the government and parliament continued to fall throughout much of 1993. The government appeared powerless to stop the divisive forces in the country, and though it worked out a Federation Treaty for the units of the federation to sign, the agreements were all very inconsistent.[32] In the summer of that year the president organized his own constitutional conference that approved the draft of a new constitution written by his advisors. Yeltsin essentially wrote in for himself a strong presidency that some historians have linked to the tsarist authoritarianism characteristic of Russia's past. On September 21st, as his support crumbled, Yeltsin suspended parliament and postponed the parliamentary elections for December.[33] Constitutional crisis ensued, Parliament declared that Yeltsin had acted unconstitutionally, and violence erupted. Artillery was fired at the White House, and the parliament quickly succumbed. This was the first major use of military force domestically since the Russian Civil War (1918-1922).[34]

When elections were held in December 1993, voters turned away from Yeltsin.[35] The people demanded a call for order and more gradual change, and the

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[27] Neil Robinson, "The Global Economy, Reform and Crisis in Russia," *Review of International Political Economy* (1999): 536.
[28] Gaidar, 118.
[29] *Ibid.*, 146.
[30] *Ibid.*, 182.
[31] *Ibid.*, 160.
[32] Suny, 523.
[33] *Ibid.,* 524.
[34] *Ibid.,* 523.
[35] Michael McFaul and Nikoli Petrov, "Elections," in *Between Dictatorship and Democracy: Russian Post-Communist Political Reform,* ed. Michael McFaul *et al.* (Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2004), 37.

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restoration of Russian dominance as a world power. Despite opposition, Yeltsin was able get approval for his proposed constitution. Many of the Soviet successor states were very weak, and many of their governments were still made up of the old Communist elite. Russia, although a fraction of its old self, still hovered over the other states, and it remained more powerful than the rest.[36] Perhaps the greatest blow to Yeltsin's image, however, came in 1994, with the invasion of Chechnya. The president of Chechnya was the dictator Jokhar Dudavev. Dudavev attempted to grant independence to his region and to allow his republic to become a center for freewheeling economic and criminal activity.[37] On December 8th the Russian Duma issued a state of emergency against Chechnya.[38] On December 11th 1994, forty thousand Russian troops were sent to Chechnya. The war did not go well for Russia, and Yeltsin reluctantly granted full authority to General Lebed to negotiate a peace. In the end, Russia's reputation was crushed, as guerilla forces on its own territory defeated the former super power.[39]

With elections slated for the end of 1995, and with Yeltsin's government riddled with corruption, a Communist victory seemed like a realistic possibility.[40] Even as the economy had moved towards capitalism it had failed to construct the legal mechanisms to protect private property, enforce control, deal with bankruptcy and suppress the rising criminal activity. The period of Russian history between 1991 and 1995 was characterized by this struggle for identity, and against corruption, instability, crime, political uncertainty and the continual decline of the Russian economy. Russia was experiencing an identity crisis in having to deal with the humiliation associated with losing the Cold War, and the subsequent loss of its massive empire and superpower status.

From Communism to Capitalism: Russia's Economic Transformation

The transition from socialism to capitalism was fraught with complications. Even Chancellor Kohl greatly underestimated the financial, political and psychological costs of integrating the former GDR into the new, unified German economy. He overlooked the grave fiscal consequences of inheriting the debt the GDR had accumulated over the years, and the difficulty of reversing the effects of forty-five years of economic planning had had on the Eastern population.[41] The situation in Russia, however, was substantially more fragile. Economic questions were some

[36] Suny, 528.
[37] *Ibid.*, 530.
[38] *Ibid.*
[39] *Ibid.*, 531.
[40] *Ibid.*, 533.
[41] Angela Stent, *Russia and Germany Reborn: Unification the Soviet Collapse and the New Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 152.

