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**RUSSIA AFTER YELTSIN:
IMPLICATIONS FOR U.S. NATIONAL SECURITY**

BY

**LIEUTENANT COLONEL CHARLES B. LEE JR.
United States Army**

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by

LTC Charles B. Lee Jr.

DR. R. Craig Nation
Project Advisor

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U.S. Army War College
Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania 17013

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ABSTRACT

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With the recent health problems of Russia's President Yeltsin it becomes prudent to ask who would assume control of Russia if Yeltsin were suddenly to die, or become incapacitated for a lengthy period of time. This paper examines the key powerbrokers which are likely to play a significant role in a post-Yeltsin power struggle, and discusses the implications for U.S. national security interests in the region should they assume power. It also outlines the various critical internal and external factors-Russian nationalism/authoritarianism, the "power troika", and NATO expansion-which are likely to influence the succession outcome. The U.S. can exert some leverage on the succession outcome by acting decisively now in employing a variety of political, military, and economic means in an effort to effect those internal/external factors which are likely to impact the succession outcome. There is a "window of opportunity"

which the U.S. must fully exploit now if its expects to have a hand in shaping the political and economic future of Russia in the long term.

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It appeared that recent elections in Russia and the U.S. had provided a badly needed impetus to the continuing struggle for democracy and a market-oriented economy in Russia. President Yeltsin won a relatively hard fought election over his major challenger, Communist Party leader Genadii Zyuganov in July, while President Clinton easily succeeded in defeating Senator Dole last November. A summit between the two reelected leaders was scheduled for March, and the stage appeared set for four more years of relative stability, cooperation, and progress. However, President Yeltsin's heart surgery in November, and lengthy recuperation period, as well as his most recent bout with pneumonia, have once again cast serious doubts on his ability to lead Russia into the 21st Century. Therefore, a rather timely and important question becomes, "Who would assume control of Russia if President Yeltsin were to suddenly die, or become incapacitated for a lengthy period of time?" The purpose of this paper is to examine the key powerbrokers which are likely to play a significant role in a post-Yeltsin power struggle, and to discuss the implications for U.S. National Security interests should they assume power. There are currently a number of critical internal and external factors which will have a major impact on the succession outcome, and which the U.S. may be able to influence. The intent is first to: set the stage by providing a brief overview of the current political and economic dynamics in Russia today; second, briefly to discuss Yeltsin's previous health problems, and the succession process as outlined in the Russian Constitution; third, to provide a general overview of the key powerbrokers in Russia today as well as their respective agendas, and to assess the possible impact of each on U.S. national security interests should they gain control of Russia; and lastly, to outline the critical internal and external factors which may significantly impact on the succession struggle, and what the U.S. might do to influence these factors in a post-Yeltsin

power struggle. However, before assessing the post-Yeltsin power struggle it is imperative to first lay the foundation of our discussion.

BACKGROUND

Russia has been undergoing a transformation since Party General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev introduced the political, social, and economic concepts of “perestroika” and “glasnost” in the late 1980’s. Exactly where Russia’s transformation will eventually lead is still being hotly debated both in the West and in Russia herself. In his recently published article, “The Risk of Losing Russia”, Aleksei Pushkov compares Russia to a “runaway train moving with growing speed in an unpredictable direction”.¹ In an effort to better understand where Russia might be going let’s briefly examine where she has been, and what the current political and economic realities in Russia are today.

POLITICAL SITUATION

If one examines the current political situation in Russia by looking only on the surface one may conclude there exists all the elements of a “budding democracy.” A Russian parliament has been established with a lower house, or State Duma, and an upper house, or Federation Council, both of which exercise some power. A new Constitution was adopted in 1993 which closely mirrors the French Constitution. There is a multi-party political system whose major parties range from the supreme ultra-nationalist “Liberal Democratic Party of Russia” (LPDR), and the “Communist Party of the Russian Federation” on the left, to the more liberal democratic parties such as “Yabloko”, and “Russia’s Choice” on the right. In the Presidential and Parliamentary elections held within the last two years Russian voters had a wide variety of parties and

candidates to choose from, and the elections were generally characterized as free. Indeed, there is even "freedom of the press", and both President Yeltsin's supporters and the opposition use the press to further their own causes.

However, upon closer examination one finds that the constitution, which was just barely ratified, places significant and potentially dangerous power in the hands of the President.² Indeed, President Yeltsin often pays what can best be described as lip service to the Duma. The reality is that Yeltsin frequently rules by decree, has the right to dissolve the Parliament, can order a referendum on any issue, and make changes to the Constitution. In addition, the recent Presidential and Parliamentary elections offer some valuable insights. In the December 1995 parliamentary elections the Communist Party did very well garnering some 22% of the vote and 157 total seats. In the July Presidential election Yeltsin defeated Zyuganov with some 53% of the votes to his challenger's 40%.³ Many analysts assume that with Yeltsin's victory the threat of a communist resurgence has all but ended. It is important to note, however, that Yeltsin's victory was relatively narrow, and most analysts agree that there was almost a convergence of positions between the Communists and Yeltsin on many of the major issues such as NATO expansion, and both factions played on Russian nationalism in an effort to win supporters. Yeltsin's ability to control a major portion of the television media was also a significant factor in his reelection victory.

It is important to remember that "democracy" cannot be established overnight, particularly in a country such as Russia that has no tradition of democratic institutions. Currently, however, the types of grass roots democratic institutions which are prevalent

in the West have not yet been established in Russia, nor do they appear to be taking root.⁴ In fact, some analysts insist that Yeltsin and other Russian politicians indulge in “formalistic, ritual-like use of democratic phrases and organizational facades to accommodate Western expectations.”⁵ Still others argue that Yeltsin never really wanted to achieve power in order to build a democracy, “but merely wished to destroy the Soviet system to achieve power” and control Russia.⁶ Regardless of the rationale the bottom line is that Russia is not currently a democratic country, nor does it appear to be moving towards democracy.

