Conclusion: Reflections on the Origins and Fate of New Thinking

> Even a dyed-in-the-wool materialist would have to agree that "In the beginning was the Word," the suggestion. . . the idea.
>
> —Leonid Kornilov, *Lenoid Il'ich ne znal, chto zapuskaet mekhanizm perestroiki*

This book began with a review of the dangerous state of superpower relations in the early 1980s. So rapidly and completely did Gorbachev transform those relations that what might have been has faded from memory, and what did occur has taken on near-inevitability in hindsight, a deterministic bias that pervades even some serious analyses in subtle ways. So it is useful to reflect on where the paths not taken in 1985 could have led.[1] Between continuing the status quo (a path whose support was dwindling) or making a sharp reactionary turn (with its obviously perilous implications for a very different ending to the cold war) there was a third, and perhaps most likely, option of resuming the modest changes initiated by Andropov in 1982–83. Domestically, various streamlining and anticorruption measures could have slowed decline and prolonged the life of the old system well into the next century. Internationally, the USSR might have quit Afghanistan and ceded other contests in the third world—but surely not so easily as it did—while a precarious nuclear confrontation would likely continue.[2] In this scenario, the Soviet condition, at best, might today resemble a protracted "Ottoman-style" imperial retreat, with dissent, repression, and eventually rebellion erupting in Eastern Europe and perhaps the Caucasus and the Baltics as well. At worst, a more defiant USSR might only now be entering its terminal crisis, which could see it stumble into conflicts with Turkey or China

abroad, with an ultimately swift but violent "Romanian-style" finale awaiting it at home. And Romania, of course, possessed neither an international empire nor a global, nuclear arsenal.[3]

Thus, perhaps ironically for a study stressing the importance of intellectual change, I begin by affirming that the pessimistic expectations some realist, power-centered analyses were well-founded. Those that foresaw the likelihood of a conflictual resolution to the dilemma of Soviet international decline were in fact correct.[4] Their failing lay, rather, in an inability to foresee, or contribute much to understanding, how ideas and leadership could combine to overcome these difficult odds. Without appreciation of the complex sources of intellectual and social change that nurtured the steady rise of a "Westernizing" identity among a diverse policy-academic elite, the process by which its ideas managed to capture an innovative leader and help propel a remarkable series of foreign (and domestic) reforms is simply incomprehensible. To reiterate, decline played a minor role in the long-term rise of new thinking and a major one in catalyzing the change that brought it to power. But that change could easily have gone in a very different direction; that it did not was thanks to an earlier intellectual transformation whose origins lie largely beyond the reach of materialist, international-level explanations.

Nor have most attempts to integrate domestic-level factors—modified realist or neoliberal-institutionalist—been much more successful in explaining the triumph of new thinking. A prominent example of the former, Snyder's "defensive realist" interpretation of Soviet overextension, details well the forces that stood for continuity of a hostile international posture (and its supporting ideological "myths") through powerful military-industrial interests. But the forces that ultimately produced change remain vague, and their influence undemonstrated.[5] Economic necessity, foreign-policy failures, and a growing intelligentsia are all cited. But *what* economic necessity and *which* policy failures? To repeat the question that neorealism cannot answer, why not 10 years earlier, or 10 years later? The difference in the 1980s apparently lay in Gorbachev's "successful learning about grand strategy."[6] But how and when this learning occurred—particularly the intelligentsia's beliefs and Gorbachev's ties to this admittedly key "constituency"—are addressed only briefly, and not without the inevitability of hind-

sight. Yet by their own recourse to learning and leadership, such arguments themselves suggest that ideas were indeed more than epiphenomenal, and that Gorbachev's new thinking was not merely a rationalization of the inevitable.

The interplay of ideas and leadership are examined much more closely in the noted works of Mendelson and Checkel. The former, an invaluable study of Soviet policy making in the invasion, occupation, and eventual withdrawal from Afghanistan, faults both power-centered and learning-based explanations in stressing, instead, the *process* of mobilization for major policy change.[7] But the centrality of politics notwithstanding, the decline of Soviet power over the decade under review—and consequent difficulty in sustaining global confrontation—was manifestly more significant than that revealed in a focus on just one aspect of the confrontation. And so was learning; though downplayed as a causal variable, ideas are in fact central to her model in that they constituted the very expertise of the "expert communities" (and the source of their influence over Gorbachev, via a reformist agenda of which Afghanistan was just one part) whose "empowerment" is given primary emphasis.

