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3/27/91

The Struggle Over Russia's Future

CIA HISTORICAL REVIEW PROGRAM
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1999

An Intelligence Assessment

~~CIA SOV~~ 91-10013X

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SOV 91-10013X
March 1991

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The Struggle Over Russia's Future

An Intelligence Assessment

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SOV 91-10013X
March 1991

The Struggle Over Russia's Future

Key Judgments

*Information available
as of 18 March 1991
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Debate over the future of Russia and the formation of new Russian institutions reflects vastly different outlooks among Russian political elites. The struggle has been fought in the republic's legislative bodies, the Supreme Soviet and the Congress of People's Deputies, but it is also being waged across the republic in many cities and regions where democratic reformers emerged in leadership positions after the March 1990 elections.

Russian reformers, led by Boris Yel'tsin, account for approximately 30 percent of both the republic Congress of People's Deputies and the Supreme Soviet. They are pushing an agenda that features rapid movement toward pluralistic, Western-style institutions and a substantial degree of sovereignty from the center. They have drawn consistent legislative support from a strong bloc of centrist deputies.

Traditionalist opponents of comprehensive reform control about 40 percent of the Russian Congress of People's Deputies and a somewhat smaller proportion of the Supreme Soviet. They draw their support from elements of the Communist Party as well as from blue-collar, agricultural, military and security, and nationalist circles. They hope to retain a center-dominated union, they object to the reformers' insistence on a rapid pace of change, and they claim to support traditional Soviet values such as political stability, economic leveling, and social justice.

Yel'tsin and his supporters have been able to move reform tentatively forward on issues such as sovereignty that have appeal across the ideological spectrum. They have enjoyed success in other key areas and have gained approval for amendments that have moved the republic constitution in a sharply reformist direction. Despite intense Communist opposition, reformers also passed a landmark bill that allows limited private ownership of land. Traditionalists have succeeded in watering down reform initiatives, however, and appear to have been energized by the center's crackdown in the Baltic region.

The debate over the division of powers between the center and the Russian Republic has become all-important. At stake for the center is its historical claim to administer the RSFSR and the other republics; one Soviet characterized it as the "central bureaucracy . . . fighting for its life." Russia's ability to wrest significant concessions from the center would not

only undermine the center-dominated union but would also seriously challenge Gorbachev's ability to continue in power. At stake for Russia is the future ability of its leadership to run its government with a high degree of independence from the center and the possible development of democratic institutions in the republic

The passage of the referendums on preserving the union and on a popularly elected Russian president has laid the groundwork for further conflict between Russia and the center. Yel'tsin will probably try to schedule a Russian Republic presidential election in the next few months—he has already announced his candidacy—which would provide him with a clear demonstration of popular support. This prospect will raise the stakes for both traditionalists and reformers at the extraordinary Russian Congress of People's Deputies, which convenes on 28 March:

- Traditionalists are likely to intensify their campaign to discredit Yel'tsin and demand his recall at the session. Failing that, they will try to hamper Yel'tsin by supporting constitutional restrictions on the powers of the presidency and on election procedures.
- Yel'tsin and his supporters at the Congress are almost certain to push for creation of a strong executive presidency.

If the Congress approves a republic presidency, which is likely, Yel'tsin would be the undisputed favorite to win the election and thus become an even more formidable challenger to Gorbachev, who has never submitted to a popular election.

The Russian Republic's population has shown continuing support for democratic values—even in the face of strong opposition from the center and deteriorating living conditions. Within the republic legislature, there have been sharp differences between reformers and their traditionalist opponents, but there has nevertheless been agreement on some important reform legislation. Moreover, the legislature's ability to compromise on some issues may be an early indicator of the development of adversarial political behavior and the beginning of a Russian multiparty system.

Recent gains are endangered by intensifying political struggles at all levels, the difficulty of creating a new political system, and the fear of looming economic disaster. Confrontation between Russia and the center will contribute to near-term domestic instability, but successful development of Russian sovereignty could earn the republic substantial political and economic benefits over the longer term. Democracy and institutional stability, which are only just emerging, should have the opportunity to take firmer root in Russia if a republic constitution and a federation treaty of the republic's regions can be negotiated and approved

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The Russian reform movement's heavy dependence on Yel'tsin, however, is a potential weakness. Should Yel'tsin commit a serious political blunder and be forced from political centerstage, there does not now appear to be a replacement with the same ability to capture popular support and drive the reform agenda. Even if Yel'tsin were to be martyred by assassination, the reform movement, rather than rallying, would almost certainly be splintered by his loss.

