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The New Post-Transitional Russian Identity:

How Western is Russian Westernization?

Project Report

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Project Sessions

Seminar 1: **The United States, Russia and Central Asia: New Cooperation or the Old Divide?**
(Nov. 2003)
Speakers: S. Frederick Starr, Chairman of the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute at Johns Hopkins University, School of Advanced International Studies
Barnett Rubin, Director, Center on International Cooperation, New York University
Commentator: Stephen Kotkin, Director of Russian Studies at Princeton University

Seminar 2: **NATO and the European Union: Where are the Limits to Europe?**
(Feb. 2004)
Speaker: Robert Cottrell, Journalist, *The Economist*

Seminar 3: **Russia's Present Condition: Why Putin Couldn't Lose**
(April 2004)
Speakers: Gideon Lichfield, Journalist, *The Economist*
Masha Lipman, Editor, Columnist, *Pro et Contra, Washington Post*
Adam Michnik, Editor-in-Chief, *Gazeta Wyborcza*
David Remnick, Editor-in-Chief, *The New Yorker*

Seminar 4: **Reagan and Gorbachev: Presidential Politics, the Cold War and Lessons for Today**
(Nov. 2004)
Speakers: Jack F. Matlock, Jr., president Ronald Reagan's principle advisor to Soviet and European Affairs
Commentator: Stephen Kotkin, Director of Russian Studies at Princeton University

Seminar 5: **Russia: How Perceptions Shape Reality**
(Dec. 2004)
Speakers: James Collins, Former US Ambassador to the Russian Federation 1997-2001
Masha Gessen, Journalist, *US News and World*, *Bolshoi Gorod*
* A Ranking Bush administration official.
(This official is actively involved in policy issues and therefore requested their comments not be for attribution)

Seminar 6: **Putin's Russia: The Human Rights Record**
(March 2005)
Speakers: Mary Holland, Professor, NYU School of Law
Diederik Lohman, Senior Researcher, Human Rights Watch
Alexander Lupis, Program Coordinator, The Committee to Protect Journalists
Andrew Nagorski, Senior Editor of *Newsweek*

The New Post-Transitional Russian Identity: Putin and the Pendulum

There has been much written about Russia in the post-Soviet era regarding the transition from communism to democracy, from state-run to free-market economy. Implicit within these transitions is a cultural one. Russian history through the Soviet era focused on the community, the individual was subservient to the state. This was a factor in the longevity of the Soviet Union; the centrally-planned economy and "vertical of power" within the government meshed with the communal values of the culture. The transition to democracy and free-markets, where the individual is the base unit and motivator of the system, therefore not only signals a change in political and economic systems, but the forging of a new Russian identity as well. The scope of this project has been to study this emerging new, post-transitional Russian identity. This has been achieved through a series of panel discussions, bringing together experts to examine a number of topics, all of which will help to shape this new identity. The goal of this report then is to examine some of the concepts explored in these discussions and to show what effect they are having on the new Russian identity.

This is not a new position for Russia to be in. A survey of Russian history shows cycles of reform followed by a reversion to the old ways. It is a series of attraction to outside ideas (often western in origin) followed by repulsion from them and a call back to "traditional" values. It is a cycle which dates back to the invitation made to Viking princes in the ninth century to rule over the embryonic Russian state, and continued with the Eurocentric reforms of Peter the Great in the 17th century and the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917 (this time adopting the philosophy of Karl Marx of Germany). Each time, the outside influences were soon regarded as corrupting the Russian "soul" and were repudiated in favor of something more authentic, more Russian. It is in this way that Russia can be thought of as a *revolutionary* nation - one of sudden drastic changes, rather than as an *evolutionary* nation - where the slow, steady development of each generation builds upon the foundation laid by the preceding one.

The change facing Russia today is perhaps the most drastic ever; the attempt to develop a liberal, free-market democracy from a formerly authoritarian, communist state. The challenge faced by these new reforms cannot be understated, nor can the changes they imply in the Russian identity. In the scope of history then the events of 1991 can be thought of as another "revolution" as Russia again opens itself to the influence of the west. How the challenge of this latest revolution will be accepted and how it will reshape the Russian identity is the central question which this research project has sought to answer.

The New Post-Transitional Russian Identity is the second phase of a study of Russia's transition from the era of the Soviet Union. The first phase of this project, *Lessons of Transition: The Cultural Contradictions and the Future of Russian Liberalization*, conducted in 2001-2002 looked at the forces which shaped the first decade of Russia's post-communist development. The final report for Phase 1 of the project, published in July 2002, can be found at: http://www.worldpolicy.org/projects/russia/transition.pdf

In the November 2004 panel discussion conducted by the project, Ambassador Jack F. Matlock, the United States last ambassador to the Soviet Union (1987-1991), repeated a question once asked of him by a Russian colleague in the early days of the post-Soviet era. He was asked how long would it be before Russia became a "normal" country, in other words, how long would it be before Russia completed its transition to becoming a western-style nation.[1] Matlock's answer was two generations. He felt that the society could only complete such a drastic change after all those active in the society at the time of the transition had been replaced.

If we use Ambassador Matlock's answer as a guide, we are roughly only one quarter of the way through this transitional period. The post-Soviet Russian identity therefore remains very much a work-in-progress and what form it will ultimately take remains unclear. If Russia's ultimate goals are a transition to democracy and free-markets, the culture must change as well to become one which values the individual above the community; since in a democracy the government is ultimately created by the actions of the individual, as in a free-market system the individual investor, or entrepreneur, is the agent of action, the motivator. Neither democracy or a market economy would seem compatible with a communitarian system where the individual was not the base-unit of society. It would seem then that the path is clear, and that it would only be a matter of time, of the passing of two generations, before the transition is complete. Russian history though as stated, has been one of revolution, not evolution, and the appearance of a clear path towards development is not a guarantee of success. The post-Soviet transition therefore needs to be watched and examined to see if it does indeed signal a change in the Russian identity or if it is merely another brief advance, to be followed by another historic regression.

Putin and the Pendulum

Russian history has many instances of flirtation with the west followed by a retreat from it. There is an attraction to things western, though when it becomes clear that fully adopting these western traits and ideals will mean substantive changes to the Russian "soul" there is a turning away from them; a desire to not abandon dedication to the community for personal glory. This could be described as a cycle, though a more apt description would be that of a pendulum; Russia swings towards the west, towards change, but then loses momentum and returns to its old patterns, its old ways, and swings back in the other direction. A full circle is not completed, but rather an oscillation between two polar opposites.

The current post-Soviet transition needs to be looked at in these terms. In the period of the late 1980s/early 2000s Russia seemed eager to westernize; in the 1990s it sought inclusion in the G8, partnerships with NATO, the World Trade Organization (WTO), the European Union (EU), etc. The first panels of this phase of the project, which occurred in 2003,[2] seemed to follow in this spirit; the westernization of Russia was discussed as fact, the only questions were on the pace of the progress.

Since the reelection of Vladimir Putin in 2004 though, there has been a noticeable change. In the panel discussions that followed, talk increasingly focused on Putin's authoritarianism and the growing power

exerted by the central government. It would seem that, potentially at least, an apex in the swing of the pendulum has been reached, his actions are indicative of a move back in the opposite direction.

It evolved then that one man, Vladimir Putin, became the focus of a project designed to study the cultural development of an entire society. Though it may seem counterintuitive to focus on one man when studying an entire society; there is good reason in the case of Putin, or in the case of a traditionally autocratic society such as Russia for that matter. As conceived, the Russian presidency is a strong one, made stronger by some reforms instituted by Putin which will be discussed in more detail later in this report. He therefore has great latitude in shaping the policies of the country, which in turn will inform the development of the culture. Putin also encapsulates the paradox present in Russia today; he is a democratically-elected president who comes from that most Soviet of institutions, the KGB. It is a seemingly incongruous mixture, but at the same time is illustrative of the position of Russia today – somewhere between autocracy and democracy.

Putin also enjoys a high level of personal popularity. Poll numbers during the time of the panel discussions put his personal approval rating around 70%.[3] This high number is despite further polling data which shows far less support for his individual policies. The apparent conclusion is that the Russian people simply like Putin, and his style of leadership. This despite his implementation of policies which they do not (to varying degrees) approve. An examination of why he enjoys this popularity is useful in gauging the mentality of the public.

With Putin there is also a level of personal identification, a way of seeing him as a Russian "everyman." During the December 2004 panel, special guest Russian Ambassador Andrey Denisov (Permanent Representative to the United Nations) said that there is a perception of Putin in Russia as "an ordinary man. He is like you and me…he has the same problems in his life, the same vision."[4] Using Putin as an example of the "new Russian" is instructive in two ways – he both represents what the public wants in a leader, and at the same time is someone with whom the public identifies on a personal level. He is symbolic both of aspiration and reality. A study of his actions and the public reaction to them is illuminating of the current state of mind among the public.