Checkel considers the new thinking more broadly, and so goes rather further, in capturing the new thinkers as a larger group of specialists concerned with a wider array of interconnected foreign-policy problems. But his approach—a policy "windows" and "entrepreneurs" model—leads to emphasis on divergent institutional interests when common ideological interests were even more salient, particularly in the new thinking's critical earlier development.[8] It was during this earlier development, about which Checkel, too, has much less to say, that enterprising reformers pioneered the most important ideological innovations—often *against* their institutional and personal interests.

Both of the above approaches, notwithstanding efforts "to capture the full array of factors affecting a complex process of change," essentially take the existence of reformist ideas for granted;[9] both contribute less to understanding such ideas' origins than they do to analyzing their implementation.

By contrast, it is approaches that privilege the normative over the instrumental aspects of ideas that better capture the nature of new thinking as a long-term intellectual phenomenon as well as the contingencies of its near-term influence over leadership.[10] For

example, rather than viewing détente as a time when Moscow foreign-policy analysts were imbued with confidence about Soviet power and its prospects in global rivalry with the United States, Risse-Kappen emphasizes instead a period of specialists' cooperation with their Western counterparts that facilitated the transnational diffusion of liberal ideas about global security.[11] Evangelista, focusing closely on Soviet scientists and other arms-control experts, traces important steps in this process back more than a decade earlier.[12] And Herman, taking the wider view of a community of liberal-Westernizing reformers, argues for reconceptualizing this process as a fundamental transformation in identity.[13] My attempt to build on these pioneering efforts has led in two directions: first back, to an even earlier and broader understanding of that community and the sources of liberalizing intellectual change; and then forward, to demonstrate as concretely as possible its real influence on the Gorbachev leadership.

But even if I have succeeded in showing that long-term intellectual and social (even cultural) change was a decisive factor in when and how the cold war ended, so what? What does it contribute to the broader theoretical and methodological concerns of the study of international relations? Many scholars committed to general theory building, through the application of deductively derived hypotheses over multiple cases, argue that an empirically driven, single-case study contributes little to that enterprise. In response, I would raise several points.[14] The first is that such a clearly inductive study offers an important test of deductive hypotheses. If we are concerned about the validity of theory, we must then also be concerned about more than just plausibility or general consistency with long-term outcomes. Tests of postulated causal mechanisms are essential if theory is to contribute to a progressive research program, generating useful hypotheses and even offering some predictive value. In other words, it is not only important that a theory "get it right," but that it do so for the right reasons.[15] Admittedly, the in-depth, single-case study can usually trump multiple-case, parsimony-seeking analyses in the particulars, and the cause of scholarly progress is ill-served by "empirical ad hocism."[16] But the other extreme—dismissing close, inductive empirical analysis as "mere history"—is equally unproductive and parochial.

Such either/or arguments on the lessons of the cold war's

end—often posing stark contrasts between international-structural-material and domestic-ideational-cultural factors—are now yielding to more fruitful interaction between different types of analysis.[17] Wohlforth, a "neoclassical" realist whose state-of-the-debate critique is probably the most trenchant and constructive to date, argues for both greater theoretical precision and better empirical research.[18] His own analysis of great-power decline is filtered through the lens of leaders' and elites' perceptions—and one with which, ultimately, my main disagreement in interpreting the cold war *finale* is over the relative weighting of material and ideational factors.[19] But having admitted such domestic-level variables as elite perceptions, intelligentsia beliefs, or specialists' expertise into their models, neither neorealists nor neoliberals can avoid the necessity of exploring, in much greater detail than we have yet seen, the sources of those perceptions, beliefs, and expertise.[20] Without such investigation, theory remains limited to mere plausibility, and its relevance largely restricted to the cold war's endgame.