The center is likely to try to undermine Russian reformers by continuing to cast them as elitists and "anti-Soviet" and "anti-Communist" agitators, despite the positive outcome of the 17 March referendum for Yel'tsin and his allies. It is also likely to increase its efforts to exploit the sovereignty claims of Russian autonomous regions in order to distract the republic leadership and split reformers. With the center resorting to harsher intimidation tactics, reformers could lose the support of the centrists' swing votes in the legislature, leaving their ability to stand up to the center heavily dependent on their appeal to the population.

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The Struggle Over Russia's Future

Introduction

Six years of *perestroika* have rekindled age-old debates in Russia, the Soviet Union's largest and richest republic. The results of the elections to the Russian Republic legislature in 1990, which were a visible sign that far-reaching political change was under way, represented only the tip of the iceberg. The elections were the logical culmination of events that included the opening of Soviet society to outside influences, the advent of *glasnost* and expansion of human rights, and the weakening of Communist Party control. These changes have had consequences that Mikhail Gorbachev did not intend, such as the undermining of traditional Soviet institutions, a surge in the strength and assertiveness of democratic forces, and the growing confrontation between the center and the periphery

The roots of the current debate over Russia's future run deep, even beyond the 19th-century debates of the Slavophiles and Westernizers, to Peter the Great. Common threads that span the generations of debate include the issues of modernization versus tradition, openness versus isolationism, and democracy versus authoritarianism

The Emergence of Russian Politics

An emerging debate over the future of the Russian Republic (RSFSR) and the formation of new Russian institutions reflects the vastly different outlooks among elements of the new Russian political elite. Indeed, the debate between Russian reformers and their traditionalist opponents, primarily in the Russian Communist Party (RCP), has taken on the nature of a struggle for Russia's soul. The center of this struggle has been the republic's legislative bodies, the Supreme Soviet and its parent body, the Congress of People's Deputies.

The Democrats. Russian democratic reformers, led by republic Supreme Soviet chairman Boris Ye'tsin, constitute roughly 30 percent of the Russian Congress of People's Deputies, the republic's supreme legislative body. Their share of the smaller Supreme Soviet

When the Party Was King

Until recently, the CPSU wielded undisputed control of the RSFSR by a variety of formal and informal mechanisms. Communist Party officials were the preeminent political figures in the republic, while republic executive and legislative leadership was subordinated to the party and composed of senior party figures with close ties to the central authorities. The large, ceremonial republic legislature, precisely constructed to reflect approved quotas of party, military, and security officials, token workers, and a smattering of women, met twice a year for two or three orchestrated days to unanimously approve legislation that often duplicated laws passed by the center. The highly centralized system of government was complemented by an ornamental judicial branch and a network of quasi-official organizations for workers, farmers, youth, women, and intellectuals.

Unlike citizens of the other union republics, Russians had no intermediary republic party organization to represent their interests until the reestablishment of the Russian Communist Party in June 1990. Routine personnel decisions throughout the RSFSR typically were determined by the CPSU Central Committee apparatus and approved by Politburo members—a level of micromanagement that maintained the center's and the party's firm grip on Russian politics. Indeed, party control of the republic's political machinery ensured that Russia and the Soviet Union were virtually indistinguishable.

has been augmented by support from a variety of centrist parties and factions. They are pushing an agenda that features rapid movement toward pluralistic, Western-style institutions and a substantial degree of sovereignty from the center. They have united

in an informal legislative coalition that has aggressively pursued comprehensive republic autonomy, a democratic constitution, and a market-type economy. They have pressed for rapid and thorough-going transformation of all institutions of power, using Western experience as their model.

Other reformist politicians, such as Leningrad Mayor Anatoliy Sobchak and Moscow Mayor Gavriil Popov, have also achieved national recognition. They have taken advantage of reformist majorities in their local soviets (councils) to concentrate on reforming their constituencies and have worked in parallel with the republic-level reform leadership. Although they have had their differences with other leading reformers, they have tried to coordinate their actions with Yel'tsin, focusing on issues like local autonomy, a shift toward a market economy, and political pluralism.

Republicwide umbrella organizations like Democratic Russia—a coalition of proreform parties, some of which are represented in the republic legislature—also have been active at the union level. Democratic Russia has had significant successes in raising popular demonstrations against the central authorities; its leaders organized a demonstration of over 300,000 Muscovites and many thousands in other Russian cities in support of Yel'tsin on 10 March

Reformist parties in the Democratic Russia bloc have a wide variety of programs. Social Democratic leaders like Oleg Rumyantsev, for example, advocate the virtual dismantling of all Soviet and Communist Party (CPSU) institutions and replacing them with Western-style democratic institutions. Democratic Party of Russia chairman Nikolay Travkin espouses democratic reform while imposing strict discipline on his party, arguing that the only way to achieve success against the well-organized CPSU is to emulate it. Although their programs differ, however, the reformers are generally united behind the leadership of Yel'tsin, who has studiously avoided alignment with any party.

