



## The Grasp of Empire

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A cardinal principle of Russian military doctrine is that the country should never use its armed forces against its own people. How cynical this sounds as bombs explode in the houses of innocent people in Chechnya. President Boris Yeltsin's order yesterday to stop the bombing of the capital, Grozny, should raise no one's hopes. It applies only to the air force, which in any case has been hampered by fog in the region.

The crisis in Chechnya is far from over. But in addition to my compassion for the Chechen people, I am acutely concerned about the future of my homeland, Ukraine.

A two-faced policy on the use of force to "bring order to the country" has a long tradition in Russia and the Soviet Union. Even leaving aside the czarist and Stalinist regimes, we may recall Nikita Krushchev, Leonid Brezhnev and that champion of socialism with a human face, Mikhail Gorbachev. Each used the army against his own people to maintain the empire and the rule of the Communist Party. Now Mr. Yeltsin is doing it again.

There is no discernible difference between Soviet and Russian policies. In April 1989, Soviet troops broke up a peaceful demonstration in the Georgian capital, Tbilisi, leaving scores of dead and wounded. In January 1991, Soviet forces brought order to Lithuania and blood flowed in the streets of Vilnius. In 1992, these forces, now Russian, provided arms to Russian separatists fighting the legitimate Government of Independent Moldova.

In a speech on Dec. 14, 1992, the Russian Foreign Minister, Andrei Kozyrev, shocked an audience of foreign ministers in Stockholm. "One shouldn't act too familiar with 'Great Russia'" he said. "Russia must protect its interests by all available means, including military ones." Although the Russian news media dismissed this as a harmless remark, more likely it was in earnest - and meant to test world reaction.

Since he took power in 1991, President Yeltsin has been ordering his armies to protect Russian

interests in other countries, not to mention the Russian Federation. The success of this policy, and the West's wait-and-see attitude, have emboldened Russia. In early 1994, Mr. Yeltsin, Russia's military leaders and its diplomats began to demand that the United Nations and the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe sanction its aggressive actions by recognizing its troops as "peacekeepers."

Chechnya is no exception to the international policy Russia has thus established. Russia's ambitions are based on its politicians' modest desire to assume the powers of the former Soviet Union. It does not matter to them that the U.S.S.R. had consisted of 15 republics, of which Russia, like Ukraine, was theoretically one among equals - more testimony to the fact that there was never true equality among these so-called fraternal states.

### "It's getting hard to tell Russia from the Soviet Union."

The question is how different Russia's current leaders really are from their Soviet predecessors, who turned the military into "hostages of political ambitions" - in the catch phrase once used by Russian democrats, some of whom are in power today.

While their predecessors often sought to conceal their actions from the world and their own people, the leaders of the new Russia do not even heed world opinion. They are, after all, the leaders of a powerful state, and public opinion in less powerful states interests them not at all.

With its one peer, the United States, Russia has an understanding, a tacit partnership. Thus, no condemnation is expected from that quarter. Why speak of Chechnya, which is part of the Russian Federation, when even Ukraine has been relegated to the status of a former Soviet republic and considered to fall in the Russian sphere of influence?

Let us ask ourselves: Are the military operations in Chechnya an internal affair of the Russian state, or is the assault on Grozny an act of aggression? If the world ponders the question long enough, it may become moot, and no one will have to fret any longer over what to call it.

But why do I fret over it? Because Ukraine also must deal with Russia - not only as a neighbour but as the "big brother" of any state that falls in the territory of the former Soviet Union. This is how Russia views its role.

Russia's campaign for international recognition of this role has already met with some successes. One was the concession by the West that led to the "Partnership for Peace," when Russia used its muscle to prevent the former Warsaw Pact nations from joining NATO. Their secondary status would appear to leave the former Soviet republics even more out in the cold. Another was the State Department's reorganization of its European bureau last year. In both instances, Ukraine was relegated to Russia's sphere of influence.

As long as the West concedes to Moscow paramount authority in its part of the world, Russia will have a mandate to seek restoration of its empire. This threatens to undermine Ukraine's future as a democracy.

Perhaps the West does not care exactly how democracy takes root in the former Soviet republics - individually or in an integrated commonwealth under Russian hegemony. The West seems concerned only that it not face the threat from Russia that it faced from the Soviet Union. One can understand that. But the post-Soviet states also deserve consideration. They still imagine that the world is interested in seeing democracy and justice take root where they have never existed before.

But what do the Chechens see? True, Chechnya is a constituent part of the Russian Federation, and no one expects a U.N. Security Council resolution supporting it. Even as Russia wages war against the Chechens, however, its regime continues to be democratic. Will it not try someday to impose this kind of democracy, by similarly democratic means, on my country, Ukraine?

Of course Ukraine is not a part of the federation. And the Ukrainian Parliament agreed to join the Commonwealth of Independent States only with guarantees of its political sovereignty. This nation of more than 50 million people has proved to be an anchor of stability in a volatile region. But Ukraine requires a commitment from the West - moral, economic and diplomatic - to support its efforts to build a democratic future. With the West's support, a strong democracy in Ukraine could prevent a restoration of the Russian empire.

If Russian ambitions are allowed to reign unchecked, as they have in the Moldova, Georgia and now Chechnya, Ukraine-along with other independent republics-could face dangerous upheaval. Such fires must not be allowed to start. Around the borders of Ukraine, they have already begun to smolder.