Again, the new identity is something which is still being formed, a definitive statement of what it will be is impossible at this point. It is possible however, to examine where this development now stands and to explore where it may be going. Perhaps the most important question to address is one that goes beyond cultural identity. It is whether Russia is truly on a new path of development, or merely swinging between reform and return. This question will ultimately affect the developing identity more than any other factor. Logically, should Russia return to its authoritarian past, the development of a spirit of liberal individualism among its citizens will not occur. If this cycle cannot be broken, then the "new" identity then will merely be the old one repackaged.

This report will consist of seven parts. The first four: Governance and Reform, The Economy, The Soviet Legacy, and Foreign Policy; each explore in more depth part of the current situation in Russia and how these areas are shaping the emerging identity. This is followed by a conclusion in three parts

that looks at the identity that appears to be forming in reaction to the current situation within Russia and speculates on what factors could influence this development either to continue along its current path or to change. The question is whether Russia, and by extension the new Russian identity, is yet again locked into a pendulum swing, or whether that cycle will finally be broken.

Governance and Reform

One of the most drastic of changes faced by the Russian people after the end of the Soviet Union was the switch to a democratic form of government. For all of its rhetoric, the government under the Communists was not one of the people, but rather an autocracy imposed by a ruling elite. Nor had the earlier rule of the Czars given the people any real experience in representative governance. The concept of self-rule, the basic principle within any democracy, was one the Russians were not familiar with.

It was one which required a drastic change within the culture. Since a democracy is about self-rule, it also puts the burden of government on the individual. To cite Abraham Lincoln's *Gettysburg Address*, it is a government "of the people, by the people, for the people."[5] The government therefore is no longer a force which is to be endured by the community, as it had been under the Czars/Communists, but rather it is one which will be shaped by the actions of each and every individual, a citizen. The agent of action in society becomes the individual, not the collective – this requires a substantive change in the mindset of the average Russian and a break from 1,000 years of the people's relation with power.

In the west, Boris Yeltsin was hailed as a democratizing figure and gained something of an iconic status as the first democratically-elected president of the formerly communist Russia. His election, as well as the election of a state Duma and regional governments, was viewed as the triumph of democracy. It is, however, a mistake to call one election a democracy. While Russians may have been thrilled to have the chance to vote in an election where the outcome was not pre-determined, their further experiences with democracy were not as positive. Along with democracy came a package of economic reform and privatizations to establish free-market capitalism in Russia; free markets being deemed a necessary aspect of any true democracy. It was expected that these reforms and privatizations would establish a sizeable American-style middle class within Russia which would function both as the engine of their economy and their democracy. In practice this was not the case, although a middle class was created to some extent. The measures also resulted in the concentration of much of the country's wealth into the hands of a small elite. Many members of this elite were connected personally or politically with Yelstin and became known colloquially as "The Family." Further, while many Russians were shut out of the privatization process, they were also stripped of the protections they enjoyed under the communist system: guaranteed employment, pensions, stable costs of living, etc. They were tossed, largely unprepared, into the free market. Since these reforms were partnered with the rise of democracy, democracy was blamed by many for the chaotic economic situations of the late 1990's. By the end of the decade people advocating this new system were called "dermocrats" – *dermo* being the Russian word for shit.

The enthusiastic support for democratic reforms seen at the beginning of the 1990's thus began to wane by the end of the decade, since democracy was seen by many as a system of chaos and uncertainty with benefits only for a small, well-connected elite. Thus, 15 years after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the political space has not developed in Russia as some envisioned at the beginning of the reform process. Core elements of a properly-functioning democracy have not yet become parts of the post-communist Russian identity.

One of these elements is the concept of public discourse. To return briefly to the American example, public discourse was viewed as such a vital element of a functioning democracy, it was codified in the first amendment of the Bill of Rights. In post-communist Russia, public discourse has not been held in such high regard. Project participant Masha Lipman in the April 2004 discussion *Russia's Present Condition: Why Putin Couldn't Lose*, cited an example of the use of public billboards in Russia to convey private messages among the elite. One example given was of a billboard depicting a man with coins raining down on him and the slogan: "Roma takes care of the Family and the Family takes care of Roma. Congratulations!"[6] It is widely believed that "Roma" was oligarch Roman Abramovich who had close ties with then-president and "Family" head Boris Yeltsin. No public explanation of the message was ever given, the masses it seems did not need to know the meaning of this message. Lipman gave other examples and described the whole episode as the appropriation of public space for private communications among insiders with no regard to what the public at-large would think. It indicates a disconnect between the public and the ruling elite.

A more serious indication of failure in public discourse has been the consolidation of media outlets under President Putin. Today, most national television outlets are "controlled" by the Kremlin, those who dissent to the policies of the president do not have access. Project participant Masha Gessen during the December 2004 discussion *Russia: How Perceptions Shape Reality*, talked about the *temka* [from the Russian *temnyi* meaning "dark"] – briefing memos sent out by the Kremlin each morning with suggestions on what stories the national media should focus on and what tone their reporting should take.[7] Gessen said that Kremlin officials attempted to use *temka* during their support of Viktor Yanukovych during the 2004 presidential elections in Ukraine. They stopped after the Kremlin *temkas* were routinely leaked and printed by Ukranian newspapers. By comparison, *temkas* in Russia are never leaked. This is an indication of complicity among the press outlets with the "party line" coming from the Kremlin. In a larger sense, it shows the lack of a "free" press within Russia. Again, a free press is regarded as a requirement for a functioning democracy, a check against the power of the government and a method of providing accountability. The lack of a free press is another indication of the failure, so far, of commitment to democratic ideals in becoming part of the new Russian identity. As to why the press would be so compliant, several panelists during this second phase of the project discussed the unsolved murders of 11 journalists in the past few years in Russia, many of whom had been critical of the Putin administration before their deaths.[8]

Even within the political parties of the new Russia the democratic spirit is weak. The largest faction within parliament is a coalition of parties led by Putin under the United Russia banner, though their function in the Duma is primarily to endorse his policies. The Communist and ultra-nationalist Liberal Democratic (LDPR) parties each have committed though small followings, and are the only

ones outside of United Russia to show any staying power so far in the democracy. The nationalist Rodina (Motherland) party formed in recent years and has been attracting followers, though they are new enough so that their endurance over the coming years cannot be assumed; while the liberal Yabloko party, formed in 1993, has lost support and failed to win representation in the most recent Duma elections (2003). In general, Russians at this point simply do not have the personal identification with political parties as do people in properly-functioning western democracies.

This is a liability to Russia since the Duma is organized as a parliamentary system, where the political party is the basis of power. Since Russians have not developed strong party loyalty or identification (the core supporters of parties like the Communists and the LDPR being the exceptions), the party structures themselves have not developed. Without strong parties, the organization of the body (the Duma) as a whole is weakened, thus allowing power to lie with the executive branch to a larger de facto degree than it should.

Under the banner of reform in the run-up to his 2004 re-election campaign, and further in the wake of the terrorist attack in Beslan on September 1, 2004 in the guise of strengthening national security; Putin instituted changes which will further weaken the people's voice in the government. One reform changed the way Duma deputies are elected – moving from the current system where half the seats are selected by direct vote of the people for a specific constituency, to one where all seats are allocated proportionally based on the percentage a party receives in the general election (previously only half the seats were awarded in this manner). Further, a party must receive 7% of the total votes cast to qualify for any Duma representation. Given the weakness of the parties among the general public and the high threshold, critics expect few parties to be represented in the next Duma. Putin's United Russia, based on its organization and access to the press, is expected to increase its dominance even further, while more voters will find their own choices not represented within the government.

Putin's other major reform was to change the selection of Russia's 89 regional governors from a vote of the local electorate to appointment by the president. This move was undertaken, according to the government, to fight terrorism and corruption at the regional level. Some panelists did acknowledge that there are entrenched, corrupt regional governors whose removal from their posts could likely only be achieved by Moscow. Others were skeptical of the "reform" goal of this change, especially of claims of this reform being an anti-terror initiative. So while a few bad governors may be removed, a more direct result of this reform will be to deny people at the regional level a voice in selecting their leaders, except through the indirect chance once every four years to vote for the president. It remains to be seen if this will be an effective move against corruption, but it has reduced the democratic choice of the average Russian citizen in selecting their government.

Ultimately, it will take the next presidential election to indicate if Putin will suffer a political price for these reforms. Early indications are that the public is at least grudgingly accepting of them – Putin's popularity and approval ratings remain solid,[9] and there have not been mass public demonstrations as there were in response to changes made in 2004 by the Putin government to pension payments and education fees. It could be argued that people are accepting of the reforms because of the disconnect between the public and the ruling elite cited in Lipman's examples. The public would seem

to be moving away from the democratic ideal that government is something for the people to participate in, and back to the older Soviet/Czarist idea of government as something to be endured, a troubling sign for a lasting democracy. Troubling too are the way in which both the press has easily become controlled by the Kremlin and how the public space has been appropriated from the public for the personal use of the lucky few, since it is only through public discourse that democracy can grow. In terms of governance and reform then, it would seem that the pendulum is indeed swinging back towards a more Soviet model of a controlled media, a voiceless public and a centrally-controlled bureaucracy. That there has not been more protest by the public indicates that these ideals of democracy have not yet become part of the post-communist Russian identity.