One of his party's principal objectives is to persuade the center to negotiate with Yel'tsin in good faith.

Leading Russian Political Parties

The Russian political spectrum has expanded in the last year to include parties ranging from Christian Democrats to Anarcho-Syndicalists. Besides the Russian Communist Party, which claims over 10 million members, the leading Russian parties include:

- *Democratic Party of Russia (DPR) . . . claims over 30,000 members . . . led by Nikolay Travkin . . . tightly organized, dedicated to direct competition with the Communists . . . supports parliamentary democracy, depoliticization of key institutions.*
- *Republican Party of Russia (RPR) . . . founded November 1990 . . . claims 20,000 members . . . leading figure Vladimir Lysenko describes RPR as centrist party . . . oriented toward social protection of the population, progressive economic policy.*
- *Social Democratic Party of Russia (SDPR) . . . 8,000 to 10,000 members, heavy intellectual influence . . . leading figures Oleg Rumyantsev, Aleksandr Obolenskiy . . . dedicated to parliamentary democracy, free market system, social protection.*
- *Russian Christian Democratic Movement (RKhDD) . . . approximately 15,000 members . . . led by Viktor Aksyuchits, Father Vyacheslav Polosin . . . spiritually opposed to Communism as a "world evil" . . . supports economic decentralization, private ownership based on Christian values*

Russian reformers have embraced an economic program that would move the country quickly, albeit painfully, toward market principles. The republic legislature supported the radical "500 Days" program, which provided for rapid privatization, gradual movement toward free prices, and drastic reduction of meddlesome economic ministries; the plan was shelved when Gorbachev reneged on a promise to apply it to the entire USSR. The Russian leadership—particularly Yel'tsin—has admitted that its

economic reform plans include some social and economic disruption, but has downplayed them. Yel'tsin promises that his program will turn Russia's economy upward within three years.

The Traditionalists. Traditionalist opponents of comprehensive reform draw their greatest support from the Communist Party, but also from blue-collar, agricultural, military and security, and Russian nationalist circles. They are united not so much by common policy goals as by shared objections to what they view as the forced pace of change. Many support some change as necessary, but oppose reforms they believe undermine Soviet values, such as political stability, economic equality, and social justice. They support the preservation of a union dominated by the center and the CPSU, restrictions on private ownership, and continued leveling of living standards. They are resentful of the reformers' rush to overturn Soviet institutions and believe that many reform initiatives will cause, rather than prevent, social instability. Above all, however, they want to retain the prerogatives to which they believe themselves entitled by their self-assigned role as the nation's vanguard.

The Russian Communist Party is the republic's primary bastion of political traditionalism. Party chief Ivan Polozkov has been an outspoken advocate for the preservation not only of Communist ideology but also of the union as it is presently constituted. The Communists of Russia (Komrossiya) bloc, whose members ardently oppose Yel'tsin, is the largest faction in the Russian legislature, claiming approximately 40 percent of all Congress deputies.

The Communist leadership in the republic legislature appears to be dominated by hardliners, including RCP Politburo member Aleksandr Sokolov, Lt. Gen. Boris Tarasov, and Siberian legal scholar Yuriy Slobodkin. They have supported Yel'tsin on a number of major issues, such as sovereignty, that appear to have a great deal of resonance in Russia, but they have drawn the line on issues that appear aimed at dismantling or creating institutions at the CPSU's expense. RCP control of many regional governments has allowed the party to frustrate reform at the local level, but Yel'tsin's threats to enforce legislation that prohibits local party leaders from heading

The Russian Declaration of Sovereignty

The declaration, approved 12 June 1990 by a vote of 907 to 13 with nine abstentions, proclaimed "determination to create a democratic rule-of-law state within a renewed USSR." Its provisions contained several direct challenges to the historical prerogatives of Moscow, including:

- *RSFSR authority to determine which policy areas it "voluntarily hands over to USSR jurisdiction."*
- *The primacy of the RSFSR constitution and RSFSR laws over their union equivalents "throughout the territory of the RSFSR."*
- *RSFSR representation, presumably embassies or their equivalent, in other Soviet republics and foreign countries.*
- *The demand for a union treaty that precisely spells out the sovereign rights of the Soviet republics.*
- *The right to secede from the USSR.*
- *An assertion that the RSFSR is empowered to protect Russian citizens residing outside the republic.*
- *A multiparty system in the RSFSR.*
- *The separation of executive, legislative, and judicial powers in the RSFSR.*

the corresponding government apparatus could break their stranglehold on reform, particularly in the Russian countryside.