ECONOMIC SITUATION

Let's turn now to the current economic situation in Russia. The Russian economy has taken on many of the trappings of a western-oriented market economy. Over the last six years Russia has made enormous strides toward the privatization of industries, land, and resources which were once centrally controlled by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). It is estimated that close to 80% of the Russian economy is currently in private hands. The economy has shown signs of improvement, particularly over the last year as inflation has been brought under control, confidence in the ruble has increased, and the overall rate of production decline has slowed. In addition, the budget deficit is slightly under 4% of GDP, while it is estimated that some 70% of GDP is generated through private enterprises.⁷ Of significance is the fact that while GDP has continued to decline, it only fell by 6% in 1996, and some analysts predict 1997 may see Russia's first actual increase in GDP.⁸

Upon closer examination of Russia's economy one sees a very different picture. A "nomenklatura privatization" has, in essence, emerged. For example, the relatively rapid privatization resulted in the majority of the former Soviet industries ending up in the hands of former Communists, many with strong political ties to President Yeltsin. Many of these industries are granted special privileges by the state authorities, and corruption appears to be rampant at the highest levels of government. For example, President Yeltsin and Prime Minister Chernomyrdin have granted tax relief and other financial concessions to a myriad of friends and politicians who run these once state-owned industries. Prime Minister Chernomyrdin is head of GAZPROM, the largest natural gas monopoly in Russia which counts tax relief among its numerous other perks. Economic democratization is therefore not currently a reality in Russia because the state controls a large share of the economy and "powerful cartels control the rest".⁹ The Mafia is another powerful facet in the Russian economy which will certainly inhibit its ability to move toward a truly democratic market-oriented economy.

The various Mafia groups, which have expanded both in numbers and in power since the demise of the Soviet regime, are having a major impact on the Russian political and economic arenas. The Mafia has become better organized, more sophisticated, and more "multi-functional" over the last several years. They have divided the key Russian cities into their own "zones of influence", and have significantly increased their share of commercial import-export operations. Analysts estimate the Mafia controls over 50% of all entities engaged in economic activity.¹⁰ The Mafia, along with Yeltsin's ruling party and the business elite, form the new "troika" of power which rule Russia.

Therefore, while the Russian economy shows signs of improvement as well as movement towards a free market economy the means of production remain concentrated in the hands of a relatively few “new Russian elites”, politicians, and various criminal elements. Despite economic improvements the common Russian has been disenfranchised by Yeltsin’s current economic program. Rising unemployment, nonpayment of salaries, severe housing shortages, and the growing economic gap between the “new Russian rich” and the vast majority of Russians are key indicators of the current health of the Russian economy. A recent appeal signed by the noted historian Yuri Afanasyev perhaps best sums up the situation; “The Yeltsin-Chernomyrdin economic policy has brought an unbelievable wealth to a tiny group of old Communist bureaucrats and “new Russians”, but has reduced the overwhelming part of industry to paralysis and a majority of the population to poverty.”¹¹

Now that we have taken a brief look at the current political and economic realities in Russia let’s examine President Yeltsin’s health, and how that impacts Russia’s future.

DEFINING THE PROBLEM

Throughout Yeltsin’s first term in office there were a number of highly publicized and embarrassing incidents which experts attributed to poor health, alcoholism, or both. In October 1995 Yeltsin was hospitalized twice in less than four months due to an attack of ischaemia, a chronic medical condition that limits the flow of blood to the heart.¹² Yeltsin won reelection in July 1996, and was inaugurated for his second term in August. To correct his heart problem Yeltsin underwent quintuple coronary bypass surgery in November 1996, and spent the majority of the next five weeks recuperating from the

surgery. However, on 8 January, 1997 Yeltsin was diagnosed with “moderately grave” pneumonia in both lungs, and was taken to the Central Clinical Hospital in Moscow where he spent much of January recovering from the illness. Yeltsin’s repeated health problems have raised grave concern about his ability to govern Russia. Gregory Yavlinsky, leader of the centrist “Yabloko” bloc in parliament, recently stated, “Yeltsin symbolizes Russia’s drift- nothing changes in the rule of Russia, no matter whether Yeltsin is in the Kremlin or in the Central Clinical Hospital”,¹³ and there have been numerous calls by various politicians that Yeltsin be relieved of his duties. In the past several years, however, Yeltsin has been like a “cat with nine lives” bouncing back often from an assortment of health problems to prove his detractors wrong. However, there are very few political leaders who have stayed in the job long after major heart surgery, and the list is even shorter of those who have beaten both heart surgery and pneumonia. What happens if Yeltsin dies or is relieved of his duties?

In accordance with the 1993 Russian Constitution the succession process calls for the Prime Minister to assume the reigns of power in the event President Yeltsin dies, or is incapacitated and unable to continue in office. The Constitution explicitly states that presidential powers will be terminated if the President suffers sustained invalidity due to poor health, or is impeached.¹⁴ However, according to most experts the provisions in the constitution for terminating the President’s term “are very vaguely written, need clarification, and do not specify who decides if the President is incapacitated”.¹⁵ Under the current rules Prime Minister Chernomyrdin becomes the interim President for a 90 day period during which time presidential elections must be held. This is the process as

spelled out in the Constitution, but who are the major players that would vie for leadership in a post-Yeltsin power struggle in Russia? What are the key factions that would wield power-be it political, economic, or military-in the succession process? Lastly, what are the implications for U.S. national security interests in the region should one of these key individuals or factions assume control of Russia? Let's first look at the major political parties and key personalities in Russian politics today.

THE POWERBROKERS -POLITICAL PARTIES/LEADERS

As previously mentioned a plethora of parties have sprung up in Russia since 1991 representing the various ideologies and interests prevalent in today's Russia. This despite public opinion polls which show that some 75% of all Russians do not identify with any political party.¹⁶ Therefore, the intent is only to focus on the most prominent Parties and personalities which may succeed President Yeltsin. Let's start by reviewing the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (KPRF).

THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION

The KPRF is headed by Genadii Zyuganov who, as mentioned previously, was the major challenger to Yeltsin in the 1996 Presidential elections. As the 1995 Parliamentary elections indicate the KPRF maintain a fairly strong, if not consistent, following, particularly among the older, more conservative Russians who have suffered most from Yeltsin's economic policies. The Communists promote Russian nationalism, and advocate a strong Russian state, believing that the security and well-being of the Russian people is dependent on strong state power.¹⁷ The Communist agenda calls for the renationalization of banks and former state industries, and the expansion of social

services. The Communists' campaign rhetoric includes the Pan-Slavic traditional claim that the West, in the form of the U.S., has caused the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and is determined to keep the country weak and subservient.¹⁸ To counter the West's "diabolical schemes" the KPRF claims Russia must restore herself to "great power status," and assume her rightful place in international affairs by reestablishing her former empire.

While Zyuganov's brand of "New Communism" is more pragmatic than ideological it is still, for the most part, based on the old Tsarist precepts of "Autocracy, Orthodoxy, and Nationality." According to James P. Scanlon in his article entitled "The Russian Idea from Dostoevski to Ziuganov" the principle features of the Communist platform include:

- "ethnic chauvinism"-the "voluntary" re-establishment of the USSR;
- "statism"-a strong Russian state is needed as a "continental counterbalance" to the "expansionist, hegemonic tendencies of the ...mercantile, oceanic, cosmopolitan oligarchy," i.e. the U.S; and
- "imperialism"-the Russian empire is the historically and geopolitically determined form of development of the Russian state".¹⁹

The Communist promise to restore order is a fact which has not been lost on the vast majority of Russian public who have indicated in recent public opinion polls they "preferred order over democracy"²⁰ However, President Yeltsin co-opted many of the nationalistic campaign themes of the KPRF in the last presidential elections, a tactic which many analysts believe successfully discredited the Communists.

What are the implications for U.S. policy of a Communist return to power? Zyuganov's platform is anti-Western and anti-capitalist, and would certainly not be welcomed by the majority of the newly independent Former Soviet Republics. If the KPRF were to assume control of the Russian government it would have a major negative impact on the ability of the U.S. to achieve its security goals in the Russia which are designed to support and consolidate democratic and market reforms. Market reform would not move forward, trade with the West would decrease, there would be a resurgence of the Russian military, and the KPRF would likely seek to use the CIS as a coercive tool to reestablish the empire. It is also doubtful that the Communists would be able to restore internal stability with the powerful alliance which currently exists among the Mafia, the new Russian rich, and the political elite.

THE LIBERAL DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF RUSSIA

Another leading political party is the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR) whose somewhat erratic and ultra-nationalist leader Vladimir Zhirinovskii, has caused considerable concern in Western capitals. Despite its name, the LDPR is neither liberal nor democratic. The LDPR's Zhirinovskii vehemently attacks both Yeltsin and the West for the demise of the Soviet Union and its way of life. This theme has had significant public appeal, and resulted in the LDPR amassing some 22% of the vote by party list in the 1993 Parliamentary elections. However, in the 1995 Parliamentary elections that total fell to only 11%, and Zhirinovskii himself received less than 6% of the popular vote during the 1996 presidential election primaries.²¹ The LDPR closely identifies with the ultra-nationalist/Slavophile camp which proposes the establishment of an "ethnic Russian

or East Slavic state” consisting of Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakstan.²² The LDPR agenda further advocates the reconstruction of the Soviet era empire, and a reduction in the autonomy currently enjoyed by other nationalities in Russia. More significantly, Zhirinovskii proposes the incorporation of former Soviet Republics in a new Russian state, and a subsequent “invasion to the south” to conquer Afghanistan and Iran to maintain stability in the new “Greater Russia.”²³ Despite the LDPR’s drop in the more recent elections its message of nationalism and imperialism are well received among the Russian populace. Recent polls indicate only a little over 10% of the Russian people believe Russia is still a great power, while more than 60% claim they want Russia to regain its great power status.²⁴

Like the KPRF, the LDPR platform directly conflicts with U.S. security interests in the region. If Zhirinovskii were elected President the relatively meager steps which have been taken to build democracy and a market economy would most likely be reversed. The Russian military threat would become a new reality as a large-scale military would be required to accomplish the LDPR’s goals of reestablishing the empire, and conducting the necessary “peacekeeping operations” needed to maintain control. The Former Soviet Republics would obviously feel more threatened if the LDPR came to power, which could lead to greater instability in the region. Is there a more moderate party on the left?

GENERAL LEBED AND THE CONGRESS OF RUSSIAN COMMUNITY

Another left of center political party is the Congress of Russian Community (KRO) whose leader, retired General Aleksandr Lebed, is viewed by many as a serious

front runner for future President. A very charismatic, popular, and forceful leader, Lebed burst on the Moscow political scene following his retirement as commander of the 14th Army in Moldova. Since then Lebed has successfully won a seat in the Duma from the Tula oblast, challenged Yeltsin for the Presidency, and subsequently became Yeltsin's national security advisor until his dismissal in October 1996. Who is Aleksandr Lebed, and exactly what do he and the KRO stand for?

Lebed is considered Russia's most popular soldier, and to many he symbolizes the "new Peter the Great".²⁵ He is a former airborne soldier who fought in Afghanistan, and later commanded the Tula airborne Division from 1988-1992. During this period his unit was involved in a number of "peace enforcement" type missions in places like Baku and Tblisi as the Soviet empire unraveled. Lebed was a principal figure in the 1991 thwarted coup attempt in Moscow. As the 14th Army Commander in the Trans-Dniester region from 1992-1995 his opposition to the war in Chechnya, and call for the protection of Russians in the "near abroad" increased his popularity with the Russian people, but incensed then Defense Minister Pavel Grachev.²⁶

Lebed's previous military experiences under the Soviet regime have significantly impacted his view of where Russia is, and where she needs to go. In Lebed's view nationalism and militarism are closely linked, and he believes Russia can only restore herself to her former great power status by reestablishing the close relationship between the military and the Russian people.²⁷ Lebed views the implementation of a Pinochet type model of political authoritarianism, economic reform, and suppression of democratic

institutions as Russia's best hope in surmounting the present crisis. The focus of Lebed's program would be to:

- restore order in Russia by eliminating the "democratic chaos;
- reconstitute "Greater Russia" as a Slavic state and a major player on the world stage; and
- restore Russia's military might.²⁸

What would a Lebed victory signify for U.S. interests? On a positive note it may bring a relatively strong and predictable authority to power in Moscow. Lebed could possibly make a dent in the escalating crime and corruption which has seriously impacted social and economic life in Russia. However, Lebed's appeal for a "Greater Russia," and emphasis on restoring the military to its former glory could have serious negative implications for U.S. security interests, and possibly even lead to a new cold war. Lebed's agenda would certainly result in increased pressure on the former Soviet Republics to march to Moscow's tune, pressure which may be fervently resisted by these newly independent countries. In response to a question concerning what he would do if Yeltsin passed from the scene, Lebed stated, "Well, I have plans"²⁹ If Lebed assumes power through democratic means will he move the country towards democracy or dictatorship? Would Lebed relinquish power at the end of his term? Would he work closely with the West Europeans and the U.S. to create a viable security architecture in Europe? These are but a few of the myriad questions which Lebed's assumption of power would raise.

OUR HOME IS RUSSIA

Continuing along the political spectrum let's now turn to the center to discuss the party of the ruling political elite. The "Our Home is Russia" (NDR) party is led by Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin, and was established in the summer of 1995 in an effort to unite elements of the left into a centrist-oriented party to bolster Yeltsin's support in the Duma. The NDR advocates continuing the current path of democratization and economic reforms upon which Russia has embarked, however it represents a "relative narrow circle of interconnected government bureaucrats, oil and gas industrialists, and certain Moscow financial interests tied to Chernomyrdin."³⁰ While often called "the party of power, the NDR has been less than the spectacular success that Yeltsin and Chernomyrdin had initially hoped for. Despite being able to control much of the media, as well as having all the advantages of the incumbent party in power, the NDR only won some 10% of the vote during the December 1995 Parliamentary elections, acquiring a total of 55 seats. This was hardly a great showing of support by the Russian people for Yeltsin's reform programs. Interestingly, following the rather poor showing in the parliamentary elections the NDR adopted a more nationalistic, anti-western platform which in some ways coincided with that of the KPRF during the run-up to the Presidential elections.

In the event of a post-Yeltsin succession the NDR's leading candidate would be Prime Minister Chernomyrdin. As a senior Communist Party official Chernomyrdin directed the massive build-up of the Soviet natural gas industry in the 1970's and early 1980's. Yeltsin sought him out in 1992 to replace Egor Gaidar, whose radical economic reforms termed, "shock therapy", caused a significant drop in industrial production, a rise

in inflation, and resulted in millions of Russians losing their savings.³¹ Chernomyrdin slowed many of Gaidar's reforms, and has, through a variety of measures, been able to bring inflation down, provide stability for the ruble, and increase productivity. However, as previously mentioned, Chernomyrdin owns GAZPROM-a large company which has a monopoly on the extraction and sale of gas in Russia. Chernomyrdin has used his position as Prime Minister, as well as privatization for both "political patronage, and to construct an oil and gas financial-industrial empire" effectively linking Moscow bankers with regional oil and gas overseers.³² As a result of Chernomyrdin's position GAZPROM, which is 40% state-owned, has received significant benefits from continuing government subsidies and protectionism.³³ Therefore, Chernomyrdin's political power base rests with the gas, oil and chemical industrial managers who, in turn, are the primary benefactors in the transition to a market economy.³⁴ If Chernomyrdin were to succeed Yeltsin what would it mean for U.S. national security interests in the region?

A Chernomyrdin succession would certainly provide a sense of continuity, and possibly stability, in the policies and programs which have been the mainstay of the Yeltsin regime over the last six years. A Chernomyrdin presidency would also be supported by the current political and financial leaders who derive maximum benefit from maintaining the "status quo". It would also perhaps reassure some of Russia's neighbors that at least things will not change significantly. However, while Chernomyrdin may be acceptable to the "new Russian rich", the former Soviet Republics, and the Mafia, he is not especially popular with the Russian masses. His inept handling of the "Buddyenovsk affair" in which he allowed Chechen fighters to return to Chechnya after holding some

100 Russians hostage caused a major scandal for the Yeltsin government. In addition, he is perceived as rather dull, and lacks oratory skills. General Lebed, when asked about Prime Minister Chernomyrdin, recently remarked, "He's so inarticulate he needs a translator from Russian into Russian."³⁵

Is continuity what the Russian people really want? Will the "continuity" that a Chernomyrdin presidency brings eventually lead to a truly democratic Russia with a market-oriented economy? Chernomyrdin's close association with "big business", which in all likelihood has connections with the Mafia, suggests otherwise. Therefore, in the short term, Chernomyrdin's rise to the Presidency would likely benefit U.S. interests, however, in the long term the "status quo" would be maintained, and a truly democratic market-oriented Russia is unlikely to prevail. If the Centrists can't bring democracy to Russia, can the less powerful liberal-democrats?

THE LIBERAL-DEMOCRATS

There are a number of liberal-democratic parties competing for votes in Russia, however, the three most prominent are Egor Gaidar's "Democratic Choice of Russia", Boris Federov's "Forward, Russia", and Grigorii Yavlinsky's "Yabloko". To date, however, the liberal democrats have been unable or unwilling to unite to form a single, concentrated political bloc which would be capable of gaining a majority of seats in the Duma, or mounting an effective challenge against Yeltsin. Yavlinsky's "Yabloko" is currently the leading liberal-democratic party. "Yabloko" advocates the continuation of democratic and economic reforms with special emphasis on privatization.³⁶ In the 1993 parliamentary elections "Yabloko" gained 25 seats, but increased that total to 45 in the

1995 elections.³⁷ While the increase in 20 seats represents a better showing for “Yabloko” it must be compared against the 113 seats gained by the KPRF between the two elections. In addition, Yavlinsky challenged Yeltsin in the first round of the Presidential elections amassing over 7% of the popular vote, but finishing fourth behind Yeltsin (35%), Zyuganov (32%), and Lebed (14%).³⁸ Again this was not an impressive showing for a Party which more closely identifies with the economic concepts and democratic values of the West. What would the implications be for U.S. national security interests if Yavlinsky were to win in the succession process?

