Notes: Legacy of Soviet Collapse

**The Commonwealth of Independent States**

In the beginning of 1991, the Soviet economy was faced with soaring inflation, devalued currency and decreased production

The people were suffering

Goods were available, however very few people had money to buy them

July 10th 1991 Boris Yeltsin became the first democratically elected president of the Russian Republic

Mikhail Gorbachev was still President and maintained his hold on the Kremlin.

A power struggle emerged between the two

Gorbachev remained committed to the doctrine of Communism, which necessitated central control

Gorbachev refused to allow private property or conversion to the free market system

Yeltsin wanted to introduce free market reforms

**Attempted Coup: August 1991**

In August of 1991 eight senior party officials staged a coup d'état (the sudden violent overthrow of a government and seizure of political power, especially by the military), Tanks rolled into Moscow, and from 19 to 22nd of August The Soviet Union was in revolution

There had been signs of unrest Gorbachev and Yeltsin were arguing about who held power. This was in evidence during a visit from President George Bush Sr.

During that same visit an action on the Lithuanian boarder saw 6 Lithuanian customs agents gunned down in what appeared to be a message regarding Soviet feelings about Lithuanian independence

There were tanks in Moscow and after meeting with Bush, Gorbachev left for a vacation on the Crimea

Questions/Main ideas:

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Questions/Main ideas:

**Attempted Coup: August 1991**

August 16th Yeltsin left for Kazakhstan, leaving Moscow without either one of them their

The Coup was doomed to failure

Communication lines were not cut, potential enemies were not rounded up and shot or arrested, and troops were not strategically located

The turning point happened when Yeltsin (who had returned to Moscow) climbed on to a tank and rallied the crowd in front of the Russian Parliament

Three Yeltsin supporters were killed in the ensuing shootout, but it was otherwise bloodless

By August 22nd order was restored and Yeltsin and Gorbachev were working on power sharing, however Yeltsin had clearly emerged in a better light from the events than Gorbachev had (Gorbachev had been arrested and returned to Moscow)

The Coup failed, however it marked the death of the Soviet Union

**The End of the USSR**

After the Ukraine and other republics declared themselves independent it was necessary for the leaders of the newly independent nations to discuss how this new system would function

Boris Yeltsin represented the republic of Russia

Leonid Kravchuk represented the republic of the Ukraine

Stanislav Shushkevich represented the republic of Belarus (formerly Belorussia)

The leaders of these republics met outside Minsk in Belarus and agreed to the dissolution of the Soviet Union

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Questions/Main ideas:

**The End of the USSR**

These three republics were the original signatories to the document that had originally created the USSR in 1922. This new body was called the Commonwealth of Independent States. It was a loose federation of sovereign states designed to empower the independence of these regions while linking them economically. Immediately after the meeting Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan began to lobby for the inclusion of Kazakhstan and the remaining republics in the new union. Another meeting was held in Alma Ata, Kazakhstan, The Commonwealth of Independent States was declared the successor of the former Soviet republics and included 11 of the former Soviet republics. Georgia remained apart from this union, joining in 1994. December 25th 1991 Mikhail Gorbachev resigned as president of the Soviet Union

**Aftermath of the Soviet Collapse**

Obviously the breakup of the USSR raised a number of serious issues. Russia would represent the Common Wealth of Independent States in the UN

Ukraine and Belarus would also maintain their seats as these three nations had occupied the seats granted to the former Soviet Union in the General Assembly. Russia (the largest of the republics) would occupy the seat granted to the Soviet Union in the Security Council. Of bigger concern was the control of the former Soviet Unions nuclear arsenal. Negotiations to consolidated the stockpiles of nukes began, by 1994 the Start I (Strategic Arms Reduction Talks) treaty was ratified by the US, Russia, Ukraine, Belarusand Kazakhstan. By the end of 1994 ½ of the 3300 strategic warheads were transferred from Ukraine, Belarus and Kazakhstan to Russia. Theses stages agreed that fissile material (able to undergo nuclear fission) would be transferred to areas which would use thematerial at nuclear energy plants instead of for weapons production. Some of the fissile material fromKazakhstan was transferred to nuclear energy plantsin the US.