Russian xenophobes in the traditionalist camp are less concerned by the assault on Communist ideology than by what they perceive as the corruption of Russian society by "Western liberalism." At a recent congress of the RSFSR Writers' Union, Valentin Rasputin and Yuriy Bondarev, two of the most outspoken and xenophobic of the traditionalists, viciously attacked reformers, denouncing the "mob rule" of *perestroika*. Bondarev accused democrats of killing Russian culture and of blindly imitating the West—"an enticing apple that is rotten on the inside." Rasputin chastised his fellow Russian writers for permitting the reformers' "destruction of Russian spiritual and national

order, its traditions and culture" as if by "gang rape." The xenophobes are little more than a splinter faction in the Russian legislature, having fared poorly in the 1990 elections.

The Centrists. A small but important center exists in the Russian legislature. Its support has been crucial to reformers on several occasions, including Yel'tsin's election as Supreme Soviet chairman last May. Centrists in the Russian legislature have more in common with reformers than with traditionalists. They support wide-ranging political and economic reforms, but they are reluctant to give the reformers carte blanche. The [] the centrist factions account for roughly one-third of the republic legislature.

The largest and most vocal of the centrist groups in the republic legislature has been the Rossiya bloc, with upward of 100 adherents in the Congress. Rossiya has supported Yel'tsin on many key pieces of reform legislation, but its leaders, Sergey Baburin and Maj. Sergey Glotov, have accused Yel'tsin of rail-roading reform through the legislature. The Centrist bloc,¹ chaired by Col. Gen. Dmitriy Volkogonov, generally votes with the reformers and has been especially critical of the center's repressive measures in the Baltic republics.

Legislative Balance

The 252-member republic Supreme Soviet and the 1,068-member Congress of People's Deputies have been the venues for sharp, partisan debate among the contending parties.² Both are roughly balanced between hardcore reformers and traditionalists, but support from the centrists has allowed Yel'tsin to gain backing for key reform measures. These successes reflect, in part, advantages in the Russian legislature that progressives in the center lack: the Russian body was elected a year later in a more reformist atmosphere, and there are no reserved seats in the Russian legislature for traditionalist organizations, including the Communist Party

¹ Volkogonov's legislative Centrist bloc should not be confused with the extraparlimentary "Centrist Bloc of Parties," which is an alliance of traditionalist CPSU front parties.

² Russia is the only republic that follows the union pattern of having a Congress of People's Deputies, which prohibits direct election of the Supreme Soviet

Many Russian legislators claim that theirs is the most effective legislature in the USSR. In the opinion of a USSR Supreme Soviet deputy, the ability of RSFSR Supreme Soviet members is equal to or better than that of their USSR counterparts. []

The Yel'tsin Factor. Yel'tsin's election to the post of republic Supreme Soviet chairman has been a key ingredient in the success of democratic reform in Russia. His skillful manipulation of the pervasive antiestablishment mood in the RSFSR and his intransigence toward the central leadership have elevated him to the level of folk hero. Yel'tsin's widespread popular support probably has in many cases eased the passage of reformist legislation. His sensitivity to factional differences in the republic legislature, his willingness to compromise on some controversial issues, and his linking of reform to the sovereignty issue have facilitated the emergence of a coalition of democratic and centrist legislators sufficiently broad to gain passage of important reform legislation

Yel'tsin has surrounded himself with a strong leadership team that has played an important role in crafting an effective political strategy. A number of Soviet officials have offered positive assessments of the performance of his "brain trust." One official, [] said that the Russian leader has matured, has excellent advisers, and listens to them. Yel'tsin's team includes veteran bureaucrats, such as Prime Minister Ivan Silayev, who have retained their ties to the CPSU while supporting political reform in the RSFSR. The team also includes loyal subordinates, like Supreme Soviet First Deputy Chairman Ruslan Khasbulatov, and young, enthusiastic intellectuals with little political experience and few or no ties to the center.

Yel'tsin also has assembled an advisory council that includes such internationally known reformers as economists Nikolay Shmelev, Pavel Bunich, and Oleg Bogomolov, agricultural specialist Vladimir Tikhonov, sociologist Tatyana Zaslavskaya, Volkogonov, Popov, and Sobchak. Many of the council's members formerly advised Gorbachev, underscoring the shift in the focus of reform from the center to the RSFSR.