The Economy

As cited in the preceding section, the introduction of democracy in post-Communist Russia was tied to the establishment of a free-market economy. These two reforms marked the greatest changes faced by the Russian people after the end of the Soviet Union. It is important to remember here that serfdom was only abolished in Russia in 1861.[10] The dawn of the twentieth century saw the country still largely tied to an agrarian heritage, with the majority of Russians still living in communal villages. The collective was the principle around which society was organized. The Communists were able to capitalize on this mentality with their rise to power in 1917, keeping the communal idea of society largely intact for the 70-odd years of their rule. The result was that by the end of the Soviet system in 1991, the average Russian had little experience with the concepts of private property or a market-driven economy. As discussed, their first experiences with privatization were not positive ones. This lack of experience combined with the "shock therapy" approach to economic reforms endorsed by outside advisors (that quick and drastic reforms were the best way to achieve change, even if the reforms would be painful to the average citizen), led to the economic collapse of 1998.

These events have left Russians skeptical of the free markets that operate in their country. This is despite the fact that today, the market is a facet of every-day life, and Russians have become consumers in a capitalist system. Many of the trappings of capitalism are apparent: brand-name outlets, commercials, advertisements, etc., however the deep-seated belief in the system present in the citizens of western capitalist countries has yet to take root. One example was provided by Masha Gessen at the December 2004 discussion where she discussed a bank run based on internet rumors in Russia during the summer of that year.[11] A "black list" of 10 banks supposedly to be investigated for corruption circulated on internet sites. Despite the fact that the list came from no reputable source and in the face of numerous public assurances from officials and private businessmen that there was no such list and no reason for concern, customers still flocked to the banks to withdraw their money. This run lead to the collapse of Guta Bank, previously one of the 30 largest banks in the country.[12]

This episode is indicative of both a lack of faith in the economic institutions and in the financial leaders, both public and private, in the country. At a basic level a capitalist system is built on trust, trust that money invested with an entity like a bank will be guarded and available for the investor at a later date. Without this trust, the system cannot function. This bank run shows an inherent lack of trust.

People would rather remove their money from a bank based on an unsourced rumor rather than believe an array of officials who are simply asking for their trust.

But trust in today's Russia is in short supply. As we have seen, those in the Kremlin do not trust the people and the result are electoral "reforms" which take power away from the citizens. In turn, the people do not believe what their leaders tell them, the run on Guta Bank being a prime example. The Russian people lived with decades of Soviet rule where silence or disinformation were the policies of the government; the "official" story was quite likely the polar opposite of the truth. This was all suppose to change with the end of the Soviet Union, yet to the average Russian the Commissar merely gave way to the Oligarch. Trust then is not a cycle which has been broken, it is a cycle which has never begun, in short "the system despises its citizens, eliciting an equal and opposite reaction of derision and distrust."[13]

It is important to remember the concept of Russia as a revolutionary state. Revolutions are a time of crisis and uncertainty. The natural inclination is for a person to try to take advantage of any situation which presents itself since in a time of crisis things will likely only get worse. The policy of "shock therapy" and the economic collapse of 1998 did nothing to soothe this crisis mentality among the citizens. The result is that today during a time of a growing economy within Russia (IMF projections for 2005 project a GDP growth rate of 5.5%)[14], the fear that chaos lurks just around the corner is one that is very real in the minds of the people.

It is in this light that corruption and bribery, which are endemic within Russia, should be viewed. While both can been seen also as indications of a muddled bureaucracy where it is difficult or impossible to get things done through normal procedures, they also signal a lack of belief in the free-market reforms and a sign that the country is still in "crisis-mode" at least in the minds of its citizens. Another example given at the December 2004 panel discussion was that during the September 2004 school siege in Beslan, North Ossetia, which ultimately claimed over 300 lives; it was possible to bribe one's way into the security cordon for a sum equaling a mere $3. That bribery could exist during a national crisis illustrates the level to which corruption is engrained into the system.

In discussing corruption it is important to focus not only on the petty amounts collected in bribes by provincial border guards. The idea of grabbing what one can today (or in simpler terms looting) applies to the oligarchs as well. Project participant Gideon Lichfield summed up Russia's privatization of state assets by saying "a group of a few very rich men essentially bought the country."[15] As the case with bribe-taking, the oligarchs [Lichfield's "rich men"] had an opportunity for immediate gains presented to them and they took advantage of it. Along with the state assets came access to the Yeltsin government, access largely denied to average citizens. The oligarchs became princes within this new kingdom, finding more opportunities for themselves by denying those same opportunities to the public at large, a public which according to the reform plans should have become the investor class of the new market economy.

Corruption, in all its forms, is a sign of an opportunistic mentality of seeking immediate gains working from the idea that tomorrow is uncertain and very likely to be worse than today. It is an attitude

that runs contrary to one which could support capitalism since the capitalist system is inherently optimistic; it assumes that tomorrow has a good chance of being better than today. This is the ethic that encourages investment; the money set aside today will be returned in the future in larger amounts. But belief in the future is not compatible with a revolutionary mentality where crisis is the permanent state of affairs.

In discussing the economy, it is important to talk about the Yukos affair and Vladimir Putin. In brief, in 2003 Mikhail Khodorkovsky, the chairman and principle stockholder in Yukos (formerly Russia's largest oil company) was arrested on charges of tax evasion. At various panels project participants debated the validity of these charges, though the consensus is that his arrest was politically motivated and occurred after Khodorkovsky made a small contribution to an opposition political party. It is widely believed that Putin had warned Khodorkovsky and other oligarchs not to get involved in politics. Since Khodorkovsky defined this warning, he was arrested.

Fully discussing the implications of the Yukos affair could fill a book. For the scope of this report there are a few points to note. While a number of participants in both the December 2004 *Perceptions* and March 2005 *Putin's Russia* discussions felt that the charges against Khodorkovsky did have some technical merit, they were charges that could have been levied against any number of businessmen or companies within Russia (a critique of the oligarchs in general). Given the timing of his arrest, the charges have the appearance of being politically motivated, an example of selective enforcement of the law. It is assumed that Khodorkovsky's arrest was at the direction of Putin. This act has several unfavorable implications.

It is another indication of a swing away from free-market democracy, back towards a centrally-controlled authoritarian state. It sends the message that the actors in the market are free to pursue their goals only with the blessing of the central government. Step out of line (as in the case of Khodorkovsky's political donations) and there will be ramifications. While it is not Soviet-style central planning, it is a system where acceptable behavior is dictated by those in power.

Further, selective enforcement of the law, as seen with Yukos, undermines the rule of law as a whole. Putin's actions in the Yukos case (working on the widely-held assumption that it was he who ordered the arrest in the first place) show that in practice, there are no laws. There are legal statutes, but when they are applied selectively, as the Yukos case would seem to indicate is the current practice, they become merely a tool for the state to exercise its power; they are not, as they should be, a framework for the operation of a market economy and a civil society.

Nor do these actions do anything to move the state from this perception of being in "crisis mode," if anything Putin's actions regarding Yukos have reinforced this idea. More than any economic policies, the future growth and strength of a market economy will rely on a perception of stability and a change from the crisis mentality that lurks below the surface. Stability will only come with trust. Here we return to the ideas of governance, the people need to be engaged with the government, not trying to avoid it; while the government needs to trust in its people.

Russians today are engaged in the capitalist system. Even outside the oligarch class, Russians are becoming entrepreneurs, and investors. Lichfield noted that in the past three years Russians have begun to use credit cards and take out mortgages, indications he feels that: "the economy is at last beginning to get out of the phase of robber baron crony capitalism…and its beginning to be built as a proper economy from the ground up."[16] Even more so while the Communists, the traditional enforcers of the planned economy, remain a political party with a dedicated following within Russia,[17] no one seriously believes that they will return to power. The free market mentality must continue to be viewed as a work-in-progress, one which still has major obstacles to overcome, but one which is becoming a central part of the fabric of society.

It is also likely that western observers have had unrealistic expectations for the Russian adoption of capitalism. As Masha Lipman noted of Russia: "having been a communist great power, we expect it to become a capitalist great power."[18] It may well be that simply not enough time has elapsed for this change to occur. It is important to remember not only that the free market, and its implied belief in the individual, runs counter to 1,000 years of Russian communal history; but that for the seven decades of the Soviet Union, capitalism was held up as the antithesis of a civilized society. Capitalism used to be seen as the source of the world's problems, not its solution. It is difficult then to ask a people to embrace as their future a system which previously they had been told would be their ruin. And at some point the government and the people need to build trust in each other so that the entire system can move from the current crisis mentality. These factors will ultimately dictate the shape the future Russian capitalist.