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of the hardest the Russian Federation had to answer following the overturning of the communist system. How was such a vast country to do undo not forty-five, but seventy-five years, of Soviet economic planning? The ideological and practical implications of this ran very deep throughout the entire country, and the inability to adjust to the market forces meant that by 1991 the Russian economy was on the verge of collapse.[42]

In the latter part of 1990, on one of their only collaborative accounts in the late Soviet period, Yeltsin and Gorbachev joined together to create an economic initiative called the Shatalin plan.[43] It called for a radical transformation of Soviet economics over a 500-day period, through partial privatization of some state property. It aimed to accomplish this by selling off certain assets to ordinary citizens.[44] Gorbachev was drawn originally to the plan as he felt it went hand-in-hand with the goals of *perestroika*.[45] He retreated shortly thereafter, however, fearing rejection from the Supreme Soviet, and instead pushed for the "500 day" plan developed by his prime minster, Nikoli Ryzhkoi.[46] At this late stage, however, it was clear that neither of these initiatives would be sufficient to fix the crumbling economy. Gorbachev in turn, greatly weakened his already waning political position by siding with the conservatives and retreating from Shatalin.[47]

Yeltsin chose Yegor Gaidar, a thirty-five year old intellectual from Moscow, to take the reins of the country's economic future.[48] Gaidar was an unlikely candidate as he was inexperienced politically; however Yeltsin liked his confidence and trusted Burbulis' intuition about the young economist. "Why did I choose Yegor Gaidar?" began Yeltsin approximately four years later in his memoirs,

> Gaidar had a knack for speaking simply, which figured prominently in my selection. He, not I, would have to talk to opponents of reform sooner or later. He did not water down his ideas, but he knew how to speak plainly about complicated things. All economists try to do this, but Gaidar was able to do it the most persuasively. He was able to infect people with his ideas.[49]

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[42] Bressler, 94.
[43] Suny, 504.
[44] *Ibid.,* 505.
[45] Gorbachev, 62.
[46] Suny, 504.
[47] *Ibid.*
[48] "Conversations with History: Yegor Gaidar," video clip, accessed December 13th 2012, YouTube, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fa_Yf52GCYk.
[49] Boris Yeltsin, *The Struggle for Russia* (NY: Random House, 1994), 125.

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The ultimate economic question circulating amongst the Russian politicians and intelligentsia at the time was whether it was best to institute gradual or rapid economic transformation. Gaidar was among those who stood for more rapid reform. He argued that either way it was going to be a painful transformation and that the quicker the transition the less time the Russian population would have to suffer. Gaidar's version of shock therapy was the most radical shift in Russian economics since Stalin's policy of rapid industrialization in the 1930s. Economist Richard Ericson described the situation Gaidar and Yeltsin were thrown into as

> uncharted territory of building a modern market economy on the still disintegrating ruins of the Soviet command economy. It was a plunge taken with optimism, in ignorance of the depth of the problems to [overcome] and with hope that the situation could not get much worse than it already was at the end of 1991.[50]

The two central principles of shock therapy were to bring an end to price controls, thereby creating natural supply and demand in Russia's market, and to convert most of the state owned enterprises into private businesses as quickly as possible.[51] In an interview with Henry Kreisler at University of California Berkley, Gaidar lists the priorities as having been: to cut down military spending five-fold, cut down agricultural subsides, introduce the high valuated texts, liberalize prices and erode artificial savings, and manage the debt.[52]

1992 and 1993 were characterized by mixed economic results. Beginning on January 2nd, 1992 prices were freed on 90% of goods in the market, with the exclusion of a few products. Things did not go as Gaidar had planned, however. Inflation rose to 1500% and the purchasing power of Russian consumers declined. Russian exports failed to take off on the global market and the government therefore had to continue paying subsides and a wide variety of welfare payments to the population.[53] The government printed money and sold bonds to finance it.[54] By the summer of 1992, although a complete economic crash had been avoided, shock therapy was deemed an overall failure, and Yeltsin's popularity declined, as he was unable to establish consistent and meaningful order in the country that he had overturned.

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[50] Richard E. Ericson, "The Russian Economy since Independence," in *The New Russia: Troubled Transformation,* ed. Gail W. Lapidus (Boulder CO: Westview Press, 1995), 39.
[51] James Millar, *The Soviet Economic Experiment* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 147.
[52] "Conversations with History: Yegor Gaidar."
[53] Millar, 149.
[54] *Ibid*.