Moving Reform Tentatively Forward. Reformers in the legislature have been aggressive in pursuing their goal of broad democratization of Russian politics and society. They were quick to grasp the importance of using not only the influence of Yel'tsin but also the forum of the republic Supreme Soviet to speak out in favor of their policy goals and to organize themselves into cohesive blocs to propose, draft, and vote for legislation. They have taken advantage of poorly written parliamentary rules, using a loophole in the legislature's rules and Yel'tsin's apparent complicity, to stack important committees and subcommittees, including the key constitutional drafting committee, thus gaining them an ability to lend a decidedly progressive coloring to draft republic legislation.

In December 1990 the Congress approved amendments to the existing RSFSR constitution that assert republic sovereignty, lay the groundwork for economic reform, and liberalize civil rights. When it became clear that a major battle was brewing between reformist and traditionalist versions of a new constitution, Yel'tsin prodded the Congress to amend the existing constitution article by article. The result was a major victory for reformers. The amended constitution dropped references to RSFSR subordination to the USSR constitution and repealed several articles that infringed on republic sovereignty. Similar amendments removed clauses that mandated the subordination of RSFSR institutions to Communist ideology. Other changes augment individual rights of privacy, association, and free speech. The Congress also passed a landmark bill permitting the private ownership of land, albeit with restriction.

Lopsided votes on sovereignty issues suggest that, to a large extent, there is consensus across the political spectrum on a strong stance vis-a-vis the center. In

The Battle Over the Russian Constitution

The sharpest debate of the December Congress session emerged over the issue of the republic constitution. Just prior to the December Congress session, reformists on the constitutional drafting commission—apparently fearing a well-organized traditionalist backlash—decided to drop discussion at the Congress of their reformist draft, which featured provisions for Western-style political institutions, republic sovereignty, and a market economy.

Traditionalists have argued that acceptance of the draft would promote confusion as Russia steers away from both the union and socialism; that it would pave the way for virtually unlimited personal rule, presumably by Yel'tsin; that it would necessitate new elections long before the incumbents' terms are up; and that it would require an unnecessarily comprehensive restructuring of the republic's present organs of power. The Communists of Russia published a draft constitution of their own that made some concessions on the issues of private ownership, the separation of powers, and the depoliticization of society, but preserved limits on market activity and relations with the center.

Prodded by Yel'tsin, the Congress compromised and decided to amend the existing constitution. The amended constitution marked a victory for reformers. It dropped references to RSFSR subordination to the USSR constitution and laws and repealed several articles that infringed on republic sovereignty. Similar amendments removed clauses that mandated the subordination of RSFSR institutions to Communist ideology.

June 1990, the Congress almost unanimously approved a declaration of sovereignty that states the republic's right to determine its role in a future union. A supporting decree outlining which powers the republic would keep for itself and which it would delegate to the center received the support of nearly

95 percent of the deputies. Separate decrees approving rapid marketization of the economy and asserting the primacy of republic over union laws received over 80 percent of deputies' votes

The Traditionalist Response. Despite significant reformist successes, the Russian legislature has not been Yel'tsin's rubberstamp. The opposition has succeeded in blocking some key legislation and watering down other reformist initiatives. The constitutional amendment proposed in December supporting creation of a popularly elected republic presidency, to which Yel'tsin aspires, received over two-thirds of the votes cast in the Congress, but it fell eight votes short of the required majority of the total membership.¹ Yel'tsin and his supporters succeeded in adding the question of a popularly elected republic president to the 17 March all-union referendum on the union treaty.

As Gorbachev and the central government have taken a more hardline stance, Komrossiya and other traditionalist factions have stepped up their activities in the republic. Russian traditionalists appeared particularly energized by the center's repressive actions in the Baltic republics. They were able in January to repeatedly obstruct passage of a Supreme Soviet resolution denouncing the center's actions in the Baltic region when each version fell fewer than 10 votes short of the minimum required. A drastically watered-down version that did not mention the Baltic republics finally was adopted. In each case Yel'tsin's initiatives consistently outpolled the opposition by wide margins but failed to gain a sufficient majority, in part because of the embarrassing absenteeism of many of his potential supporters.

Of significance for the future, the gradual adaptation of "the obediently compliant majority"—as historian Yuriy Afanas'yev labeled traditionalist legislators at the union level—to parliamentary tactics has turned the republic Supreme Soviet into a political battleground. CPSU members in the republic legislature, in particular, have organized themselves beyond the point of merely voting against reform. They have

¹ To be approved, bills in the Russian legislature must receive a majority of the total number of deputies, even if all are not present during a session. Currently, approval by the Congress of People's Deputies requires 536 votes; 126 votes are required for approval by the Supreme Soviet. (Two of the 252 seats in the Supreme Soviet are vacant).