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Questions/Main ideas:

**Aftermath of the Soviet Collapse: The Nuclear Issue**

Another concern about the nuclear materials of the former USSR was the growth in theft and trafficking of these items that had occurred since the collapse of the Soviet Union.

From 1992 to 1994 German authorities caught 58 smugglers in possession of nuclear substances and uncovered over 400 serious offers to deliver nuclear materials.

In addition, there is real concern that nuclear scientists in the former Soviet Union will be drawn to Third World countries who would like to develop nuclear weapons. The knowledge of these scientists combined with illegal nuclear material could be very unfortunate

**Aftermath of the Soviet Collapse: Ethnic considerations**

A third problem with the collapse of the Soviet Union was the instability created by ethnic differences in the now independent republics

Russification projects had continued throughout the 20th Century

Many of the republics contained large numbers of Russians and they were now treated as foreigners, however most of them had nowhere to go

Big differences in the former republics of the USSR continued to develop

The west began to look to Europe for economic and political aid

The East moved closer to the Islamic world

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Questions/Main ideas:

**Russia in the 1990’s: Troubles with the Chechens**

As the largest of the former Soviet republics, Russia became the leader in the region, therefore the stability of Russia was important to the international community. There are 21 republics in Russia, one of the big problems after the collapse of the USSR were ethnic tensions and demands for sovereignty in the more distant republics, the worst fighting taking place in the Caucasus. Since the Russian conquest of the Caucasus in the 1800’s, the Chechens had resisted Russian occupation. They revolted in 1862,1942, and again in 194. Stalin deported Chitin and Ingush people to labour camps in Kazakhstan and Siberia, causing horrible loss of life and damage to the Chechen culture. When Khrushchev let these people back in 1957 they became involved in land disputes as they tried to reclaim their former homes

Russian administrators discriminated against the indigenous citizens and but the are was at peace from 1957 until the collapse of the USSR November 1st 1991, Chechnya’s president Dudayev declared that the area of Chechnya-Ingusheti was independent of the Soviet Union. On November 30th, 1991 he voted to remain in the Russian Republic, leaving Chechnya on its own Yeltsin declared a state of emergency in Chechnya and launched an invasion. Initially the Chechens were successful against the Russians, they captured strategic facilities on the ground and seized weapons which were flown into the capital in Grozny. Yeltsin responded to the defeat with an economic embargo on Chechnya, as a result the Chechens started to sell their oil and gas reserves to terrorist groups in the Middle East and the Mafia in Russia

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Questions/Main ideas:

**Trouble in Chechnya continued**

In late 1994, the Russians decided to take Chechnya using military force

Throughout January of 1995 Grozny was saturation bombed

Many Chechens had already retreated to the mountains, however approximately 25 000 civilians (some ethnic Russians) died in the shelling

Atrocities spread to the country side as well and the slaughter of civilians became widespread

The problems in Chechnya caused Yeltsin significant political embarrassment

As a result of the continued conflict with Russia, the Chechen land and culture have been devastated, Russia has been censured internationally

**The Russian Military**

Primary responsibility for defence in the region fell to Russia post-collapse.

The remaining military left in Ukraine and Belarus went back to Russia. Significant cutbacks in equipment and overall funding.

Military spending in Russia was but a fraction of the former USSR, it was not possible to maintain a prestigious force.

In 1994, Russia spent 4.6% of it GDP on defence, while in the past the USSR typically spent anywhere between 15-25%.

Conventional armed forces suffered from a lack of conscripts and excessively high rates of desertion.

The military, however, remains an important factor in the development of Russia’s political and economic future.

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Questions/Main ideas:

**Ukraine**

On December 1st 1991, Leonid Kravchuk became Ukraine’s first democratically elected president.

