

I. International Security Implications of the Post-Soviet States

Introduction

The fall of the Berlin Wall on November 9, 1989 was the first major sign of the collapse of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR).¹ By 1990, the USSR had become severely destabilized by protests and riots within many of the smaller states, most notably the Baltics.² In 1991, a failed coup d'état aimed at removing President Mikhail Gorbachev from power made the downfall of the USSR inevitable.³ The coup caused the USSR's ruling Communist Party to dissolve and enabled the Soviet Republics to secede from the Union and form fifteen new Member States.⁴ These events led Gorbachev to resign as the last leader of the USSR on December 26, 1991, dissolving the Soviet Union after almost seventy years of existence.⁵ As the USSR was one of the five major powers within the United Nations (UN) and the Security Council (SC), a myriad of transitional changes took place that had significant and lasting impacts on the international community.⁶ The Russian Federation was legally recognized as the successor of the USSR, assuming permanent membership on the SC.⁷

Post-Soviet Political Structures and Ethnic Policies

The dissolution of the USSR led to the development of a complex range of issues within the newly independent Member States: from severe economic downturns, violent internal conflicts, and deteriorating relations with their neighbors.⁸ Some of the most severely affected Member States were Moldova and Georgia, where economic output decreased by two-thirds by 1998.⁹ Ukraine, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan also experienced severe economic decline in this decade.¹⁰ Inequality across post-Soviet states increased dramatically, resulting in high levels of poverty and sharp declines in quality-of-life indicators.¹¹ These issues exacerbated tensions between the Member States, as well as the relationships with the Russian Federation.¹²

Most Member States initially retained relatively cordial relations with the Russian Federation, with the exception of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania.¹³ Although relations between most post-Soviet Member States have declined since the 1990s, some have managed to maintain cordial relations with the Russian Federation.¹⁴ The Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) was formed following the dissolution of the USSR to integrate the former Soviet-states.¹⁵

¹ UNICEF, "After the Fall: The human impact of ten years of transition," *International Child Development Centre*, November 1999, <https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/afterthefall.pdf>. (Accessed July 18, 2021.)

² Fein, Esther B., "Baltic Citizens Link Hands to Demand Independence," *The New York Times*, August 24, 1989, <https://www.nytimes.com/1989/08/24/world/baltic-citizens-link-hands-to-demand-independence.html>. (Accessed July 18, 2021.)

³ Dunlop, John B., "The August 1991 Coup and Its Impact on Soviet Politics," *Journal of Cold War Studies*, no. 1 (2003): 94-127, <https://direct.mit.edu/jcws/article/5/1/94/12588/The-August-1991-Coup-and-Its-Impact-on-Soviet>. (Accessed August 21, 2021.)

⁴ Dunlop, John B., "The August 1991 Coup and Its Impact on Soviet Politics."

⁵ "End Of the Soviet Union; Soviet U.N. Seat Taken by Russia." *The New York Times*, December 25, 1991, <https://www.nytimes.com/1991/12/25/world/end-of-the-soviet-union-soviet-un-seat-taken-by-russia.html>. (Accessed July 17, 2021.)

⁶ Chamberlin, W. Henry, "U.S.S.R. and U.N.," *The Russian Review* 6, no. 2 (1947): 37-43.

⁷ Blum, Yehuda Z., "Russia Takes Over the Soviet Union's Seat at the United Nations," *European Journal of International Law*, volume 3, issue 2, (1992), 354-361, <http://www.ejil.org/pdfs/3/2/2045.pdf>. (Accessed July 18, 2021.)

⁸ Kundu, Nivedita Das. "Russia and the Former Soviet States: Dynamics of Relations," *Policy Perspectives* 4, no. 1 (2007): 49-59.

⁹ UNICEF, "After the Fall: The human impact of ten years of transition."

¹⁰ UNICEF, "After the Fall: The human impact of ten years of transition."

¹¹ UNICEF, "After the Fall: The human impact of ten years of transition."

¹² Policy Perspectives, "Russia and the Former Soviet States: Dynamics of Relations."

¹³ Policy Perspectives, "Russia and the Former Soviet States: Dynamics of Relations."

¹⁴ Policy Perspectives, "Russia and the Former Soviet States: Dynamics of Relations."

¹⁵ Usov, Pavel, "Evolution of the Belarus-Russia Union State: from Integration to Attempts of Incorporation," *Studia I Analizy Nauk O Polityce*, no. 1 (2020), 95-108, http://cejsh.icm.edu.pl/cejsh/element/bwmeta1.element.ojs-doi-10_31743_sanp_9839. (Accessed August 21, 2021.)