Yel'tsin and the Executive Republic Presidency

Yel'tsin differs markedly from his predecessors in a key respect: he was elected, rather than appointed, to the post of republic Supreme Soviet chairman. The behavior of the Russian government to date undoubtedly would have been more amenable to central authorities had either of Yel'tsin's primary opponents—Ivan Polozkov, the staunchly traditionalist leader of the the Russian Communist Party, or Aleksandr Vlasov, the moderately reformist Russian Republic premier at the time—been elected chairman. Either, by comparison, would have been a compliant tool of the center.

Currently, no office of president exists in the Russian Republic, although the chairman of the republic Supreme Soviet has typically been referred to as such. Russian reformers, savoring their victory in the 17 March referendum, foresee the creation of a strong republic president with executive powers similar to those wielded by Gorbachev at the union level. Their proposals, found in their draft constitution, include a president who:

- Serves no more than two 4-year terms in office.*
- Is head of state and commander in chief of Russian armed forces; nominates candidates for his cabinet, the Supreme Court, and other key posts; signs laws into force; and represents the RSFSR in domestic and foreign affairs.*
- Has the power to call for national referendums, veto legislation, call for a vote of confidence in the government, proclaim a state of emergency or martial law within the RSFSR, and mobilize troops and authorize military operations.*
- Can be removed from office for committing "particularly dangerous" state crimes*

begun to propose alternative legislation of their own, denying reformist legislators their previous virtually uncontested agenda.

The Challenge From the Center

The center needs the RSFSR as part of the union if it is to continue to exist and retain any credibility. Consequently, the debate between the center and the Russian Republic has become all-important. At stake for the center is its historical claim to administer the RSFSR and the other republics; one Soviet characterized it as the "central bureaucracy . . . fighting for its life." Indeed, Russia's ability to wrest significant concessions from the center would not only undermine the center-dominated union but would also seriously challenge Gorbachev's ability to continue in power. At stake for Russia is the future ability of its leadership to run its government with a high degree of independence from the center and the possible development of democratic institutions in the republic.

How Much Sovereignty? At the heart of the debate is the extent of sovereignty that Russia and the other republics will obtain. Citing constitutional rights that have remained dormant for decades, the Russian Republic leadership has asserted that there should continue to be a union, but one in which the republics determine their own forms of government, control assets on their territory, and delegate to the center the rights it will enjoy. The RSFSR's proposed union treaty draft envisages a confederation based on the voluntary membership of the republics

To support its claims of sovereignty, the Russian leadership has pursued since last summer precedent-setting policies separate from those of Moscow in a number of key areas. The Russian Republic government and legislature have initiated independent courses in republic foreign policy, law enforcement, resource ownership and allocation, taxation, and the development of telecommunications facilities. Yel'tsin has initiated the formation of a Russian security service, parallel to but independent of the central KGB, and is acting as if he has the center's concurrence. In the wake of the January 1991 violence in the Baltic republics, the RSFSR leadership began negotiating with the center for a greater republic say in military policymaking

The RSFSR legislature has ignored many of Gorbachev's decrees and endorsed formulations that favor dramatically increased republic authority and challenge the ability of the center to enforce its decisions. Attainment of all the rights currently demanded by the RSFSR legislature "would leave little of substance to the central government."

During the republic Congress of People's Deputies session in December, Yel'tsin announced at a press conference that Russia was dissatisfied with Gorbachev's proposed union treaty, noting that the republic leadership prefers "not a union treaty but a treaty among sovereign states." Yel'tsin's government has already concluded bilateral treaties and economic agreements with most of the other republics, including a 10-year treaty with the Ukraine that was signed in November. Although their current value is primarily symbolic, Yel'tsin has taken steps to create a quadripartite political and economic agreement among the four republics with the highest Slavic populations—the RSFSR, the Ukraine, Belorussia, and Kazakhstan. He and his advisers have boldly characterized the agreement as the foundation of a future union of sovereign republics.

Despite criticism by some Russians of the RSFSR's attempts to pursue a course independent of the center, there appears to be substantial support in the republic for sovereignty. According to at least one Soviet poll indicated that support in the RSFSR for "complete sovereignty and economic independence" increased from about 30 percent at the time of Yel'tsin's election to over 60 percent by midsummer 1990. The RSFSR leadership will use that support—and probably the support of other republics dissatisfied with the center's limited concessions—to push the central authorities, at a minimum, for a union treaty that provides appreciably greater republic autonomy.