First, from a purely national security perspective it would probably increase Russia’s chances of achieving a democratic, market-oriented country in the long term which has closer ties to the West, and a less threatening foreign policy. However, currently the typical Russian is more concerned with the rising crime rate, inflation, and his own survival than with democratic and economic reforms. Will a liberal-democratic Party, which is closely associated with reform policies, that in turn are closely associated with the U.S., be able to gain the support of the Russian people? Russians want a strong leader who has the authority and power to make decisions and implement them. It is questionable whether Yavlinsky is viewed by the Russian people as a strong leader, but more importantly it’s doubtful he has the political machinery to affect the type of changes the liberal-democratic platform calls for. Yavlinsky would also have to overcome the military, the security services, and the Mafia, all of whom would likely oppose his reforms. In the short term, therefore, if Yavlinsky was unable to strike a deal with the

various interest groups a coup would be possible as these various powerbrokers vied for power. Chaos and instability could result which would negatively impact U.S. interests.

After reviewing the principle political parties and key figures it's important to examine three institutions- the military, the security services, and the Mafia, each of which could play a critical role in any future succession process. Let's begin our analysis with the military.

THE RUSSIAN MILITARY

The Russian military's fall from grace has been a particularly rapid and hard one. From a once proud and mighty force of over 5 million in 1987, the Armed Forces have been reduced to less than 2 million personnel in 1997.³⁹ Along the way the military has withdrawn its forces from forward deployed bases throughout Eastern Europe and parts of the Former Soviet Union, suffered from severe housing, pay and food shortages, and experienced the debacle of the war in Chechnya which has significantly deflated its morale and prestige. Like Russian society in general crime and corruption have also made major inroads in the Russian military. Of significance, however, is that while the military is considered weak it has played perhaps a more significant role in internal politics during the last six years than under the Soviet regime. During the Soviet era the powerful Soviet military was a major beneficiary of the CPSU receiving a large percentage of the budget to maintain its modernization programs, and large numbers of personnel and equipment. Despite its might, the Soviet military was not used to influence domestic politics. However, since 1991 the Russian military has been called upon to be a major arbitrator in Russian domestic politics; first during the attempted coup against President Gorbachev in 1991, and then in 1993 when it was ordered by Yeltsin to lay siege to the Russian

White House.⁴⁰ In addition, it has been increasingly used to conduct "peacekeeping" type operations in selected former Soviet Republics, and to quash the Chechen move for independence.

Interestingly, the increased use of the military to support domestic and foreign policy issues has come at a time when the Russian military has suffered significant personnel and budget reductions. The 1997 draft budget included a proposed defense budget of some 100.8 trillion rubles (\$19-20 billion U.S.), while Defense Minister Rodionov has indicated that 260 trillion rubles is the minimum required just to maintain the current low operational readiness level.⁴¹ In addition, January 1997 estimates show a shortfall of some 200,000 conscripts and 64,000 officers, while some one-third of junior officer slots are reported vacant.⁴² The general consensus is that by "the end of 1996 the Russian Armed forces were on the verge of collapsing, with the Chechen war having all but exhausted its operational resources. Such an Army is already a potential source of political instability."⁴³ Would the Russian military interfere in the succession process?

In over 70 years of Soviet rule the military represented a powerful interest group, but never challenged the leading role of the CPSU. However, the Army today is a "formidable mute of Russian politics," a mute that each of the political elements must take into account if it wants to control Russia.⁴⁴ Defense Minister Rodionov is an advocate of military reform-hoping to create a relatively small, well-equipped, professional Armed Forces. However, reform can not proceed without funds to carry out the downsizing of the military, as well as the training, equipping, reimbursement, and housing of the new professional force. The military's dissatisfaction and need for reform could be major factors in future Russian politics. An

unhappy military which sees no one as a champion for their cause may attempt to influence directly the succession process. Conversely, a candidate such as Lebed, or even Zyuganov, who advocates restoring the power and prestige of the military would be more likely to receive the full support of the Russian Armed Forces.

THE SECURITY SERVICES

Another institution which could possibly have a major impact in the future succession process is the Russian Security Service. In the Soviet era the “troika of power” consisted of the CPSU, the Soviet military, and the KGB. While the KGB has been officially disbanded, its roles and functions have largely been assumed by a number of agencies to include: the Federal Security Service (FSB); the Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR), the Federal Protection Service (FSO); and the Federal Government Communications and Information Service (FAPSI). Some experts suggest that the KGB has only been “reshuffled and reorganized, but not reformed.”⁴⁵ Each of the security services is headed by former KGB officials, and there is little doubt that they play a very active role in current “power politics”. With the increase in crime and corruption there has been a corresponding increase in the powers of the Federal Security Service which is responsible for counterintelligence, and combating terrorism and corruption.⁴⁶ The FAPSI, which is responsible for providing communications support to government officials, is used by Yeltsin to eavesdrop on the private telephone conversations of political adversaries.⁴⁷ Perhaps the most blatant example of the rise in power of the KGB successors was the very significant increase in the size and influence of the Federal Protection Service headed by Mikhail Barsukov, and the Presidential Security Service headed by Aleksandr Korzhakov. Both men, but Korzhakov in particular, were deeply involved in government financial affairs, creating their own power base, and pandering to Yeltsin. While both

of these men have been replaced, (reportedly in a deal to placate Lebed), their replacements were their immediate subordinates, and it is very likely they will resurface somewhere else in politics. The personnel changes and subsequent combining of the two security organizations into one, the Federal Protection Service, have only increased their strength and influence. Therefore it is likely that with a possible succession struggle looming on the horizon, "the security services will maintain a strong presence in the political arena."⁴⁸