Three issues of importance: Relationship with Russia, control of the Black Sea fleet, and Crimea

In 1954, control of Crimea was turned over to Ukraine. A rather important plot of land, it was requested to become an autonomous area in 1994, which would solve disputes between Ukraine and Russia over the region.

Kravchuk did not demonstrate the leadership skills necessary to solve the country’s economic problems. Hyperinflation set in and the country seemed poised for economic collapse. Kravchuk was replaced by former Prime Minister Leonid Kuchma in July 1994.

Kuchma determined that Ukraine had no choice but to introduce radical economic reform. He advocated market prices, free trade, and a mass privatization program including land reform. The launch of the reform gained the support of the IMF.

$750 million were committed by the IMF as an initial payment, with an additional $1.6 billion to follow.

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Questions/Main ideas:

**Breakup of Yugoslovia**

Tension in Yugoslavia had been building gradually since the death of Tito in 1980. His brand of nationalistic communism held together a state composed of many different ethnicities, religions, and histories.

Separatist movements and economic difficulties pressured the government and by mid-1991, the region exploded.

This crisis originated in the 14th century when the Ottomans defeated Serbian forces in 1389, leaving it ruled by Muslim forces until Turkey’s defeat by Russia in 1878.

Serbia agitated for a union of Slavs in the Balkan area, nationalist agitation that contributed to the outbreak of WWI.

At the beginning of the crisis, the region was divided by ethnic and religious differences.

Serbs = Eastern Orthodox

Croats + Slovenians = Catholic

Bosnians = mix of Serbs and Croats and Slavs who converted to Islam (Muslim) during Ottoman rule.

Serbs maintain ties to Russia and Eastern Europe

Croats and Slovenes favour western Europe.

**The Soviet Response**

In 1977 the USSR led the US 3 to 2 in mega tonnage ( the explosive yield of bombs measured in tonnes of TNT) however, it lacked missile accuracy.

Between 1971 and `84 defence spending in the USSR grew by 5% per year.

Estimates suggest that this was the equivalent of between 13 and 17% of their GNP (compared to 5.5% of the US GNP)

In the late 1970`s Soviet accuracy improved an d technology they imported from Japan allowed Soviet Submarines to move more quietly

In the 1980`s the quality of Soviet aircraft, submarines, warships and missiles all improved significantly

However by 1985 the money committed to the defence sector of the economy had created serious problems in the domestic economy and unrest and discontent among the Soviet citizens

Between 1979 and 1985 the arms race escalated, as the US and USSR argued about the Soviets in Afghanistan and NATO`s nuclear policy, among other issues

In 1981 Reagan proposed the Zero option according to which the Americans would not deploy missiles in Europe if the USSR would dismantle their SS-20`s there. The USSR refused fearing the remaining bombs of the French and British

In November of `81 Reagan puts forth the Strategic Arms Reduction Talks (START)

This involved the destruction of missiles on both sides, however left the US in a position of superiority regarding cruise missiles and bombers

The Soviets were not interested

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Questions/Main ideas:

**Yugoslavia**

Ethnic and religious differences were compounded by bitterness over historic events such as Kosovo in 1389 and Croatian Fascist atrocities against the Serbs in WWII.

Serbian leader Slobodan Milosevic rallied Serb forces throughout Yugoslavia to promote Serbian influence in the region during the 80’s. In 1991, Croatia and Slovenia proclaimed their independence in resistance to Serbian threats of annexation.

When Bosnia-Herzegovina declared its independence, Serbia responded with military force, moving against Croatia and Slovenia as well.

Conflict in Croatia and Slovenia ended in ceasefire. Slovenia restored its political and economic systems Croatia remained embroiled in conflict. Fighting persisted in Bosnia where some of the worst atrocities in recent history occurred.