But beyond modifying well-established neorealist and neoliberal models, a second and perhaps more important contribution of the elites-identity framework is to an understanding of the broader relevance of ideas in political change. Many questions need study: on the interplay of domestic and international sources of ideas, on the impact of cultural-historical as well as institutional factors, and above all on the social dimensions of intellectual change and ideological innovation.[21] Strict constructivists may view the case of new thinking as a contribution to general theory on the role of beliefs, norms, and identity in broad political-historical change. Caution is in order here, too, for just as we have seen how neoliberal-institutional models derived from Western political experience can obscure as much as they reveal when applied in contexts as different as the Soviet political system before perestroika, so, too, with ideational models of large-scale international change.[22]

Still, at a minimum, the case of Soviet new thinking suggests some directions for middle-range theorizing about the processes of political liberalization and international opening in other dictatorial systems and ideologized polities.[23] Following on the examples noted in the introduction, fruitful comparisons are suggested with cases of democratic transition in Latin America (where key elite-intellectual congregations and foreign reference groups played an

apparently similar role), or with contemporary China (where a once-terrorized society and isolationist party dictatorship are undergoing wrenching reforms, with a xenophobic ideology challenged by a Western-influenced and global-oriented intellectual elite).[24] The potential of such study for linking the domestic and international levels of analysis is great.[25]

And in all such cases, the methodological-empirical injunction is particularly important. By definition, closed-dictatorial systems yield their (and their societies') secrets only grudgingly, and informal intellectuals' groupings and closed-door debates are, by their very nature, especially difficult to reconstruct. But that hardly makes them less important than other, more easily accessible types of evidence. As Herrmann argues, "Logic will not substitute for evidence. Rigorous data analysis cannot replace careful data collection, which requires both area expertise and attention to contextual assumptions."[26] Such research makes it possible to explore causation and not just correlation, and to gain much-needed insight into the complex intersection of material and intellectual forces. Drawing on cases of political reform in southern Europe and in Latin America, Bermeo stresses that beliefs and values

> emerge from earthly experiences and earthly observations in identifiable situations and institutions. Using biographical and historical sources to reconstruct what key elites observed and experienced can enable us to understand when political learning takes place and why it takes a particular form.[27]

Finally, on the lessons of new thinking for post-Soviet Russia. The myriad changes that the country has undergone since 1991 have been deeply traumatic and, for many observers, the bright but brief flowering of Westernizing ideas and policies now seems a distant, increasingly irrelevant or even aberrant episode. A period of gradual reestrangement from the West has now lasted longer than that of perestroika's rapid rapprochement, with strains in these relations steadily worsening in tandem with Russia's deepening economic crisis. By 1999, tensions over issues from IMF policy and ties with Iran to NATO expansion and crisis in Kosovo-Serbia had reached an intensity that made Yeltsin's earlier characterization of an emergent "cold peace" seem an understatement. Official anti-American voices had grown louder than at any time since the early 1980s, while

elite (and, by some reports, popular) anti-Western, Russian nationalist sentiments were more widespread than they had been in decades. To place these events in some broader context—including that of this study's findings—several observations should be made.

First, the resurgence of a Russian national "neo-Slavophile" current should come as no surprise. As I have frequently emphasized, the "neo-Westernizing" political-philosophical current was always in a minority—even among Soviet intellectuals, much less educated society more broadly, and certainly among the general public.[28] It came to power thanks to a confluence of domestic and international changes that—together with the force of its ideas and the unity of its advocates—gave it unique influence over an innovative leader. Thus even in the best of circumstances, it was to be expected that democratization, the inclusion of these other voices and opinions in the political process, would temper the "extremes" of the conciliatory-integrationist policies that ended the cold war.[29] And circumstances, to put it mildly, have not been the best.

Widespread poverty and immiseration, an arrogant oligarchy presiding over rampant corruption, and collapsing systems of health, education, and welfare—these are the fruits of Russia's market experiment for most ordinary citizens. Many educated Russians, at least those with the time and means for reflection, see even worse—a humiliated former superpower for whom the tragedy of vanished international prestige is now supplanted by the specter of an already truncated state's internal fracturing. Even those still admiring of the West, and faulting primarily their own leaders for Russia's catastrophe, naturally question the efficacy of some Western models (and the prescriptions tied to much Western aid) in the Russian political-cultural context. And everywhere there is enormous gloom, disappointment, and resentment at expectations falsely raised and promises long unfulfilled (As in the last century, many were enamored of a West that was "more imaginary than real").[30] In this context, skepticism of "alien" models and a turn toward "native" Russian values is hardly surprising. The wonder, perhaps, is why Russian opinion and Russian policies have not turned more sharply anti-Western.