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Another of Yeltsin's early undertakings was the voucher system. This program was developed to boost the stock market in Russia.[55] Each citizen was given a voucher worth about 10 000 rubles, or 22 American dollars. Workers for the most part invested in the companies they worked for.[56] By January 1993 about 64 percent of plants were essentially owned by the employees. Corruption nevertheless ensued, and although the workers were owners of stocks they held no decision making power. Vouchers primarily benefited the elite, as most ordinary Russians did not know what to do with them.[57] Old managers who now controlled many of the former Soviet industries demanded subsidized credits from the government. Counter to what shock therapy intended, industries received revenues from the government rather than profits from the new Russian Market. Furthermore, many elites kept their money in Swiss bank accounts and foreign investments, instead of in the local economy.[58] Russian banks also bought up the vouchers and used their influences and connections to buy up industries at incredibly low prices.[59] Yeltsin dismissed Gaidar at the end of 1992; however, he was reinstated in 1993.[60]

Political scientist Michael McFaul wrote, " by the summer of 1993 insiders had acquired majority shares in two thirds of Russia's privatized firms, state subsidies accounted for 22% of Russia's GNP, little if any restructuring (bankruptcies, downsizing) had taken place within enterprise and few market institutions had been created."[61] In October 1994, the ruble crashed against the US dollar.[62] In his memoirs, Gaidar remembers

> That in light of the hardships people had endured throughout the initial stages of reform, now was the time to shout as loudly as possible that it had all been done against the will of the congress and the Supreme Soviet, or that it wasn't done right, it wasn't done the way everyone agreed, or that it should have been done more gently or more harshly, faster or slower but in any case differently, and that we had to stop right here, or even better – turn around and go back.[63]

By 1995 GNP and production were half what they had been in 1991.[64]

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[55] *Ibid.,* 151.
[56] *Ibid*.
[57] *Ibid*.
[58] Suny, 520.
[59] *Ibid*.
[60] Gaidar, 183.
[61] Suny, 520.
[62] Robinson, 548.
[63] Gaidar, 147.
[64] Suny, 533.

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According to Angela Stent, Europe had not seen such a dire economic situation since Germany's defeat after World War II. The two situations were, however, incredibly different. As Stent has reasoned, "[Russia] had died of self-inflicted wounds and could not expect a Marshall Plan, since there no longer was a communist enemy to fight."[65] Political scientist Neil Robinson argued that many post-communist economists often overlooked the importance of the global economy in reconstruction.[66] Economist Jeffrey Sachs believed in the early 1990s that foreign investment was a financial prerequisite for successful recovery. Sachs viewed engagement with the Western and European economies as essential.[67] The problem was that due to fragility and the lack of transparency of the Russian economy it was severely unattractive to investors.[68]

In 1992, Russia received its first billion dollars of credit to add to currency reserves for the IMF.[69] This loan, however, did not come without a certain amount of political liability.[70] Robinson concludes that although many of the financial obstacles Russia faced domestically were perhaps "uniquely Russian," its inability to attract the international market were much more general challenges.[71]

From War to Peace: Russia's Military Transformation

For many years, in the climate of the Cold War, the military achievements of the USSR were almost synonymous with the Russian national identity.[72] Gorbachev's "new thinking," however, tried to change this by attempting to transform the national consciousness into one where human values were the focus, rather than the battle between capitalism and communism.[73] When the Cold War came to an end Russia had lost its super power status, but still retained a vast arsenal of nuclear weapons and a large standing army.[74] As the Yeltsin era began in the early nineties, Gaidar hoped to decrease the economic deficit incurred from years of overspending on the Soviet military. The demilitarization of Russian society was perhaps one of the most fundamental shifts the country had to make following August 1991.[75]

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[65] Stent, 157.
[66] Robinson, 531.
[67] *Ibid.*
[68] *Ibid.,* 536.
[69] *Ibid.,* 531.
[70] Gaidar, 151.
[71] Robinson, 557.
[72] David Holloway and Michael McFaul, "Demilitarization and Defense Conversion," in *The New Russia: Troubled Transformation* ed. Gail W. Lapidus (Boulder CO: Westview Press, 1995), 193.
[73] Holloway and McFaul, "Demilitarization and Defense Conversion," 193.
[74]Stent, 153.
[75] Holloway and McFaul, "Demilitarization and Defense Conversion," 193.