The Soviet Legacy

The past makes up a large part of any nation's cultural identity. At a basic level, culture can be thought of as a people's relation with their own past; what traditions they continue, what lessons from their own history they take forward with them into the future. The revolutionary trend evident in Russian history disrupts this process. Looking at the twentieth century one sees not only a series of sudden, drastic changes (revolutions), but also a simultaneous refuting of the recent past. The revolution of 1917 sought to break the country from its Czarist traditions. The Communists during their time in power turned revisionist history into a state organ; Stalin re-wrote his relationship with Lenin, Khrushchev condemned Stalin, Brezhnev purged Khrushchev, and so on. It is not surprising then that with the end of Communist rule in 1991 came a desire to break from that past as well, to disavow the entire Soviet experience.

Culturally this has left contemporary Russians with a 70-year hole in their history. It was possible to say what it meant to be a Soviet citizen; it was even possible to know culturally what it meant to be a Russian during the time of the Czars. But by breaking with the Soviet Union, Russians in the post-Communist period became people without a past. While the Soviets asserted the role they played on the world stage, how today's Russia fits in is much more of a mystery. This uncertainty goes to core of the question of this project on what is the "new" Russian identity.

It is not surprising then that with a little distance from the 1991 "revolution" there is a desire to re-examine the legacy of the Soviet years. Perhaps the two most important historical milestones unique to the Soviet Union were the sacrifices endured during World War II (known during Soviet times as the Great Patriotic War) and the triumphs of the Soviet space program. No nation suffered losses to the extent that the Soviet Union did during the war (the most common current estimates place the number of military and civilian deaths at approximately 27 million).[19] It also bore the brunt of the fighting with Nazi Germany. Without the Soviet effort it is unlikely that the Allies would have prevailed in destroying the Nazi regime. A little over a decade later, the nation launched an ambitious space program which scored a number of firsts; including the first satellite and first human put into orbit. These were grand achievements, made even more significant when measured against the level of destruction suffered by the Soviet Union during the war.

Both of these milestones would be sources of immense national pride in any nation. But with the collapse of the Soviet Union, and Yeltsin's rapid adoption of western reform policies, Russia began an uncertain relationship with its own past, the place of these milestone events in the cultural history of the people was not what would be expected.

During the reign of Vladimir Putin there has been a looking back into its own history within Russia. There has been a mining of the past for symbols and icons to evoke a sense of strength, pride and perhaps even empire. One only has to take a brief look at the current symbols of the Russian state. Project guest speaker David Remnick at the April 2004 discussion *Russia's Present Condition* described Russia as "the ultimate mixed bag – a nation whose mixed post-modern symbols, some czarist, some neo-Soviet, some *sui generis* – stand for the severe, post-modern soup that is the nation itself."[20] The Russian coat of arms is from the time of the Czars. The national anthem is an amalgam of the Soviet-era music, with new lyrics, which themselves are quite similar to the Soviet ones. The Kremlin recently began a ceremonial "changing of the guard" routine complete with empire-age pomp.

Putin himself evokes a sense of the old Soviet Union. His past career as a KGB officer is a prominent part of his biography. A recurring theme from several of the project sessions, and particularly from the March 2005 session *Putin's Russia: The Human Rights Record*, was a "return to the past" in Putin's recent political moves, that they have been attempts to restore the Soviet "vertical of power" centralization of government affairs. Today he seems to be less of a new Russian leader and more of an old Soviet one. That his personal approval rating has remained high shows that this is an appealing notion to a large sector of the general public.

None of this should be very surprising. Project participant Celestine Bohlen noted during a discussion in Phase I: "the Soviet Union was more than a regime, it was a state of mind."[21] For those who were raised under it, this mindset is still present, even if it is on a sub-conscious level. Mentally it shapes the way state institutions should look – so when Putin establishes policies that critics deride as being authoritarian, there is at the same time a sub-conscious acceptance of them since they evoke the Soviet idea of leadership that many Russian even today were raised under.

As icons and symbols from the past are recycled, the Soviet time period becomes acceptable in a way it was not in the early days of the new Russian state. No longer must there be a total break with the Soviet times, but rather there can be an acceptance, even a pride in them. A sense of nostalgia is present in society today for the less-turbulent times of the Soviet Union. Putin himself can be viewed as a nostalgic choice, an old-style premier, albeit young and modernized, in charge of an all-encompassing central government, rather than the chaotic democratic reforms imposed under Boris Yeltsin.

The danger with nostalgia is that ideologically it provides a slippery slope. Nostalgia is borne out of idealized memories of a simpler past that stand in opposition to a confusing or uncertain present. The problem is that happy memories of the past can easily turn into a desire to *recreate* the past. Logically it would seem that if life was better "back then" that the correct course of action is to adopt the customs and mores that previously existed, to recreate the world of yesteryear, since people were, supposedly, happier and life was better. Of course, the old adage that "you can't go home again" is true, to adopt the trappings of the past does not stop the clock, and often the "good old days" of memory were not as good as remembered.

This trend for nostalgia for the Soviet past also plays up the positive aspects of the former regime while ignoring the negative ones. One idea expressed several times during the March 2005 panel on Putin's human rights record was the lack of a critical examination of the crimes of the Soviet era. There was no Russian equivalent of the Nuremberg war crimes trials, or even of South Africa's post-Apartheid Truth Commission, no accounting for the purges, oppression, the gulags, etc. Project participant Robert Cottrell, during the February 2004 discussion *NATO and the European Union*, suggested this lack of self-reflection affected Russia's relations with the west. He stated that: "they [NATO and the EU] feel that Russia cannot be trusted in the future until it has in some way confronted or purged, through confession or through an apology, its actions as the dominant regional power of the Soviet Union."[22]

Arguably the Soviet Union's strongest leader, Josef Stalin, is also the one that Russia least wants to analyze. It is estimated that Stalin was responsible for the deaths of between 20 and 40 million Soviet citizens during his rule. He filled labor camps with imagined enemies, he deported entire populations to suit his grand visions of what "Great Russia" should be, and committed numerous purges of the academics, the military, the intelligentsia, and so on. Yet in 2005, for the 60th anniversary celebrations of the Soviet victory in World War II, he was hailed as the formidable leader who won the war for Russia. The horrible toll he extracted from his own country was dismissed in the face of the celebrations.

The image of Stalin offered today then is of the firm leader who defeated the Nazis, rather than the brutal dictator who should be made to answer for his crimes as the Nazis were made to in Nuremberg in 1946. He is the ultimate "strong man" for Russia, the archetype of leadership. Stalin is seen as a "cherished role model" whom Putin "[calls] a tyrant to soothe the wounded feelings of the Baltic leaders, yet instantly qualifying his remarks by saying that Stalin was no Hitler."[23] It is as if the murders, imprisonments and deportations of the Stalin-era were merely the cost of doing business during troubled times.

The picture then of the Soviet past being offered today is an incomplete one, even a romanticized version. The project members agreed that by not having an open discussion about these negative aspects of the Soviet Union, a tone has been set for a lack of accountability in terms of government action today. This is especially true in the field of human rights. No one has been held responsible for the past human rights violations. This sends the message both that consideration for the rights of the individual are not important and that the rights of the individual can be violated in the present with little fear of retribution. The state and its interest remain superior to the individual.

The road ahead continues to be a difficult one with much uncertainty, Soviet nostalgia provides too easy a distraction. Russia, as noted, has been in this position before regarding its reforms, and has shown tendencies to at the point of difficulty to retreat towards notions of strong leaders and communal living, thus absolving the individual of their responsibility. If the "good old" days of the Soviet Union are looked at not only with a misty sense of nostalgia, but as a better way of life, one that better suits Russian society, the threat of yet another retreat is a serious one. Further, by not dealing with the negative aspects of this history, the old system not only appears more attractive, but it also undermines the reform efforts. Both democracy and a free market economy place the individual in the position of motivator for the society; a sense of individual rights and individual responsibility therefore are needed to make democracies and market economies function. As noted by the project members in the March 2005 discussion, a lack of accountability for the past, diminishes the individual's place in the present, and put the state rather than the individual in the position as the supreme actor in society.

The Soviet past will have a significant role in shaping the post-transition identity. It is not a period of time which can be conveniently forgotten, nor should it. There were certainly accomplishments during the Soviet period which are rightly a great source of national pride. And a certain level of nostalgia for the past is part of human nature. It is important that this nostalgia be controlled and be paired with a full examination of the negative aspects of the Soviet era as well. The current habit of cherry-picking icons and images from the past and incorporating them into the present is a notion that will not create a well-rounded identity. A full examination of the past – good and bad – is what is called for. People can learn as well from the darker parts of this history as they can from the great achievements.

Foreign Policy

Russia's role within the world community has its own effect in the shaping of the new Russian identity. It is important to remember that from a period beginning almost immediately after World War II until its dissolution, the Soviet Union wore the mantle of a superpower, a counterpoint to the United States on the world stage. It wielded great influence over global affairs and from the 1950's onward held the power to destroy the world through its nuclear arsenal. Several generations of citizens grew up with part of their cultural identity being that their nation helped to shape the world. It is not surprising that Russia's place as a power in the world remains of keen interest to many Russians.