Because, in fact, they have not. For all the rhetorical excesses of some Russian officials, Russia's international behavior has generally been responsible and cooperative. For all the anti-Western fury of

some intellectuals, educated opinion remains broadly committed to liberal values and acceptance as a "normal" Western state. And for all their suffering in the national humiliation and immiseration in which they perceive Western leaders as complicit, ordinary Russians remain surprisingly well disposed toward Western peoples and societies. As always, it is tempting to conflate attitudes critical of certain Western policies with attitudes of deeper anti-Westernism. And as usual, the vitriol of a vocal minority gains disproportionate attention. Russian policy makers, too, pander to these minorities, and play on wounded national pride, for political gain. Still, given Western and especially U.S. policies that sometimes seem almost calculated to offend Russian dignity and interests (most notably NATO expansion, but also threatened abrogation of the ABM treaty, discriminatory trade practices, and a whole host of other issues), Russia's perseverance has been remarkable. It is this not-unreasonable perspective—that *the West has rejected them*, and not the reverse, with thoughtful Russians still desiring meaningful integration and genuine partnership—that is either absent or underemphasized in most recent commentary.[31]

Again, the elites-identity framework is helpful in understanding the continuity as well as change in a broadly Western orientation, and in avoiding the interpretive extremes that have been so evident. For if the new thinking was built on a generation-long process of transformation in fundamental beliefs and values, followed by a decade-long period of glasnost and international openness, then it is not something that should vanish so rapidly even in the face of enormous difficulties (any more than did the old thinking, which endured over two decades of "disconfirming experience"). Certainly, as a transformation driven primarily by intellectuals, it is significant that many of the new thinking's pioneers have left the scene. Some have died (notably, just among those interviewed for this study, historians Gefter and Edelman, commentator Karpinsky, philosopher Mamardashvili, economists Shatalin and Tikhonov, political scientist Zamoshkin, and ethnographer-politician Starovoitova), while others have retired or otherwise lost political influence in Russia (Gorbachev, Shevardnadze, Yakovlev, Arbatov, Bogomolov, Kozyrev, Aganbegyan, Zaslavskaya, Sagdeev). Among those that remain prominent, most are considered to have migrated from the camp of the liberal new thinkers to that of the realist

"state-builders" (*derzhavniki*) concerned primarily with Russia's status and influence as a great power. The latter include economist Grigory Yavlinsky, parliamentary foreign-policy experts Vladimir Lukin and Alexei Arbatov, and the former foreign minister and prime minister Yevgeny Primakov.

This categorization flows from the now-familiar typology of contemporary Russian foreign-policy opinion as consisting of three main groups: Westernizing liberals, great-power statists, and anti-Western nationalists. While perhaps a useful shorthand for making sense of today's political debates, this typology is less helpful in gaining a deeper understanding of how Russian international-relations thought has evolved since 1991. This is so, in part, because it suggests a clear distinction between the first two groups, when in fact their differences are not really so sharp and their similarities are probably even more salient. Like the Westernizers, the statists want to see Russia as a "normal" member of the liberal international order. The circumstances of Russia's crises—particular threats to the integrity of the federation as well as an emergent "arc of instability" stretching from Central Asia to the Caucasus—are seen as necessitating reassertion of Russian influence in the region. Similarly, economic needs coupled with the understandable desire to continue playing a prominent role in major international issues lie behind the ties with Iran and other "pariah" states that many anti-Russian voices in the West find so troubling. The same desire—not some supposed resurgent cultural-historical imperative—has much to do with Russia's policy in the Balkans (see below). For all the rhetoric about a "Eurasian" political-cultural orientation, it is clear that a majority of statists seek recognition of Russia as a member of the European or Western club of great powers.[32] Its course may have shifted disappointingly since 1991, and Russia may presently be foundering on its shoals, but evidence is strong that most thoughtful Russians still seek inclusion in "the common stream of world civilization."[33]

But proceding from a near-caricature of the new thinkers as naive idealists,[34] many realist analysts miss this underlying continuity between liberal-Westernizing and statist-great power thought. Thus they insist on an either/or distinction in rejecting—according to their theoretical precepts—the apparent contradiction of a realist-like defense of national interests being driven by liberal ideals. And they

make an even more fundamental mistake in claiming that a more assertive, "realist" line in Russian foreign policy *since* the cold war's end somehow invalidates "idealist" or ideational arguments about *how* the cold war ended.[35] Both material and intellectual factors were important before 1991, and both remain so after. And no account that emphasizes one to the near-exclusion of the other—or that overlooks the ever-growing salience of domestic politics—can be satisfactory.