**The Union Treaty: Views From the Center
and the RSFSR**

**Central Government Variant
(published 24 November 1990,
revised 9 March 1991)**

- *Central president and vice president, directly elected by secret ballot.*
- *Powerful Council of the Federation composed of republic leaders.*
- *Bicameral Supreme Soviet, with greater representation for autonomous regions.*
- *Constitutional Court to adjudicate center-republic and republic-republic disputes.*
- *Republics determine own internal structure.*
- *Secession possible after two-thirds vote in republic referendum; five-year transition.*
- *Center administers constitution, borders, security, defense, customs.*
- *Joint center-republic control of economic development, all-union market and budget, monetary system, social programs, ecology, foreign policy, foreign economic activity, military policy, security strategy.*
- *Republic administration of land and resources except those "necessary to fulfilling authority of union."*
- *Individual republics may cede greater authority to center via separate agreements.*

**Russian Republic Variant
(not yet published)**

- *Central president, elected by republic legislatures, to serve one 3-year term.*
- *11-member presidential cabinet, in addition to group of republic leaders.*
- *Bicameral legislature with the power, in extreme cases, to remove president.*
- *Union Court to adjudicate center-republic and republic-republic disputes.*
- *Republics determine own internal structure, but must comply with "Bill of Citizenship Rights," establishing minimum legal guarantees.*
- *Secession possible after republic referendum; one-year transition.*
- *Provisions for current republics that wish to secede and maintain ties as "associate members" of union.*
- *Center administers defense, nuclear energy, public security.*
- *Joint center-republic control of transportation, ecology, defense industries, borders.*
- *Republic administration of all policy areas except those willingly ceded to center by separate agreement.*

The Center's Response. The central Soviet Government clearly is alarmed by the independent and aggressive actions of the RSFSR and its leadership. Gorbachev has stubbornly asserted the need to preserve central control of key policy areas, such as defense, foreign and security policy, resource ownership, and taxation policy, and he has issued a number of decrees contravening Russian Republic legislation.

Gorbachev's turn to traditionalist bureaucracies—such as the party, military, and security organs—indicates that he intends to use the administrative means at his disposal to force Russian compliance with central directives. The national Ministry of Internal Affairs, for example, in January blocked the appointment of a reform-oriented official as head of the Moscow Internal Affairs Administration. The KGB has harassed reformist Russian officials, and in February one of Yel'tsin's key economic advisers resigned after the KGB incriminated him with ambiguous evidence of unethical financial dealings with the West. The RCP also has been a valuable tool in the center's efforts to stymie reform in the republic legislature. Its leadership has used time-consuming debate of partisan political issues to delay work on substantive legislation. When that tactic has failed, the RCP has succeeded in watering down some reforms.

Outlook

The future of Russia will be determined by the outcome of its internal debates and by its increasingly intense struggle with the central authorities. Optimism generated among reformers over the successes of an apparently maturing legislature is tempered by the costs of battling the center and by a fear of further economic decline. Recent events, however, indicate that reformers are building momentum behind their efforts to increase Russian sovereignty and the legitimacy of the republic's governing institutions.

The passage of the 17 March referendums on preserving the union and on a popularly elected Russian president has laid the groundwork for further conflict between Russia and the center. In Russia, the presidency question polled nearly 70 percent republicwide and over 80 percent in some urban areas, such as

Moscow and Leningrad. Yel'tsin will probably try to schedule a Russian presidential election in the next few months—he has already announced his candidacy—which would provide him with a clear demonstration of popular support. This prospect will raise the stakes for both traditionalists and reformers at the extraordinary Russian Congress of People's Deputies, which convenes on 28 March.

Traditionalists at the Congress, with the Communist Party in the lead, are likely to intensify their campaign to discredit Yel'tsin and derail his bid for the presidency by initiating debate on the subject of his recall as Chairman of the Supreme Soviet. If, as seems likely, they fail to oust Yel'tsin, they will try to hamper him by supporting constitutional restrictions on the powers of the presidency and on election procedures. Yel'tsin and his allies are almost certain to unveil legislation providing for a strong executive presidency. Sergey Shakh-ray, a Yel'tsin supporter who chairs the key Legislation Committee, indicated that a constitutional amendment on the presidency has already been drafted and will be submitted to the Congress. If the Congress approves a republic presidency, which is likely, Yel'tsin will be the undisputed favorite to win the election and thus become an even more formidable challenger to Gorbachev, who has never submitted to a popular election. In addition, Yel'tsin is likely—either at the Congress or during the election campaign—to push for new elections to the RSFSR legislature and to local governing bodies in order to further undermine Communist influence.