The slaughter and government sanctioned systematic rape of the civilian population was called “ethnic cleansing” and resulted in international outrage. Despite UN intervention since 1992 , NATO air strikes and diplomatic efforts by western powers and Russia, Serbia remained a renegade state until parties from all sides met in Dayton Ohio, in 1995.

Although there was significant resistance to a permanent solution by 1996, the war was over

However, for fairly obvious reasons the area remains unstable and ethnically divided

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Questions/Main ideas:

**Political Change in Russia**

Having a long history of authoritarian government, it came as no surprise that the democratic process was slow to develop in Russia.

 Many experts question whether it is realistic to expect Western style Democracy in a society characterized by paternalism rather than individualism.

The Russian people expected Gorbachev’s economic reforms to improve their standard of living

Although more consumer goods were available to the Russian people very few of them could afford to buy them.

Market reforms introduced after the collapse of the controlled economy caused an influx of consumer goods, but also massive inflation

Only the wealthy could purchase most items. Bacon, originally sold at 4 rubles/kg, went to 1200 rubles/kg

Prices were no longer subject to state control.

However state monopolies still existed in many areas, so people could by goods from the state monopoly and sell them on the open market and make a fortune

This led to an economic environment where it was more beneficial to speculate on the market than it was to produce a product.

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Questions/Main ideas:

**Yeltsin**

By 1993 It was obvious that the economic reforms introduced in Russia had failed

There was widespread corruption, high prices of consumer goods and massive market speculation causing rapid inflation,

Privatization schemes were failing and the Russian standard of living was falling

The new system was making the Russians nostalgic for Communism

By ‘93 there were calls for Yeltsin to resign

Demonstrations were held in Red Square

Resistance against economic reforms grew

Parliamentarians who opposed Yeltsin seized the opportunity to start a power struggle in the Russian government

Alexander Rutskoi and Ruslan Khasbulatov were in opposition to Yeltsin’s rule and stirred public opinion against him into a revolt

On October 2, 1993 while Yeltsin was at his country Dacha (Russian country house) Rutskoi, supported by Communists, neo Nazis and others, barricaded the Russian White House and threatened to size control of the government

Yeltsin sent in the tanks

Over a period of 12 days the government and the rebels were in armed combat

More than 170 people were killed and approximately 900 wounded and over 1250 people were arrested

Although Yeltsin won he could see people were unhappy and decided to rule by authoritarian decree until the December ‘93 elections

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Questions/Main ideas:

**The Fall of Yeltsin**

The reasons behind Russia’s instability were partially the result of the transition from Communism to a free market. Its parliament was elected, while the Communist party was still in control. Its constitution dated to 1978 when Communism controlled the country. The average Russian had no real knowledge of the issues at hand in the ‘93 elections or which party platform they would agree with. Yeltsin held on to power in the ‘93 elections. The openly anti-Semitic right-wing nationalist (who desired to regain territories lost by Russia during the 20th Century) Vladimir Zhirinovski won 18% of the vote. His appeal to the Russians seemed to lie primarily in his promise to restore stability and economic security by fighting organized crime and controlling the economy. There was a trend in Russia toward a more authoritarian form of government . In the 1996 elections several candidates representing Communism through to Liberal democracy ran for control of the government. Ultimately Yeltsin won (he required 50% of the popular vote and received 54%). Yeltsin’s victory was the final blow to Communism in Russia. Russia seemed poised between an oligarchic system (a small group of people who together govern a nation or control an organization, often for their own purposes) growing out of the new elite (who ran corporations) and a democratic system that wanted more control of the criminal element in Russian society. After the collapse of the Soviet state “Robber Baron” (a wealthy industrialist or businessman who uses unscrupulous business practices) capitalism became a normalized part of the Russian economy. State assets were stolen and sold and the proceeds moved out of the country. Organized crime was heavily involved in the new economy

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Questions/Main ideas:

**The Fall of Yeltsin Continued**

The living conditions of Russians deteriorated as wages and pensions were not paid by the state, which was unable to collect taxes