The CIS intended to preserve the economic, political, and military relations between post-Soviet Member States.¹⁶ By the end of the 1990s, however, the CIS had failed at achieving any meaningful integration and politically dissolved.¹⁷ Belarus maintains the strongest ties with the Russian Federation, forming the Union State on December 8, 1999.¹⁸ The Union State serves to economically integrate its Member States.¹⁹ Citizens of one Member State have freedom of travel and work within the other.²⁰ The long-term goals of the Union State are to use a common currency, and function together as a federation.²¹ The members of the Union State have exceptionally strong economic, political, and military ties.²² As of 2021, only Belarus and the Russian Federation are members of the Union State, as Kazakhstan has explored joining the union but not yet entered the treaty.²³

Following the independence of Latvia and Estonia, citizenship was only given to “those who held citizenship in 1940 and their descendants,” disenfranchising half a million people living in the Member States.²⁴ Those not granted citizenship were required to obtain legal residence and pass a language test for naturalization.²⁵ These restrictive citizenship policies have created a long-term effect on the Russian populations within the Member States, as it has restricted minority Russian-speaking political participation by invalidating Russian-speaking citizenship.²⁶ The citizenship policies were engineered to pressure ethnic Russians living in Latvia and Estonia to either assimilate or emigrate.²⁷ In 2016, 12 percent of the population of Latvia and 6.3 percent of the population of Estonia were considered stateless under these citizenship policies.²⁸ Many of those considered stateless within the Baltic states have opted for Russian citizenship, meaning they are not legally stateless but functionally stateless because they are restricted in their ability to participate in their country’s political systems.²⁹ In Latvia, stateless people and non-citizens are not allowed to engage in most civil service or private-sector jobs and are restricted from voting in elections.³⁰ The statelessness faced by the Russian minorities in Baltic states bolsters Russia’s soft-power in the region, and stokes fears that Russia could potentially use the situation as justification for military action similar to events in the Russo-Ukrainian War.³¹

Collective Security and the Russo-Ukrainian War (2014-Present)

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) is a military alliance that was formed to contain the USSR and provide military assurance to all Member States through a mutual defense pact.³² Since the dissolution of the USSR, NATO has reoriented its goals to counter the Russian Federation and strengthen North American military presence

¹⁶ Kubicek, Paul. “The Commonwealth of Independent States: An Example of Failed Regionalism?” *Review of International Studies*, 35 (2009), 237–256, <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/review-of-international-studies/article/abs/commonwealth-of-independent-states-an-example-of-failed-regionalism/B4BE4CB91BA05D4B0F265F6D30073D41>. (Accessed September 25, 2021.)

¹⁷ Kubicek, Paul, “The Commonwealth of Independent States: An Example of Failed Regionalism?”

¹⁸ Usov, Pavel, “Evolution of the Belarus-Russia Union State: from Integration to Attempts of Incorporation,” *Studia I Analizy Nauk O Polityce* no. 1 (2020), 95-108, http://cejsh.icm.edu.pl/cejsh/element/bwmeta1.element.ojs-doi-10_31743_sanp_9839. (Accessed August 21, 2021.)

¹⁹ Usov, Pavel, “Evolution of the Belarus-Russia Union State: from Integration to Attempts of Incorporation.”

²⁰ Usov, Pavel, “Evolution of the Belarus-Russia Union State: from Integration to Attempts of Incorporation.”

²¹ State Customs Committee of the Republic of Belarus, “Kazakhstan, Russia, Belarus might set up joint business councils in Europe,” *gtk.gov*, February 17, 2012, https://web.archive.org/web/20120315082707/http://www.gtk.gov.by/en/press-center/news/kazakhstan-russia-belarus-might-set-up-joint-business-councils-in-europe_i_3833.html. (Accessed August 21, 2021.)

²² State Customs Committee of the Republic of Belarus, “Kazakhstan, Russia, Belarus might set up joint business councils in Europe.”

²³ State Customs Committee of the Republic of Belarus, “Kazakhstan, Russia, Belarus might set up joint business councils in Europe.”

²⁴ Schulze, Jennie L., “Re-framing Russia’s soft power in post-accession Latvia: education reform and naturalization for stateless children,” *Eurasian Geography and Economics* volume 62, issue 3 (2020), 264-292.

²⁵ Schulze, Jennie L., “Re-framing Russia’s soft power in post-accession Latvia.”

²⁶ Schulze, Jennie L., “Re-framing Russia’s soft power in post-accession Latvia.”