THE MAFIA

The last "institution" is not a traditional one, but one which has grown significantly over the last four years in size, scope, sophistication, and power. The Mafia presence is being felt in every aspect of Russian political, economic, and social life. The break-up of the Soviet Union created, among other things, an internal power vacuum which various Mafia organizations are rapidly filling. The Ministry of Internal Affairs estimates there are some 5,000 Mafia Groups consisting of over 40,000 personnel operating in Russia today.⁴⁹ The various Mafia groups control a large number of Moscow's commercial banks, provide protection and loans, carryout contract murders, engage in money laundering, and deal in nuclear weapons technology and radioactive material.⁵⁰ The Mafia translates it's money into power by purchasing commercial enterprises, and paying off politicians for favors. The Mafia is "taking more and more active steps toward the legalization of its leaders and ... exerting influence on the political process."⁵¹ While corrupt politicians grant the Mafia privileges in the form of tax rebates, export licenses, cheap credits, and resources, the Mafia in turn offers the politician a "krysha" (roof) for personal protection and campaign financial support.⁵² The concept of "krysha" permeates almost every aspect of Russian economic and social life. It is estimated that some 80% of firms pay 20-30% of their profits for protection.⁵³

The Mafia is a significant factor in Russian political life and may influence the succession process. The current political and economic infrastructure in Russia is embedded with criminal elements who will seek to maintain the “status quo” under which they have prospered. The Mafia is likely to encourage the election of a candidate who will make few if any changes in the current way things are done. Therefore, the Mafia’s ability to influence the political and economic spheres in Russia must be taken into account in any Post-Yeltsin scenario.

Having reviewed the major parties, and key political figures as well as those institutions-the military, the security services, and the Mafia- which may play major roles in the event Yeltsin passes from the scene let’s turn to an analysis of several critical factors will likely influence the succession outcome.

THREE “CRITICAL FACTORS”

Most analysts assume that the “sudden disappearance of Yeltsin from the Kremlin would generate enormous consequences, and major political turmoil in Moscow.”⁵⁴ Needless to say there are a myriad of factors, both internal and external, which could have a significant impact on the succession process, and who eventually controls Russia. The rising crime rate, unpaid wages, the defense budget, the war in Chechnya, privatization, etc., are all internal factors which could impact on the eventual elections outcome in a post-Yeltsin Russia. In addition, issues such as integration within the CIS, relations with Ukraine, continued “peacekeeping” operations in Georgia, Tajikistan, and elsewhere in the former Soviet Republics, as well as future relations with the West and NATO are but a few of the many foreign policy issues which may influence the election outcome. Considering all these various factors one might ask, “which are the most important factors which are likely to influence the outcome of the succession struggle, and what can the U.S.

do to influence them?" The three most important factors which may determine who eventually rules Russia after Yeltsin are: Russian nationalism/authoritarianism; the "power troika"; and NATO expansion. Let's analyze each in more detail.

RUSSIAN NATIONALISM/AUTHORITARIANISM

Democracy has not yet taken root in Russia, and perhaps never will, at least Democracy as we know it in the West. As some suggest, "At best, building a democracy in Russia will require a long term, inglorious effort which may not be what the Russian people want."⁵⁵ The massive upheavals and changes wrought by Yeltsin's reforms have caused a backlash among the Russian people. While most have become politically apathetic, many yearn for a strong authoritarian leader who can restore order, and some semblance of normal, "pre-democratic reform" life.

Authoritarianism is deeply rooted in Russian history,. It was a fundamental feature of Tsarist Russia, and today is a basic element of the platforms of the KPRF, the LDPR, and General Lebed.

As an example of the extent to which Russian authoritarianism is ingrained in many Russians I recall an incident which happened shortly after Chernenko had replaced Andropov as the CPSU General Secretary. While traveling along the highway from then Leningrad to Moscow I stopped at a truck stop where a number of truck drivers were working on their vehicles or simply resting.

Looking inside a number of the old trucks I noticed that several had pictures of Stalin hanging from their mirrors. I questioned some of the drivers about the Stalin portraits, and I was somewhat shocked by their response. Each wished that Stalin was still in charge of the country because he was a great leader who would at least insure that "order" was restored. This conversation occurred in 1983 when the CPSU was still very much in charge! While the truck drivers who wanted Stalin back certainly do not represent the majority of Russians, the incident does demonstrate how many

Russians feel today. Most Russians certainly do not want Stalin back, however, they do want “order”, or some semblance of it, restored.

Like authoritarianism, nationalism has deep seated historical roots in Russian society. Although the CPSU attempted to supplant Russian nationalism with Communist ideology, when the nation was threatened during Hitler’s invasion in WW II the CPSU reinforced many nationalistic themes in order to rally the Russian people to the cause. More recently, appeals to Russian nationalistic sentiment were instrumental in the success of Zhirinovsky’s Party in the 1993 parliamentary elections, and to that of the Communists in the 1995 elections. Even Yeltsin has increasingly appealed to Russian nationalism in an attempt to broaden his support, and, as was previously noted, this played a major role in his success in the 1996 presidential elections. Therefore, Russian nationalism and authoritarianism will be major factors which can directly influence the outcome of the elections in a post-Yeltsin election. The candidate who can successfully generate mass support by appealing to Russian nationalism/authoritarianism may be the eventual winner in the post-Yeltsin succession. Most Russians believe that Russia’s role as a great power is “genetic” and “inborn”, and that only by retaining a strong centralized authoritarian state will Russia avoid becoming “an object of history.”⁵⁶ Let’s examine another critical factor, the current power relationships within Russia.

THE “POWER TROIKA”

Evidence suggests that a “power troika”, consisting of the Yeltsin political machine, the Security Services, and the Mafia/big business, control a significant portion of the political and economic instruments of power in Russia. Currently, Russia is ruled by an oligarchy. This oligarchy controls the allocation of resources, the positions of power, and to some extent the media.