The privatization of industry resulted in job losses, high inflation, and the elimination of social programs

While Yeltsin had been initially championed as a reformer, some people began to question whether he was up to continuing reform in Russia

Control of the arsenal of nuclear weapons developed during the rule of the Soviet Union

Addressing the horrific environmental problems in Eastern Europe

Increasing health problems (diphtheria, alcoholism, tuberculosis and cholera in addition to malnutrition, problems that continue to persist even now)

And the ongoing war in Chechnya all contributed to the disenchantment of the Russian people with Yeltsin’s rule

**Yeltsin’s Resignation and the appointment of Vladimir Putin**

In an effort to assist economic reforms the IMF forwarded 10$ billion in loans to be repaid over 3 years

This was followed after Yeltsin’s victory with a further $46 billion in foreign portfolio investments

The Russian economy did not deal well with the influx of foreign money and collapsed in August of 1998

Russia defaulted on treasury bills and called a moratorium of foreign debt resulting in a devaluation of the currency

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Questions/Main ideas:

**Yeltsin’s Resignation and the appointment of Vladimir Putin**

Luckily this was followed by a dramatic increase in world oil prices (Russia is rich in oil and coal resources). As a result the financial crisis was followed by economic growth and the renewal of the stock market. Yeltsin had been in ill health for some time and it only grew worse, on December 31st 1999, he resigned and appointed Vladimir Putin (former KGB, Komitet gosudarstvennoy bezopasnosti or State Security Committee, the government agency of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, essentially the secret police) In March 2000 he ran in and won the election (he has effectively remained in power ever since)

**Vladimir Putin**

Putin benefited from high world oil prices and he put new people in charge of Gazprom, the gas monopoly that had been semi-privatized in an effort to stop the theft of state assets. Tax reform resulted in slightly better revenue, however the biggest change is that taxes have been centralized

Regional governments receive 48% of the taxes collected. However, Putin is willing to provide emergency money if a shortfall interferes with the payment of pensions and wages. Putin is credited with improvements in living standards. Payment of pensions and wages has been more regular and Russia’s economic growth has been steady, poverty remains an issue. The gap between the small % very wealthy and the large % of the very poor continues to widen. Putin has proven to be a very strong leader. He has made some limited compromises with the West, including agreeing to sign a Anti Ballistic Missile Treaty to limit by two thirds Russia’s nuclear weapons. However Putin has recently begun to exercise Russia’s power in Eastern Europe in what may prove disturbing ways.

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Questions/Main ideas:

**In the End**

In the end the transformation of Russia from the Communist state of the USSR to a type of democracy has been bumpy. Gorbachev remained committed to Communism. Yeltsin was open to market reforms. This led to a power struggle that ended in the collapse of the Soviet Union. One republic after another voted to leave the Soviet Union and Gorbachev chose not to use the military to stop this exodus as previous Soviet leaders had done. The Soviet Union ceased to exist in 1991. The successor body was the Commonwealth of Independent States, a loose federation of sovereign states that replaced the former USSR. The largest of these states was Russia Yeltsin emerged as the new leader, he survived several coups, however efforts to reunite the old Russian Empire failed as the republics declared independence. Ethnic differences caused instability as the fledgling Western nations looked to Europe and the newly emerged Eastern nations looked to Islam as their respective major influences. Issues like the location of nuclear weapons in Ukraine and elsewhere continued to be an issue and prompted the USA and Western Europe to act to locate and disarm these weapons

A black market and organized crime flourished, factories closed and unemployment and starvation ensued. The election of Putin increased Russian’s standard of living, however the situation remains unstable to this day. The member republics of the Yugoslav federation also sought independence

Unlike the Soviet Union the central Serbian majority chose war to force Croatia and others to remain part of their union, when this failed, the Serbian government attempted to seize as much land as it could and kill or expel all non-Serbs, Interference from the UN and NATO resulted in an uneasy truce

The Soviet Union and Yugoslavia became examples of failed Communist states

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