²⁷ Schulze, Jennie L., “Re-framing Russia’s soft power in post-accession Latvia.”

²⁸ Schulze, Jennie L., “Re-framing Russia’s soft power in post-accession Latvia.”

²⁹ Schulze, Jennie L., “Re-framing Russia’s soft power in post-accession Latvia.”

³⁰ Schulze, Jennie L., “Re-framing Russia’s soft power in post-accession Latvia.”

³¹ Schulze, Jennie L., “Re-framing Russia’s soft power in post-accession Latvia.”

³² North Atlantic Treaty Organization. “A Short History of NATO,” 2021, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/declassified_139339.htm. (Accessed July 17, 2021.)

in Europe.³³ Many post-Soviet States have either joined or expressed interest in joining the treaty since the dissolution.³⁴ Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania joined NATO in 2004 over fears of territorial disputes they had with Russia.³⁵ Georgia and Ukraine have expressed interest in joining NATO following direct territorial conflicts with the Russian Federation.³⁶ Despite developing strong political ties with NATO, Georgia and Ukraine have faced severe barriers to joining the alliance.³⁷ The main obstacles for Georgia and Ukraine remain the threat of Russian aggression and significant Russian military presence within both Member States' territories.³⁸

The most recent and prominent conflict between the Russian Federation and Ukraine revolves around the annexation of Crimea.³⁹ After former Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich was ousted from power by the Euromaidan Revolution, the Russian Federation deployed troops to occupy Crimea, a majority-ethnic Russian peninsula on the Black Sea.⁴⁰ Crimea is a deeply strategic peninsula for the Russian Federation as it is home to a warm-water port and naval base in Sevastopol with access to the Black Sea and the Mediterranean.⁴¹ In March 2018, after the successful annexation of the peninsula, Russian president Vladimir Putin publicly declared, "Crimea has always been an integral part of Russia in the hearts and minds of people."⁴² After the annexation, pro-Russian separatists in Ukraine seized sections of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions in eastern Ukraine and declared the regions independent.⁴³ Large-scale combat in the region ensued between the separatist groups and the Ukrainian Armed Forces.⁴⁴ Currently, more than 13,000 people have died in the war.⁴⁵ The separatist groups in eastern Ukraine have collaborated with the Russian Federation, receiving military and financial support for their campaign against the Ukrainian government.⁴⁶ The instability in Ukraine has delayed and disrupted their accession into the European Union and NATO for the foreseeable future.⁴⁷ An unstable ceasefire currently holds in the region, but sporadic clashes often occur.⁴⁸ Pro-Ukrainian and pro-Russian forces routinely accuse each other of violating the ceasefire, with tensions most recently flaring in August and September of 2021.⁴⁹ The UN overwhelmingly condemned the annexation of Crimea in 2014 by adopting A/RES/68/262, *Territorial Integrity of Ukraine*.⁵⁰ The SC, however, has not passed any resolutions on the topic, with draft resolutions on Crimea being vetoed by the Russian Federation.⁵¹

³³ North Atlantic Treaty Organization. "A Short History of NATO," 2021,

https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/declassified_139339.htm. (Accessed July 17, 2021.)

³⁴ North Atlantic Treaty Organization, "Enlargement," May 5, 2020, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_49212.htm. (Accessed July 17, 2021.)

³⁵ North Atlantic Treaty Organization, "Enlargement."

³⁶ North Atlantic Treaty Organization, "Enlargement."

³⁷ Getmanchuk, Alyona, et al., "Strengthening ties between NATO, Ukraine and Georgia," *Atlantic Council*, 2020, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/strengthening-ties-between-nato-ukraine-and-georgia/>. (Accessed September 20, 2021.)

³⁸ Getmanchuk, Alyona, et al., "Strengthening ties between NATO, Ukraine and Georgia."

³⁹ Kofman, Michael, et al., "Lessons from Russia's Operations in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine," *Rand Corporation*, 2017, https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR1400/RR1498/RAND_RR1498.pdf. (Accessed July 19, 2021.)

⁴⁰ Kofman, Michael, et al., "Lessons from Russia's Operations in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine."

⁴¹ Center Strategic and International Studies, "Crimea's Strategic Value to Russia," March 18, 2014, <https://www.csis.org/blogs/post-soviet-post/crimeas-strategic-value-russia>. (August 19, 2021.)

⁴² Myers, Steven Lee, and Ellen Barry, "Putin Reclaims Crimea for Russia and Bitterly Denounces the West," *The New York Times*, March 18, 2014, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/19/world/europe/ukraine.html>. (Accessed August 19, 2021.)