Much of Putin's ongoing domestic popularity stems from the belief that he is a "strong leader" and that he continues in this ability to mold world opinion and wield influence on the global stage. This plays into a conceit that Russia is the heir to the Soviet Union's place in world affairs. Russians continue to believe, or want to believe, that their country still "matters" when it comes to world events. Many of Putin's actions internationally attempt to build on this perception. This both serves to maintain his image as a strong, decisive leader; and fills a still-existing need within the Russian psyche.

There are some problems with this approach. On one hand it at least mentally maintains the conceit that Russia stands in opposition to the west (primarily the United States of America), yet at the same time the post-1991 reforms have basically been an attempt to adopt "western" concepts in regard to the economy (conversion to a free market system) and governance of Russia (the institution of election of a president by popular vote, as an example). Subconsciously Russians tap into the Soviet-era ideas that the western way is wrong; capitalism is inherently unfair, radical individualism is ultimately destructive, etc.; but they are simultaneously told to embrace the free market, that being ambitious and promoting oneself is a good thing, and so on.

It is illogical to stand in opposition to a set of ideals, but to also be told, or even believe, that this is the way of the future and will ultimately better your life. If the ultimate goal of the reform process and the establishment of the "new" Russian identity is to introduce western concepts into the existing psyche, than this bipolar system of opposition and attraction can only serve as an obstacle.

A second problem with Russia's current foreign policy is that while there is the tendency of those in power to act as though Russia is the Soviet Union at the height of its power and influence, simply put, it is not. The active role the Kremlin attempted to play in the presidential elections in Ukraine, the support it gives to the autocratic and authoritarian regimes of the "Stans" in central Asia reflect a desire to keep these states within the Russian sphere of influence. Certainly economic and cultural ties between Russia and these states continue to exist. However, it is unclear what Russia gains in attempts to assert control in this perceived sphere of influence aside from feeding a perception that the former Soviet Union is in some form still intact. Viktor Yushenko's election in Ukraine has not resulted in a seizing of Russian assets or in the deportation of ethnic Russians. So far, it appears to be largely business as usual. The overt actions by the Kremlin then seem to have been misplaced in trying so hard to influence the outcome of the 2004 Ukranian elections. In fact, Russia's interventions would seem to have had the opposite effect – the opposition galvanized around Yushenko and guaranteed his election, while the Kremlin's failure to get their man in power showed that the sphere of influence was indeed hollow. In the end this did not bolster Russia's image as a powerful state on the world stage, but rather diminished it.

Ultimately a realistic view of Russia's place in today's world is needed by those in power. Russia is a nation with vast resources, a strategic location and the second-largest nuclear arsenal in the world; it will play an important role in global affairs, however it is not the Soviet Union from the era of Sputnik and Gagarin, at the height of its superpower status. Given Russians' inherently strong identification with their nation and its role internationally, it is important that this role be portrayed accurately, since it will be a factor in the cultural make-up of the "new" Russian. To continue to stand in opposition to the west, to maintain a suspicion of western ideals because this is what the Soviet Union (or

Russia before that) did is counterproductive. It blocks the adoption of certain western ideals which seem to be the implicit goal of the free market and democratic reforms put into place since 1991, and undermines the effectiveness of these reforms in rebuilding the country. To promote an unrealistic image of Russia's international influence and place in the world could diminish the leadership of the country. This is especially true for Putin who relies on his "strong leader" image for much of his popularity at home. Should the people take to heart the idea that the reality does not match the rhetoric when it comes to Russia's global position, it could undermine the standing of the government. This then could be the first step down the path towards yet another Russian revolution.

Therefore it is in everyone's best interest that foreign policy be an honest reflection of Russia's current situation, not a shadow of Soviet empire. Only with a realistic foreign policy will Russia carve out a stable role in international relations. Russia still will be an important international voice, just not an opposing superpower. From this realistic role, Russians can then define their individual place in an ever-more interconnected world, and will allow them to judge western influences within their society on those influences own merits rather than the mentality of Cold War propaganda slogans. These factors in turn will help to shape their new cultural identity.

Conclusion I: Putin and Shaping The New Identity

The discussions conducted as part of the project clearly showed that the post-transitional Russian identity is a work-in-progress. It is a process that will be shaped by an array of forces outside the normal scope of purely cultural studies including: politics, patterns of governance, economics and world events. It is a process not easily quantified or analyzed. Much must be inferred from how the society as a whole reacts to various situations. It is a process that must be viewed as a constant evolution, rather than as a series of set pieces, or snapshots, that can be viewed as static situations.

It is then very instructive to look at Vladimir Putin as a barometer for the development of this identity. He is a man forged by the old Soviet Union, yet in charge of a new Russia. As a popular president with a compliant Duma, he has great command over these external forces that are shaping the new Russian man. The public's continued strong support of him as a leader indicate: 1) that his policies are at least acceptable to a majority of the country, 2) that he is leading the country in a manner in which they feel it should be led, and 3) that there is a level of personal identification with him; he is "one of us" or perhaps more correctly we would like to be more like him.

It is with these factors in mind that his package of "reforms" (direct selection of regional governors, appointment to the Duma solely from party lists, raising the electoral threshold for parties in the Duma) are troublesome to the development of a new Russian identity because they move political power away from the citizens. With the end of the Soviet Union and Communist rule, it was necessary to devise a new future for Russia. The reforms put forward with the help of the west (the "Washington Consensus", etc.) aimed to change Russia from an authoritarian state, to a liberal western-style capitalist democracy. This would mean a dramatic change within the Russian psyche; a move

from the focus on the communal to the individual, a need to become pro-active in creating one's future rather than simply learning to endure what the Czar/General Secretary imposed upon you.

The early days of reform were chaotic, in the minds of many Russians "democracy" became the scapegoat of all the problems the society was forced to deal with. This weakened the public commitment to an already drastic change in policies and in the society-wide mindset (from communal-based to individual-centric).

Consensus among a majority of the project participants has been that the policies of Vladimir Putin at least for the past few years, and especially since his re-election, represent a step backwards in terms of the development of Russian democracy and of the implicit goal of casting the new Russian as an individual-centered being. The four areas discussed in this report have all indicated regression, not progress. Democracy is weaker; a de-facto control has been established over the mass-media, political opposition is weak; the message is dictated by the center. The state also is attempting to exert control over the economy, and the people seem to have only shaky faith in the free markets. There is at least a flirtation with the old ways of the Soviet Union rather than a solid commitment to establishment of a new democracy. And internationally, Russia seems focused more on often playing the role as an opponent to the west rather than seeking integration – a goal of the post-Soviet reform.

The Russian people seem at least tacitly accepting of these moves. Again, it was clear from the panels that the state of political opposition in Russia is weak, and that the public is not well-informed, at least in terms of information which the Kremlin deems negative to its policies. At the same time, the people *have* been willing to demonstrate publicly when they have felt the need – for example the rallies against pension cuts at the end of 2004. If pushed far enough the masses will show their displeasure, even today. So, it can be inferred that they either approve of Putin's recent policies, or at least do not oppose them to a degree that would spur them to action.

Putin himself maintains a solid high personal popularity rating (70% as of September 2005).[24] This is despite, as Masha Gessen among others noted, far less support for his individual policies (the conflict in Chechnya, for example). Putin then is indicative of what Russians think they want their leader to look like, to act like. He is a figurehead for their own desires for the future. As a number of project participants have concluded this future is starting to look increasingly like the past.

This is troubling because of the pendulum concept introduced at the beginning of this paper. Russian history has shown numerous attempts at reform, flirtations with "the west." These have invariably been followed by retreats, backing away from the goal or change and an undoing of the changes that had been made. Cyclically, this appears where the situation stands now. The change from the Soviet Union to a free-market democracy is the most drastic that could be imagined. It also would, logically then, be the most difficult to accomplish. There was great enthusiasm at the start, followed by a number of social upheavals culminating in the 1998 economic collapse. The Russians faith in the reform process was undermined (i.e. the *dermocrats*). Putin, historically, could be viewed then as a retreat from reform, the Soviet-model man who will restore order. It would appear that this is where

we stand. The pendulum is swinging away from the progress of reform, back towards the re-establishment of a communal authoritarian state.

Should this indeed be the case, then the post-transitional identity may bear a striking resemblance to the pre-transitional one. Of course a pendulum never swings back to the exact same place; it is important to remember that Putin is not Stalin, and 2005 is not 1945. A full-blown return to the past is impossible. But one must wonder how compatible western-style individualism would be in a neo-authoritarian, centrally-planned state? Citizens would not engage with their government as is expected in a functioning democracy, but are more likely to try to stay out of its way. Initiative will be out of place since if your future is not yours to make, what then is the point of being an entrepreneur? The progress made so far would likely be reversed for an existence which while perhaps not the most pleasant, is at least one that is stable and in an odd sense comfortable.

Conclusion II: Reasons for Optimism?

To reiterate, it would seem then that the new emerging cultural identity could turn out to be much like the old. Putin's recent swing back towards vertical rule coupled with the Russian people's ingrained identification with "traditional" communal values and distrust of outside ideals seem to be preventing the formation of a new mindset for the 21st century world in which Russia exists. The goal of Putin's recent policies is one of recreating, at least in part, a Soviet mentality.