A "Good News" Scenario. Current trends, particularly in the Russian legislature, give the republic leadership some cause for optimism. Its confidence is based primarily on the Supreme Soviet's increasing political maturity and general effectiveness in moving political reforms ahead. The democratization and reinvigoration of long dormant political institutions have complemented the breakdown of the traditional Communist political hegemony over the republic government. Yel'tsin's populist leadership has rallied Russians in support of the principles of republic autonomy from the center and basic reforms of a dysfunctional system.

Claims that Russians have no history of "democracy" are belied by continuing popular support in the republic for democratic values—even in the face of strong opposition from the central authorities and deteriorating living conditions. The spirited political factionalism in the RSFSR Supreme Soviet is an indicator of growing democratic trends in the republic. With some exceptions, and accounting for the newness of political debate in Russia, the emergence of debate among reformers, traditionalists, and centrists is a sign of political development. Despite sharp traditionalist opposition that has made the passage of reform legislation more difficult, the legislature's ability to compromise on such issues as the landownership bill, passed in December, may be interpreted as an early indicator of productive adversarial political behavior. Moreover, the two ends of the spectrum define and contribute to Russian political culture and could mark the beginnings of a multiparty system.

The development of Russian sovereignty could, over the longer term, earn the republic substantial political and economic benefits. Assuming that willing republics eventually sign a union treaty that provides for substantially greater sovereignty and excludes unwilling republics, the terms of center-republic relations will be more firmly defined. In such an environment, the Russian leadership will be better able to solidify reforms of the republic's political structure and economic system. Similarly, democracy and institutional stability, which are only just emerging, should have the opportunity to take firmer root in Russia if, as optimistic officials predict, a republic constitution and a federation treaty of the republic's regions can be negotiated and approved.

A Gloomier Possibility. These appealing prospects are endangered by intensifying political struggles at all levels, the difficulty of creating a new political system, and the fear of looming economic disaster. Over the near term, the confrontation between Russia and the central authorities will contribute to continued domestic instability and could prompt a further raising of the stakes as Russia seeks to establish precedents for the division of center-republic powers and as Gorbachev contemplates coercive measures to gain Russian compliance.

The Russian reform movement's heavy dependence on Yel'tsin is a potential weakness. Should Yel'tsin commit a serious political blunder and be forced from political centerstage, for example, there does not now appear to be a replacement with the same ability to capture popular support and drive the reform agenda. Even if Yel'tsin were to be martyred by assassination, the reform movement—rather than rallying—would almost certainly be splintered by his loss.

Popular anger over the economy's disintegration is also a potentially major contributor to instability. Since Yel'tsin pronounced the "500 Days" plan officially dead in November—after Gorbachev rejected it—the republic leadership admittedly has had no plan to redirect its energies toward implementing significant economic reform. Even if the Yel'tsin team can get another plan on track, serious reforms almost certainly will bring with them serious consequences, such as increased levels of unemployment and inflation. Speakers from both ends of the political spectrum in the republic legislature have warned that growing economic uncertainty and frustration at the grassroots level, combined with high-level jockeying within the republic and between the republic and the central authorities, could manifest themselves violently.

The Role of the Center. Encouraged by pressure from party and military officials concerned about the erosion of the center's authority, Gorbachev is trying to reassert control over the periphery. These efforts present formidable obstacles to a republic leadership striving for greater autonomy, but, ironically, Gorbachev's mobilization of the central bureaucracy, which was intended to erode the reformers' support base and derail Yel'tsin's efforts to become Russian president, has so far backfired. The greatest danger to the nascent Russian reform movement is the threat of force by Gorbachev to assert the center's authority. Recent decisions to increase the center's pressure on Russian reformers and at least plant the seed of forcible repression may eventually be able to fracture Yel'tsin's current fragile reform coalition.

Particularly because of recent strong showings of popular support for Yel'tsin and reform in Russia, there is scant hope that Gorbachev will succeed without resorting to the crude maneuvers used in the Baltic region. Already there are signs that the front organization Centrist Bloc of Parties intends to act as a Russian "national salvation committee" if the need arises. Gorbachev is likely to continue to try to undermine Russian reformers by painting them as elitists and "anti-Soviet" or "anti-Communist" agitators, despite the positive outcome of the 17 March referendum for reformers. The center is also likely to increase its efforts to exploit the sovereignty claims of autonomous units in the RSFSR to distract the republic leadership. With the center relying on intimidation tactics, including KGB provocations and a smear campaign, reformers could lose the support of the centrists' swing votes in the legislature, leaving their ability to stand up to the center heavily dependent on their appeal to the population.