Money and property are an outgrowth of political position, while political position depends on private power.⁵⁷ Therefore, the political machinery which decides who gets resources, receives tax breaks, credits, export licenses, etc. to a large degree decides who makes money. Those who make the money, such as major businesses and the Mafia, use their money to purchase political influence. The security services, which are controlled directly by Yeltsin, are in essence the power behind the throne, there to ensure that the President remains in control. They are able to indirectly influence election outcomes by discrediting, harassing, and spying on opposition politicians.

The “power troika” is therefore likely to have a major voice in deciding who assumes power after Yeltsin. The “troika” may attempt to extend Prime Minister Chernomyrdin in the acting President role past the constitutionally stipulated 90 day period in order to provide “stability”, or simply use the same reasoning to postpone the elections indefinitely. More importantly, the “power troika” can appeal to Western public opinion by promoting the idea that the current power structure offers the best alternative for long term stability and eventual transition to a democratic, pro-Western country with a market-oriented economy. Regardless of the actual scenario, it is evident that the “power troika” will attempt to exert as much influence as possible through media control, campaign funding of candidates, and possibly through intimidation of opposition candidates. It is also clear that the “power troika” would not want an “outsider” to come to power, someone such as General Lebed, who “would destabilize the existing political system”, because they realize “they have either gained too much from it or they realize that threatening the status quo would eliminate the powerful and ruthless new elite that has risen to power.”⁵⁸

NATO EXPANSION

Let's now turn to a foreign policy issue which may also hold serious U.S. national security implications. The subject of NATO expansion is a very topical issue which is currently receiving extensive attention both in the media, and at the highest levels of government in Russia and in various NATO capitals. The issue with NATO expansion from the Russian standpoint was explained by Prime Minister Chernomyrdin during his discussions with Vice President Gore in February 1997. Chernomyrdin indicated that NATO expansion would: "unleash a new Russian military build-up; stroke the fires of nationalism; and undermine the young Russian democracy."⁵⁹ Chernomyrdin's recent remarks are but one in a series of protests by everyone from Yevgeni Primakov, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, to Defense Minister Rodionov, to even Yeltsin himself who have warned of the dire consequences of NATO enlargement. However, upon closer examination it is readily apparent that the Russian public are increasingly apathetic about politics in general, and NATO expansion in particular. The average Russian, much as he was during the Soviet era, is much more concerned about how to make ends meet in his daily quest for survival. A recent poll indicates that most Russians do not view NATO as a viable threat, despite the rhetoric from the Yeltsin regime.⁶⁰

The military build-up threatened by Chernomyrdin is also unlikely, at least in the short term. As previously mentioned, the military is extremely weak with pay, housing, and conscription shortages causing serious personnel and morale problems. As another indicator of the seriousness of the military's problems, General Nikolai Piskov, First Deputy Chief of the Russian General Staff recently indicated the new defense budget only allocates enough money to pay soldiers' salaries for

the first 7-8 months of this year.⁶¹ If the people are “ambivalent”, and the military poses no near term threat then why is NATO expansion really a critical factor?

The real issue with NATO expansion is that it would represent yet another policy failure for Yeltsin’s administration. Yeltsin and his administration are viewed by many Russians as “Westernizers” whose policies will ultimately “reduce Russia to a poor relative of the West.”⁶² In their view Yeltsin’s adoption of the western concepts of “democracy” and a “market economy” have brought Russia to her knees. If Yeltsin is unable to prevent NATO expansion, or at least obtain major concessions from the West, his administration may lose what little credibility it has left with both the Russian people, and the military. If, as some have suggested, Prime Minister Chernomyrdin is indeed the U.S. choice for “heir apparent”, and considered the “best bet for providing Russia with a stable political transition”, then how the issue of NATO expansion is dealt with becomes a very significant factor in a post-Yeltsin succession. The most important question is, “What can the U.S. do to influence the three critical factors outlined above in an effort to support the attainment of U.S. national security interests in the region?”

THE U.S. RESPONSE

There should be no doubt of the importance of Russia to U.S. National Security interests, as “the Russia problem remains Europe’s single biggest security issue” (16, 7) What are the U.S. national security goals in general, and in particular in Russia? The overarching U.S. national security goals in Russia and the region are, as outlined in “U.S. National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement”, to:

- support and consolidate democratic and market reforms in Russia;
- turn a former threat into a region of valued democratic and economic partnerships; and

-continue reductions in nuclear arms and compliance with nonproliferation accords.

The U.S. has remained steadfast in its desire to achieve these goals, and fully realizes that their accomplishment entails a long term commitment, particularly concerning Russian democracy.

However, there are a variety of measures the U.S. can take now, and in the near future, which would have an impact on Russian nationalism/authoritarianism; the "power troika", and NATO expansion.

First, and foremost, the U.S. must remain actively engaged in Russia, and hold fast to its primary goal of a democratic Russia completely integrated with the Western market economies. Of course, this is much easier said than done. However, a key principle of this goal must be that the U.S. will support democratic forces in Russia which advocate the attainment of these goals. U.S. history is replete with examples of the U.S. providing political/economic support to "individual leaders" such as Nicaragua's Somoza, the Shah of Iran, and Panama's Noriega, not because of their support for democratic principles, but simply because they were considered "pro-U.S." The U.S. has supported Yeltsin the individual, despite the fact that his actions, such as the storming of the White House and the invasion of Chechnya, were less than democratic. Therefore, the U.S. must ensure its position is based on democratic principles, and provide support to the true democratic elements in Russia rather than an individual who may offer only a short term solution. As is often the case, once that individual passes from the scene what is left is usually un-democratic and anti-U.S. In Russia's case the road must lead to democracy, or at least democracy "Russian-style".