Political science, however, would tell us that Putinism is not Stalinism, or even Sovietism. There are elements of each present in the new Russian state, but there are many elements of the liberal state in place as well. As Putin is not Stalin, and today's Russia is not yesterday's Soviet Union, the emerging identity and the reality that surrounds it could not be as bad as it once was.

It is also important to remember that in politics policies often yield results quite different from their intended goals. Though Putin is attempting to consolidate power and centralize control, his actions could have the opposite effect, and his desire to have a seat at the table of world policy-makers could also force him to make concessions whose effects will ripple through Russian society.

Looking at Putin's recent electoral reforms, his attempts to strengthen the vertical of power by limiting democratic choices in the Duma and at the regional level, the perceived result is that this will have a negative effect on democracy in Russia. This is certainly a possible outcome. In the case of the Duma though, the switch to the selection of deputies solely from proportional election results could spur Russian political parties to better organize and prompt citizens to more closely identify with a particular party. In general terms, organization of political parties in Russia since 1991 has been weak, especially in terms of a viable opposition to the Kremlin's power base (United Russia). In part this has been because voters have been able to elect independent candidates to the Duma. Since parliamentary systems like the Duma are organized along party lines, lone independent constituencies often find themselves frozen out of the decision and policy-making processes. Ambassador Matlock noted this condition during the November 2004 discussion *Reagan and Gorbachev: Presidential Politics, the Cold War, and Lessons for Today*, recounting a conversation with a Russian politician who said that that they had been

elected twice to the Duma, but "found [that they] couldn't do anything for [their] constituents because [they weren't] really part of a party that had enough seats in the parliament."[25]

By eliminating the ability to directly elect constituencies, all electoral efforts will have to be focused on the political parties. Rather than supporting random popular, but independent candidates, voters could turn their attention towards the existing parties. In doing so, they could find their own identification with a given political party strengthened. In turn, the parties could tap into a new, larger base of support, and may increase their own representation within the Duma. Those with political aspirations will also need to align themselves with a party if they hope to win a seat in the Duma.

More effective political parties are a first step. With more effective, better-organized parties, the chances are better for a coherent opposition to United Russia in the Duma. A more-effective opposition party or bloc could then make the Duma more than a rubber stamp for Kremlin policies. At the same time this could impress the importance of political parties onto the political lives of Russian voters.

It is a chain of events which Putin's electoral reform could put into place. His change in the process of selecting regional governors – selection rather than local election – may be damaging to him in the long run. Under the current system there is a buffer between the Kremlin and the regions. If the governor in a given region is corrupt or ineffective, the Kremlin can argue that it is the local region's fault for making a poor choice in their election. By moving to a system where each governor is handpicked by the central government, this insulating gap is stripped away. Now, should a governor be corrupt or otherwise ineffective, the people's ire will, logically, fall on the Kremlin and on Putin for putting such a governor in power in the first place. This would represent a drastic change for Putin, who for the most part during his presidency has managed to insulate himself from the major mishaps of the past few years (the sinking of the Kursk in 2000, the siege at Beslan in 2004, etc.). The blame has always fallen on subordinates. To put in a policy where choices come directly from the top, is to open himself up to criticism. With the selection of the regional governors, Putin is opening himself up for a level of scrutiny which he so far has not faced during his presidency. It is a move which could erode his popularity among the people should his choices turn out to be the wrong ones.

Putin's actions in the Yukos case are another area where his power could be fleeting. The arrest of Khodorkovsky sent a powerful message to the Russian business community. It also spurred concern among foreign investors. As the Russian economy grows, foreign investment will play an important role. Investors, though, are likely to shy away from markets which they view as unstable. Selective enforcement of the law (in the Yukos case the tax laws) is a form of instability. If the business community does not know what the operating environment in the economy will be from day-to-day, the attractiveness of the market is diminished. Given that the Russian manufacturing and infrastructure portions of the economy are still recovering from Soviet-era neglect, foreign investment is vital to continued growth.

The Yukos affair now can be looked upon as a culmination of the test of wills between the new class of oligarchs and the traditional authority of the central government. For Boris Berezovsky and Vladimir Gusinsky struggles with Putin eventually sent both into exile. Against Khodorkovsky, the

Kremlin felt the need to go even further. Should it happen again though, should the Kremlin target another in the oligarch class, foreign investors will take note and could reconsider their position within the emerging Russian markets. It is difficult to justify large, long-term investments when the laws of a given country seem to be enforced at the whim of the ruler.

In that respect, Putin can be thought of as possessing a kind of economic nuclear bomb. As seen with Khodorkovsky and Yukos, its use is indeed devastating. But in practice it is a weapon that cannot be used, lest the one that uses it (Putin and in a greater sense Russia), be destroyed by it. In that regard, while Yukos shows an impressive flexing of muscle by Putin, it is not a tactic which can be continually relied upon, or the economy - and by extension his own hold on power – will suffer from its effects. Therefore in the long run, Yukos does not show the strength of Kremlin power, but rather its limits.

Putin is likely to see other outside limits put on his exercise of authoritarian/centralized control. A centerpiece of his foreign policy stance has been his desire to see Russia included in the world community – from hosting the G8 summit, and membership in the World Trade Organization, to working agreements with bodies like the European Union and NATO. All of these organizations have, to varying degrees, become advocates of both democracy and commitment to free markets. They have used membership and partnership offers as tools to compel aspirants to adopt reforms and show commitment to these stated ideals. Putin's recent moves towards verticalization and centralization run counter to these goals. He is attempting to have rhetoric and reality diverge; talking of democracy abroad, while curtailing it at home. There is sure to be some grudging allowance for some of Putin's "reforms" though it is hard to see a return to a Soviet-era vertical of power as being acceptable to these international bodies. Since Putin both needs to continue the flow of foreign investment for the health of the Russian economy, and relies on his image as a strong leader on the world stage to bolster his popularity at home, he cannot alienate these organizations. He will, therefore, have to accept their dictates in regards to his domestic policies, to be sure with much negotiation and some measure of complaint on the part of the Kremlin. Staying engaged with the world community will set a limit on his ability to centralize control at home.

It is tempting to view recent developments as signs of Russia being once again trapped in a cycle of flirtation with reform, followed by a return to authoritarian ways: the revolution of 1905 which established the Duma and Czar Nicholas II's subsequent assertion of royal power; the "thaw" during Khrushchev's premiership, followed by the stagnation of the Brezhnev years; etc. It is still possible that this could be the ultimate outcome, but there are a few reasons for optimism, that the unintended consequences of policy and outside factors may prevent the pendulum from swinging back to the other extreme. The forces of democracy, free-market economy and world community will likely still have a role in shaping the new Russian identity. Italy serves as an example of how influences of culture affect the development of the government. Government in the north, where culture was organized around civic groups and foundations, operates much more effectively than in the south, where such institutions are not part of the culture.[26] So then in Russia, the civic culture can be expected to continue to

change due to exposure to "western" institutional development. As Russian institutions change due to this exposure, the civic culture of the future Russia will adapt as it organizes around them.

Final Thoughts

To conclude a discussion about the new post-transition Russian identity, it is helpful to return to the concepts introduced earlier of the pendulum and Putin. A brief survey of Russian history shows cycles of dramatic reform undertaken with great fervor until the process becomes difficult, until the changes asked of the society become too great; then there is a collapse in the reformist ideals and a desire to return to the previous status quo. It is a mentality which values stability in the present over the possibility of a better future. The communal nature so present in Russian society throughout its history (the serf system which endured under the Czars until 1861, the state-centric organization under the years of communist rule) gave them a tremendous ability to endure hard times. Perhaps they have learned to endure too well; difficult times in Russia do not provide the catalyst for change that they do in western societies. Rather pressure slowly builds, like in a steam kettle, until there is an explosion, a revolution; another recurring theme in Russian history.

The cultural identity to this point has seemed locked, unable to break out of this cycle of creation and destruction. So far the post-Communist period has showed some disturbing signs of this cycle continuing. There was great enthusiasm for democracy and free markets, then came the economic crises of the late 1990's. Today rather than enthusiasm, there is more acceptance of conditions and of policies like those being put forward by Vladimir Putin.

While in a broad discussion of the cultural identity of a people it may seem counterintuitive to focus on the actions of one man, Putin is playing a historically important role in the current cycle of Russian history, and is the catalyst for the development of the idea of what Russia means today. For his part, Putin seems to want to recreate the Soviet world which created him. He is distrustful of the free press and of the independent power of the ballot box, though he will use both to further his own aims. His answer to the problems faced by the nation seem to be to centralize control in the Kremlin and to attempt to silence or discredit those who disagree. So, as perviously the Communist leader wound up recreating the role of the Czar, so Putin would seem to want to recast the Russian presidency in the form of the general secretariat. This mimicry returns to the cyclical idea expressed throughout this report. The new regime inevitably knows no other model of rule to follow and thus wants to revert to the old model. The people, meanwhile, crave stability over the uncertainty that comes with reform, and so gravitate towards the idea of the "strong leader" who will take care of them be it Czar, GenSec, or today, Putin.