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Now that the Cold War was over a united Germany was no longer a threat to Soviet security. The agenda for the next four years in this regard was for Russia to remove the 380 000 Soviet troops stationed on German territory. [76] The terms of withdrawal were decided as part of the 2+4 negotiations.[77] Considering that Russia had dominated Eastern Germany for forty-five years, it was remarkable how smoothly the discharge was conducted. [78]

Russia inherited one of the most militarized economies in the world, with one of the largest defense expenditures. As Gorbachev put it, "the Soviet military industrial complex was not simply a part of the Soviet economy – it was the Soviet economy."[79] Whereas in the West the intelligentsia was largely comprised of intellectual workers with university degrees, the great majority of their Russian counterparts were instead thoroughly integrated into the military sector of society.[80]

During the Cold War era, the central focus of Soviet military policy was the interaction between the Warsaw Pact and NATO.[81] However, in the new post-war climate Russia established its own national army in 1992. In doing this, it also had to deal with the difficult task of divvying up the resources of the former USSR between the different CIS states, as well as establishing new military relations with the new CIS republics.[82] More important, however, was the need to establish its new military relationship with the United States.

At a conference in Vancouver in 1994, President Bill Clinton pledged to offer more economic assistance to the Russian Federation. At the same conference, however, he also expressed interest in allowing several former Eastern European states to join NATO. Russian politicians acutely protested this expansion.[83] As a compromise, the Partnership for Peace (PfP) was created. This quasi-NATO organization's intention was to serve as a forum for discussions of defense and military cooperation, and on the democratization of post-communist armed forces.[84] Russia was skeptical about PfP from the outset as it was not granted a privileged role, and because east-central European states were offered the possibility of eventual NATO membership, a possibility that Russia was not prepared to accept.[85]

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[76] Stent, 149.
[77] *Ibid.,* 160.
[78] *Ibid.*, 182.
[79] *Ibid.*, 204.
[80] Victor Zaslavsky, "From Redistribution to Marketization," in *The New Russia: Troubled Transformation* ed. Gail W. Lapidus (Boulder CO: Westview Press, 1995), 128.
[81] Holloway and McFaul "Demilitarization and Defense Conversion," 199.
[82] *Ibid.*
[83] Suny, 528.
[84] Stent, 213.
[85] *Ibid.*, 215.

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From "Proletariat" to "Bourgeoisie": Russia's Societal Transformation

During the Soviet Era, many citizens of the USSR living behind the Iron Curtain believed the fiction of the existence of equality in their society. *Glasnost,* however, dissolved this myth.[86] Post-communist Russian society was socially stratified, and fundamentally failed to develop a genuine middle class. In many senses old elites, mafia activity and the new Russian bourgeoisie replaced the void that the Soviet authority had left in the Russian political sphere.

Although by no means did a Western style civil society emerge under the influence of *glasnost* and *perestroika,* during the Gorbachev era, the number of official and unofficial social **o**rganizations multiplied significantly.[87] With the rise of the oligarchs, however, these societies did not have much political influence. As Michael McFaul and Elina Treyger have noted, "What politicians need the endorsement of a women's organization when they have the support of multibillionaires?"[88] Likewise, the development of a middle class in Russian society was hindered, in part because of the lack of small-scale entrepreneurs, as the market atmosphere became dominated by criminal activity, oligarchs, and larger financial organizations.[89]

By the end of the 1990s nostalgia for the old Soviet Union had grown. In 1994 pollsters discovered that 71 % of Russians believed that the retreat from Communism and the breakup of the USSR were mistakes. [90] Many Russians feared for the future. Russia had successfully brought down the oppressive communist state, but it had yet to show that it could create a new system to replace it. Its decline as a super power turned much of the population to apathy. According to historian Ronald Suny, polls indicated that by 1995, 65% of Russians wished that Russia had a strong leader, and only 25% of the population had a positive opinion about democracy.[91]

The challenges that Russia faced in the early 1990s were not simple ones. The reunification of Germany represented the end of predictable Cold War realities. In a short span of time, Russia was left with the task of undoing seventy-five years of Communist economics, over four hundred years of authoritative government and imperialist domination of its neighbors, and at the same time

[86] Michael McFaul and Elina Treyger, "Civil Society," in *Between Dictatorship and Democracy* ed. Michael McFaul et al. (Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2004), 271.
[87] Suny, 490.
[88] Michael McFaul and Elina Treyger, "Civil Society," 153.
[89] *Ibid.,* 154.
[90] Suny, 533.
[91] *Ibid*.

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attempt to transition into a capitalist democracy.[92] A network of political, economic, military and social factors that all influenced and restricted one another were the results of the reconstructive years. At the end of 1995 Russia was ultimately trapped in a grey area – an impasse between dictatorship and democracy.

[92] Stent, 154.

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