It is evident in Russia today "beneath the rhetoric of democracy, many of the autocratic and corrupt institutions of the Soviet regime persist with little change."⁶³ If genuine change is going to occur in Russia the U.S. must place more emphasis and resources on building democracy at the grass roots level. The Russian people have never really experienced democracy therefore a sense of

what a liberal democracy is, how it functions, and what constitutes it must be taught to the Russian people before it can be adopted. The U.S. should redouble its efforts to reach the Russian people using all available forms of media to include TV, radio, the internet and newspapers/periodicals. In addition, the U.S. should redouble its efforts at using cultural, educational, and scientific exchanges to extol the virtues, and long term benefits of a truly democratic country with a market-oriented economy. The U.S. has tried doing it from the top down, now we must attack the problem from the bottom up. The U.S. must assist Russia in the creation of various civic institutions thereby laying the foundation of democracy. The message of democracy, however, will be lost unless the benefits of economic reform and close relations with the West can be demonstrated to the Russian people.

The Russian people still associate economic reform with deprivation, therefore the U.S. must do all it can to ensure that Russia is fully integrated into the world economic markets. The U.S. should encourage increased investment in Russia, particularly from Western European countries. Additional loans/aid/credits should be generated through the International Monetary Fund and other financial organizations, though these should also have specific strings attached. Funds should not go to line the pockets of the wealthy as has been the case with U.S. aid to numerous other countries in the past, but instead should be earmarked to improve the overall living standard of the Russian people. Recent reporting indicates the U.S. Congress is already taking the initiative in this area, and is set to offer Russia a 30-year \$5 billion credit to finance housing construction.⁶⁴ In addition, the Russian oil giant LUKoil and the U.S. firm ARCO have reached agreement on investing some \$400 million in new oil projects in Russia.⁶⁵ The bottom line is that the ordinary Russian must be convinced that cooperation with the West is in his best interest as well as that of Russia.

One of the first steps in this process must be the elevation of Russia to equal partner status. Russian nationalists will ensure the message will not get through unless the U.S./West make it clear that Russia is not a client state. The U.S. must treat Russia as a "great power" which holds the key to developing a comprehensive and workable security architecture in Europe and the Far East. However, conferring of great power status also signifies that Russia must act the part, and fulfill its obligations to develop into a viable political and economic partner with the U.S. and the West.

Politically, the U.S. should strongly advocate that the Russians follow the guidelines laid out in the new Constitution regarding the succession process. Delaying or postponing the elections should Yeltsin die or become incapacitated would benefit the current regime and the "power troika." While probably providing short term continuity and stability this would not produce the long term effect the U.S. is hoping to achieve in Russia. Therefore, should the succession occur the U.S., and its allies, must insist that the Prime Minister becomes the acting President, but more importantly that free elections are held within the 90 day period.

Certainly one of the most controversial issues is "NATO expansion." While there may be many Russians across the political spectrum which view NATO expansion as intended to "diminish Russia", the U.S. must ensure that this perception remains unfounded. To accomplish this, the U.S. must use NATO expansion as both a carrot and stick. NATO should be expanded slowly and deliberately admitting one country every three to five years in an effort to appease both Russian security concerns and public sensibilities. However, both the number of countries and the pace at which they are admitted to NATO should be tied directly to Russian internal developments. How far and how fast democratic reforms are instituted in Russia could be directly linked to how far and how fast NATO expansion takes place. Simultaneously, the U.S. must increase its efforts to ensure

that Russia has a seat at the table in any future discussions of European security. To ignore Russia would diminish her great power status, and fuel nationalist rhetoric.

Several means by which the U.S. can reassure Russia and improve U.S./Russian relations in the future include: increased emphasis on military to military contacts; and continued participation in the Partnership for Peace program as well as joint peacekeeping operations. There should be at least one, if not two Russian officers in each NATO and U.S. military-related school. In addition, U.S. and other NATO officers should attend the various Russian military academies. Only through a direct exchange of this nature can we build trust and plant the seeds for future cooperation. The Partnership for Peace (PFP) program has proven to be a highly effective tool to promote democratic ideals as well as confidence among the various militaries of the Former Warsaw Pact countries. The PFP program should be expanded and enhanced. Russia's participation in the NATO-led peacekeeping operation has been a tremendous political and military success., and should be followed up by additional Russian participation in operations of this nature in the future. The cost of military to military exchanges, PFP, and peacekeeping operations are relatively minimal; however, the dividends are substantial.

It is only by taking those political, military, and economic measures as outlined that the U.S. can hope to be able to influence the dynamics of nationalism/authoritarianism, the "power troika", and "NATO expansion", and ultimately influence the post-Yeltsin succession outcome.

CONCLUSIONS

Recent reporting suggests President Yeltsin's illness may be much worse than previously admitted, and in fact, Yeltsin may never have fully recovered from bypass surgery in November. In the last five or six months Yeltsin has only physically been at work in the Kremlin for a few days.

Determining whether Yeltsin will fully recover and complete his full term of office, or suddenly pass from the scene is, however, beyond the scope of this paper. The intent has been to examine the major political parties, their leaders, and respective agendas in an effort to show who might succeed Yeltsin, and more importantly, what the implications might be for U.S. national security interests. In addition, we have discussed three "institutions"-the military, the security services, and the "Mafia-which could significantly impact on who eventually secures the throne. Three critical factors- authoritarianism/nationalism, the "power troika", and "NATO" expansion are also likely to influence the outcome of the post-Yeltsin election. To ensure the accomplishment of its National Security goals in the region the U.S. must use a variety of political, military, and economic means to influence these factors, and exercise leverage during the succession process. The U.S. must take an active role in shaping future events in Russia now because Yeltsin's succession may already be in process. Russia may once again "muddle through", and one might conclude "there is no visible sense of alarm that the outcome of Yeltsin's struggle to live, or of the palace plots to succeed him will significantly better or worsen Russia's stumbling economy, its deconstructing government or its chaotic search for a new place in the world."⁶⁶ U.S. and European security interests, however, are too important to simply bank on Russia once again "muddling through". There is a "window of opportunity" which the U.S. must fully exploit if it expects to shape the political and economic future of Russia in the long term. Allowing Russia to continue to "muddle through" in the short term will not produce a democratic, pro-Western Russia which will be so very vital to U.S. national security interests well into the future.

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