Putin therefore is attempting to consolidate power not because – to use a term from the current political discourse -- he is at heart "evil" nor out of a sense of megalomania (aside from the grand self-view common to all world leaders), but rather because he simply does not know any other way to rule his country effectively. This was the style of governance he was raised under and served under (it is important to remember Putin's earlier incarnation as a KGB operative); therefore – in cyclical thinking – it must be the correct way to rule, the fact that the Communist system fell notwithstanding.

There, symbolically, is the problem for Russia in forging a new cultural identity. That it in fact won't create a new identity but merely will revert to the old one which endured the Czars, endured the Communist and now will endure the pro-west reformists. The danger is of course that enduring, even by the Russians can only be accomplished for so long before a revolutionary change becomes inevitable, and the cycle begins again.

It is too early for such a bleak view. To return to the thoughts of Ambassador Matlock expressed earlier, the new cultural identity will likely take two generations – roughly 60 years – to emerge. Those raised under the old system will have to leave the stage before it can be seen if western style reforms have truly worked their way into the thinking of the younger generations. Exposure to the "outside world" is also at levels unprecedented in history and certainly from the times of previous revolutionary change in Russia. Moscow is less than a 10-hour flight from JFK, western television stations and internet sites are as close by as a satellite dish or a computer. How the rest of the world lives flows into Russia and affects the perceptions, particularly among the younger generations.

Russians experience with consumerism and democracy has not been long, but the idea of individuality implicit within them has already begun to shape the cultural identity. There is a growing nostalgia for the triumphs of the Soviet era, especially after the 60th year anniversary celebrations of the victory in the Great Patriotic War (the Soviet-era name for World War II), when Stalin was feted as the great leader who saved his people. But it is inconceivable to imagine a cheerful return to the gulag now that Moscow is home not only to the Kremlin and Lubyanka, but Gucci and Prada as well. We can afford to miss the safety and stability of the old times because we are free from the fear which was the price of that order. Stalin the savior could not exist without the Gulag, and the terror it inspired. This is what is overlooked in the nostalgic longings for the Soviet era, and why a return today is impossible. We are free then to flirt with the past precisely because we do not have to have it.

The pendulum then cannot fully swing back. Putinism is not Stalinism, nor can it ever be, despite the darkest predictions of his most vocal critics; too many elements of the liberal state are already in place within society. The Russian identity therefore must have evolved to some degree. What is conceivable as a final result of this development then is a synthesis of western-style capitalist/democratic-infused individuality with the long-established Russian communal nature. A society where individual advancement is encouraged, but there remains a sense of duty, of loyalty to a larger society. A government is likely to resemble those found in the "social democracies" of western Europe (Germany, Scandinavia, etc.). Such a society will require a few positive steps; continued internal stability, continued economic development, addressing of ongoing problems like health care, corruption, the Chechen war, etc.

The test of Russia's near future will come from Putin himself at the end of his presidential term in 2007. The challenge will be if he attempts to hold on to power after his term expires, and what the reaction is from the general public. It is not a situation to be considered lightly and has the potential for disastrous effects on Russia. More than any event since the end of Communist rule in 1991, his decisions will shape the future of the Russian identity; whether it continues to develop as suggested or begins yet another cycle of revolution – what kind of identity would emerge from that is impossible to predict.

Appendix I

100 Lessons of the Russian Transition

A. New Lessons from Phase II of the Project

1. Russian history tends to move like a pendulum, swinging from periods of reform to periods of traditionalism; or from remission to oppression.
2. Just as a pendulum never returns to the same point, history can never repeat itself in exactly the same fashion.
3. Putin is using symbols from the past to confer legitimacy on his presidency.
4. Nostalgia for the past is an impediment to Russia's future development.
5. Distance from the terrors of the Stalin-era allow nostalgia for the perceived "grandeur" of his times.
6. The goal of socialism was to erase individual humanity for the good of the state. This makes the creation of an individual identity, which is indispensible in capitalism, an even more complicated task.
7. The individualism implicit within democracy and free-market economics has already, if very slowly, begun to change the Russian identity.
8. The emergence of the "new Russian identity" will likely take two generations, or more, to complete.
9. Part of Putin's appeal is that he is seen as a Russian "everyman," but also a successor of Stalin in his desire to rebuild "Great Russia."
10. Recent electoral reforms giving the Kremlin power to nominate local governors will move power from Russia's 89 regions to Moscow.
11. Putin's reforms designed to centralize power could have the opposite effect of strengthening the opposition and the idea of democracy within the people.
12. The free press is currently under threat in Russia.
13. The electoral reforms may have the effect of strengthening political parties in Russia.
14. The prosecution of Yukos chief Mikhail Khordokhofsky shows how the law can be used for political purposes.
15. Actions like the Yukos prosecution undermines the rule of law in Russia.
16. Average Russians still lack faith in the market economy.
17. Democracy is still associated with the chaotic times of the late 1990's.
18. The communal mindset is still alive in many Russians.
19. Russia has never dealt with the negative aspects of the Soviet legacy (gulags, deportations, etc.).
20. The version of Soviet history offered today is an incomplete and romanticized one.
21. At heart, Putin is a product of the Soviet system.
22. Putin's desire to centralize power is motivated by a desire to recreate a Soviet-style system, which he sees as the legitimate way to govern.
23. Putinism is not the same Stalinism or the same as Sovietism.
24. Russia is still trying to assert its influence over the area of the former Soviet Union.
25. Russian foreign policy is dominated by the idea that it is still the Soviet superpower.

B. Lessons Still Valid from Phase I of the Project

1. Culture matters, but so do a lot of other things; one should avoid cultural stereotyping in assessing a country's ability for democratic and economic development.
2. "Russianness" is not a genetic code and should be avoided when constructively discussing development and modernization processes in Russia.
3. Scholars should avoid over-generalizing Russia. It is critical to specify which area/sector is being examined in certain observations and analyses.
4. Western advisers and organizations should consider the cultural and historic traditions of a country before imposing models of behavior and reform.
5. In order for liberalism and capitalism to thrive in a country, culture has to work for, not against, institutions that are authentic for a specific culture, although not necessarily "Western."
6. Economic laws need to be supported by society's own business ethics and attitudes.
7. The moral values that control people in the west are non-existent in Russia; communal ethics have historically guided Russian behavior and relationships.
8. Russia's "philosophical" respect for non-rationality and sacrifice for a higher *Idea* hinders reforms, especially in the economic sphere: the value of human life must be taken more seriously in Russian society.
9. It may take two or three generations before Western values are completely assimilated into Russian society.
10. Economic changes force *people* to change their modes of behavior.
11. No modern market system can flourish outside a functioning legal system.
12. Capitalism should be understood as a system of trust within a framework of legality and modality.
13. Liberal economics does not necessary bring liberalism.
14. Under capitalism people are capable of taking responsibility for— and pleasure in pursuing— the success in their lives, and Russia is no exception.
15. A weak state cannot protect the rights of and ensure wages to its employees.
16. The liberal order, as it pushes for property rights, is ironically abusing the Russian state and its people.
17. Post-communist liberal supporters are essentially stealing from the public and state without legal mandates and controls. While no direct *individual* rights were being abused, there was no legal precedence monitoring privatization.
18. Russia's current infrastructure was not constructed to maintain a market economy. Moreover, these deep-rooted structures cannot be changed overnight.
19. The trend of "take what you can" from the state began before 1991 by the unintended influence of *perestroika*, when Soviet state institutions became more liberal and less stifling.
20. As heavy as the Soviet legacy was, it should not excuse the behavior of the people who ripped off the nation in the 1990s.