⁴³ Peter, Laurence, "Is Russia going to war with Ukraine and other questions," *BBC*, April 13, 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-56720589>. (Accessed August 21, 2021.)

⁴⁴ Peter, Laurence, "Is Russia going to war with Ukraine and other questions."

⁴⁵ Peter, Laurence, "Is Russia going to war with Ukraine and other questions."

⁴⁶ Kofman, Michael, et al., "Lessons from Russia's Operations in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine."

⁴⁷ Kofman, Michael, et al., "Lessons from Russia's Operations in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine."

⁴⁸ Kofman, Michael, et al., "Lessons from Russia's Operations in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine."

⁴⁹ Polityuk, Pavel, "Shelling in eastern Ukraine wounds troops and civilians," *Reuters*, September 8, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/shelling-eastern-ukraine-wounds-troops-civilians-2021-09-09/>. (Accessed September 21, 2021.)

⁵⁰ United Nations General Assembly, Resolution 262, *Territorial Integrity of Ukraine*, A/RES/68/262, April 1, 2014, <https://undocs.org/en/A/RES/68/262>.

⁵¹ United Nations, "UN Security Council action on Crimea referendum blocked," March 15, 2014, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2014/03/464002-un-security-council-action-crimea-referendum-blocked>. (Accessed August 21, 2021.)

Conclusion and Recent Developments

While several post-Soviet states have made attempts to democratize following the dissolution of the USSR, the region is still highly undemocratic, with six Member States considered to be run by authoritarian regimes.⁵² This authoritarian trend is most pronounced in Belarus.⁵³ After the 2020 Belarusian presidential election, opposition candidate Svetlana Tikhanovskaya fled to Lithuania in fear for her safety after disputing the election results as rigged.⁵⁴ Other opposition politicians fled to the neighboring Member States or were arrested by Belarusian forces.⁵⁵ The Belarusian population held political demonstrations and protests against the government of Belarus in response to allegations of election fraud in favor of the incumbent regime.⁵⁶ The government of Belarus used an armed fighter aircraft to ground Ryanair Flight 4978 en route to Lithuania under the pretense of possible bombs on board.⁵⁷ During their investigation of the plane, Belarusian forces arrested opposition journalist Roman Protasevich.⁵⁸ Since the event, the European Union Aviation Safety Agency asked its Member States to not use Belarusian airspace and banned all Belarusian airlines from entering the airspace of European Union Member States.⁵⁹

The slowly deteriorating relations between post-Soviet Member States poses many threats to international stability and territorial integrity of Member States in Eastern Europe. The status quo in the region has proven through the decades to be unstable and prone to conflict. Delegates should consider how their Member State is or could be affected by instability in the post-Soviet region. Delegates should ask: Should the SC commit action to aid in the democratization of the region? Are there measures the SC can take to address ethnic tensions in the region? How can the SC help promote balance between human rights regarding ethnic tensions and the sovereignty of the UN's Member States?

⁵² The Economist Intelligence Unit, "Democracy Index 2020: In Sickness and in Health," *The Economist*, 2021, <https://pages.eiu.com/rs/753-RIQ-438/images/democracy-index-2020.pdf>. (Accessed July 19, 2021.)

⁵³ The Economist Intelligence Unit, "Democracy Index 2020: In Sickness and in Health."

⁵⁴ "Belarus Election: Opposition Leader Tikhanovskaya Left 'for Sake of Her Children'." *BBC*, August 12, 2020. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-53733330>. (Accessed August 21, 2021.)

⁵⁵ Troianovski, Anton, and Ivan Nechepurenko. "Belarus Forces Down Plane to Seize Dissident; Europe Sees 'State Hijacking.'" *The New York Times*, May 23, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/05/23/world/europe/ryanair-belarus.html>. (Accessed July 18, 2021)

⁵⁶ Troianovski, Anton, and Ivan Nechepurenko, "Belarus Forces Down Plane to Seize Dissident; Europe Sees 'State Hijacking.'"

⁵⁷ Troianovski, Anton, and Ivan Nechepurenko, "Belarus Forces Down Plane to Seize Dissident; Europe Sees 'State Hijacking.'"

⁵⁸ Troianovski, Anton, and Ivan Nechepurenko, "Belarus Forces Down Plane to Seize Dissident; Europe Sees 'State Hijacking.'"

⁵⁹ Troianovski, Anton, and Ivan Nechepurenko, "Belarus Forces Down Plane to Seize Dissident; Europe Sees 'State Hijacking.'"