21. Despite Russia's turbulent past and the sudden collapse of the Soviet Union, Russians are still very proud of their national character, culture and identity.
22. Russia is unfairly held up to the standards of highly developed Western countries that most countries could not readily meet. But when compared to the so-called "success states" of Eastern Europe, the nation is relatively successful.
23. The processes going on in post-Communist Russia are actually quite normal when compared to European and Russian history.
24. Russians should avoid using manufactured history and rhetoric to defend their current problems.
25. Russian pre-revolutionary history and Soviet history may contain answers and remedies for the nation's transition; it should not be ignored or judged "off limits."
26. It is important to acknowledge that a professional, middle class existed in Russian before the 1930s (which was then victimized by Stalin's purges), and then reappeared in the 1960s during the Khrushchev Thaw. Therefore, the process of the creation of the middle class in the 1990s had historical precedence.
27. It is important not to link nationalism with socialism - Russia has a rich history of nationalists who supported capitalism. Similarity, today Russians are becoming increasingly concerned with their nation's economic progress; they now place a high value on nationally produced products.
28. Russia had a rich pre-revolutionary history of a working economy, peasant entrepreneurship, and a respected press.
29. The Soviet economy produced negative value both economically and politically.
30. The Soviet Union was the world's largest ever military and police state.
31. Soviet factories were viewed as "communities" rather than as enterprises geared to make a profit.
32. The privatization of Soviet factories in the 1990s was facilitated by factory managers rather than by economic ministries or experts from the West.
34. Though frequently disregarded by scholars, it is important to note that beneath the Soviet state existed a society that operated on a "normal" human level.
35. If, in fact, Russian society was relatively normal, scholars should concentrate on *how* the oppressive form of Soviet governance came into being rather than rely on ideological justifications.
36. The Cold War was not a fiction, but the Soviet Union was as much a state as a state of mind.
37. The ideas that were forming since 1956 in Hungary and 1968 in Czechoslovakia came to power in the 1980s and thus made it possible for the system to dismantle peacefully.
38. No other empire of this magnitude had collapsed this peacefully.
39. The Soviet Union did not self-liquidate under the pressure of military competition. It collapsed under Gorbachev's ideas, his political commitments, and his sense of social justice.
40. The collapse of the Soviet Union did not stop in 1991; it was only just beginning.
41. During reforms, Russia believed that a new mentality would simply emerge based on universal human values. However, by sharing common human values, people also desire to share the same standards of living.
42. Russia's younger generation is much more hopeful and flexible about the future than the older generation.

43. Russian youth want to improve their own lives. They tend not to worry about the future of the state, or the world. They worry, primarily, about their own well being within their state or the world.
44. The number of Russian's abroad has been steadily decreasing since 2000 and more are returning to their native land.
45. Before 1998, Russia's problems often did not get resolved — they simply dissolved. Now the State is taking more responsibility.
46. Russia— once a unified empire— is now fragmented in its laws, information, reform, economics, and other facets of political life.
47. Russia's irresponsible and unsystematic government is the result of the Soviet Union not putting into place a real functioning bureaucracy.
48. President Vladimir Putin's promise of the rule of law is meaningless in Russia without constituencies who support this initiative.
49. Political will alone is unable to maintain reforms and a market economy. These initiatives require political constituency and support from below.
50. The Russian government should concentrate on bringing society closer together: culturally, economically, and politically.
51. Disdain for the central government and decreasing authority in local government are causing people to be indifferent toward Russian politics and reforms.
52. People seek protection in criminal bosses rather than government operatives; stable, organized local authority and governance is still rare in Russia.
53. In order to change the mentality of Russian society a critical mass is needed.
54. A "new Russia" will not emerge until changes take place in the ordinary citizen (mainly those living in villages and small towns).
55. Transformation of a nation's public consciousness often occurs at a much slower pace than its economic or political transformations.
56. While Russian society had shed its communist identity, a new one has not yet developed in its place.
57. Russia has the appearance of democracy but it doesn't have the institutions to make it work properly and effectively.
58. Russia accepted democracy but at the same time inherited an anti-liberal, hyper-executive state.
59. The importance of democratization in Russia was inflated beyond its actual worth; having political parties, contented elections, and a parliament do not necessarily make for a cohesive state.
60. The emphasis on democratization throughout the 1990s led to disillusionment for the Russian people, since freedoms often bordered on anarchy.
61. While most people simply blamed the oligarchs for the problems of democratic reforms, the oligarchs were actually a symptom, not a cause, of the complex problems, inherited along with the mentality of an autocratic empire.
62. President Putin's "recapturing" of the state from oligarchs and corrupt actors enables him to assert his own national policies in place of regional and elite interests.
63. The West was engaged in a somewhat deceptive strategy to promote universal human values throughout the 1970s-1990s: it promised that if nations embraced common human values they would eventually "catch up" with economically advanced countries.

64. As the West embraced new technology and innovation in their economies, developing countries inherited obsolete ways of production and the gap between rich and poor nations widened.
65. While universal values are important, and are promoted vigorously on the international stage, in practice they frequently take a backseat to more pressing economic concerns.
66. The West tends to dictate universal values to developing countries like Russia, while itself not always playing by its own rules.
67. The West is applying double standards to Russia in its criticism of the war in Chechnya. This statement is not an endorsement of the war in Chechnya, but rather an indication of the West's failure to recognize Chechen terrorists as a legitimate threat to Russia's security.
68. As the United States fails to pay attention to Russia's legitimate economic and political interests in Europe, it often unfairly perceives Russia's involvement there as confrontational and scheming.
69. Russia's relations with the U.S. have not been as smooth as those with Europe and other countries. The U.S. stubbornly fails to recognize that Russia has its own interests and will not unnecessarily cut ties with other countries that are paramount to Russia's goals.
70. It is too costly both politically and economically for Putin to transform the military because defense plants are located in strategic regions.
71. The U.S. needs to stop using Cold War stereotypes in its foreign policy and recognize Russia as a different country with its own interests, domestic problems, and means for achieving these goals.
72. The U.S. should respect Russia as a civilized country and not rigidly judge its behavior from an ideological, Cold War perspective.
73. Future U.S.-Russian cooperation should be implemented because it makes sense. Cooperation should not be used as "pity" recognition or superficial acceptance of Russia from the West as has been the practice during the years of transition. .
74. Russia's domestic political and economic situation now has greater importance on effecting foreign policy.

AND FINALLY:

75. A changing Russia still remains the same Russia.

Endnotes

1. Discussion summary for the Nov. 2004 panel is available at: http://www.worldpolicy.org/projects/russia/gorbachev_transcript.htm

2. The final report for Phase 1 of the project, "Lessons of Transition: The Cultural Contradictions and the Future of Russian Liberalization," can be downloaded at: http://www.worldpolicy.org/projects/russia/transition.pdf

3. Among the most recent polls available at the writing of this report, President Vladimir Putin received a 70% approval rating in Sept. 2005, up from a July 2005 rating of 67% (RIA Novosti 9/1/05); while 73% of Russians polled said they trusted Putin (ITAR-TASS, 9/22/05).

4. A transcript for the Dec. 2004 discussion is available at: http://www.worldpolicy.org/projects/russia/dec1transcript.html

5. By comparison, Pravda.ru reported the results of a 2005 poll which showed only 10% of Russians identifying democracy as "government by the people."
http://english.pravda.ru/printed.html?news_id=15241

6. Transcript for the April 2004 panel is available at:
http://www.worldpolicy.org/projects/russia/transcript.html

7. Please see the Dec. 2004 transcript:
http://www.worldpolicy.org/projects/russia/dec1transcript.html

8. These murders were discussed by several participants in the *Putin's Russia* panel. Please see the March 2005 transcript: http://www.worldpolicy.org/projects/russia/mar10transcript.html

9. Putin poll numbers cited in footnote #3.

10. Serfdom was ended in 1861 by decree of Czar Alexander II. The majority of peasants were bound to some type of service, the two main types being *obrok*-paying (those who paid a fee to landowners) and *barshchina*-rendering (those who were required to perform labor) serfdom.

11. Please see the Dec. 2004 transcript:
http://www.worldpolicy.org/projects/russia/dec1transcript.html

12. Guta Bank was later purchased by Vneshtorgbank for a mere $36,000. For more information, see "Russia: The Bank That Roars", Businessweek Online.
http://www.businessweek.com/magazine/content/05_13/b3926157_mz035.htm

13. “Russia’s Culture of Contempt”, by Nina Khrushcheva. Available at http://www.project-syndicate.org

14. IMF projection reported by RIA Novosti, 9/21/05.

15. Please see the April 2004 transcript: http://www.worldpolicy.org/projects/russia/transcript.html

16. Ibid.

17. The Communist Party claims membership of over 190,000 in its most recent posted figures. By comparison, United Russia claims 945,000 members (Moscow Times, 9/30/05).

18. Please see the April 2004 transcript: http://www.worldpolicy.org/projects/russia/transcript.html

19. Soviet war losses have been estimated between 18 and 40 million soldiers and civilians. Though an accurate figure will be impossible to determine, the estimate of 27 million was the one most often cited in recent press reports about the 60th anniversary celebrations of Victory Day (end of the war in Europe). Sources include: BBC News, “Leaders Mourn Soviet Wartime Dead” 5/9/05; and The Economist, “Victory Day Remembered” 5/7/05.

20. Please see the April 2004 transcript: http://www.worldpolicy.org/projects/russia/transcript.html

21. Celestine Bohen, correspondent for the *New York Times*, from “Lessons of Transition: The Cultural Contradictions and the Future of Russian Liberalization,” page 10, available at: http://www.worldpolicy.org/projects/russia/transition.pdf

22. A transcript for the Feb. 2004 panel is available at: http://www.worldpolicy.org/projects/russia/cottrell.html

23. “The Two Faces of Vladimir Putin”, by Nina Khrushcheva. Available at http://www.project-syndicate.org

24. Putin poll numbers cited in footnote #3.

25. Please see the Nov. 2004 transcript: http://www.worldpolicy.org/projects/russia/ gorbachev_transcript.htm

26. For a further discussion about how culture affects governance, please see *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*, by Robert Putnam (Princeton NJ, Princeton University Press, 1993).