In this new calculus of Russian foreign–policy making, the importance of understanding the role of not just ideas per se, but of *identity*, also remains. This is seen in a final illustration regarding the international problem that, as of this writing, found Russia and the West at most serious odds—the crisis in Kosovo-Yugoslavia. How to interpret Moscow's support of Serbia? Given that Russia's economic and geostrategic interests in the region are negligible, it would appear from the realist perspective to be a particularly odd choice of issue upon which to have taken a stance that, since 1993, has cost Russia so much in international influence and prestige. A domestic-politics perspective finds the answer in a democratized Russia's foreign relations necessarily reflecting broad attitudes of sympathy for their "orthodox brethren" and "historic allies" in Serbia. But such arguments based on cultural-historical continuity forget the fact that Russia's prerevolutionary foreign policy was motivated overwhelmingly by autocratic-imperial interests (which led to more frequent "betrayal" than support of Serbia); they also overlook the intervening Soviet decades during which Yugoslavia (with only brief exceptions) was widely demonized.[36] As recently as 1989, on the eve of Yugoslavia's collapse, popular attitudes were governed by general ignorance of the Balkans, while most elites perceived Yugoslavia as politically, economically, and even culturally part of the West.

Yet the dominant perception in today's Russia *is* very different, and the explanation of this rapid change—and the policies that have flowed from it—lies in appreciation of the domestic politics of national identity since perestroika. It was probably inevitable, as argued above, that the difficulties of Russia's latest attempt at rapid Westernization would lead many back to a search for meaning and identity in "traditional" Russian beliefs and values. What was *not* inevitable was the triumph of one or another, often tendentious, interpretation of those historical traditions. What a closer examina-

tion of recent Russian attitudes toward the Balkans reveals is a fairly contingent process in which a minority of nationalist intellectuals and publicists effectively filled a broad vacuum of knowledge and understanding with their particular, highly distorted, interpretation of past and present events—the myth of a centuries-old alliance with Russia's Orthodox "Serbian brethren."[37] Liberal intellectuals, discredited by the difficulties of Westernization and defensively seeking to buttress their own "patriotic" credentials, were frequently silent or even complicit in what, during its early stages, seemed a modest concession to the nationalists, unlikely to produce such tragic consequences for both the peoples of Yugoslavia and for Russia's international prestige.[38] With identity in flux, the "secular priesthood" of the national idea—by omission as well as commission—succeeded magnificently in creating a largely "invented tradition." Then, with the escalation of the Kosovo crisis to the bombing of Serbia, that issue was suddenly, directly, yoked to another, one about which Russian liberals *were* genuinely and deeply concerned: the expansion of NATO.[39]

It is noteworthy that much recent scholarship on post-Soviet politics has turned to an explicit focus on the importance of identities in transition.[40] This is only to be welcomed, even if much of it is simply driven by Russians' and other former Soviet nationalities' own near-obsessive emphasis on identity.[41] Understandably, for a people that historically has lacked a strong sense of itself apart from its empire, analysts across the political spectrum debate the path to a unifying "national idea." But interpreting these debates without a critical comparative-theoretical perspective presents several hazards. One is treating contemporary Russian events as sui generis, with an accompanying tendency to slip into historical-cultural determinism. On the other extreme is the danger of repeating the error of much earlier Sovietology in treating 1991—like 1917—as a *stunde null,* or clear break with the past.[42] For if there is any overriding lesson from the case of new thinking for understanding contemporary Russian debates over identity, the "national idea," and the country's place in world civilization, it is for judicious appreciation of both material and ideational forces.

The pressures of the international system are powerful, but not determinant, while politics remains a fluid and contingent process.

Culture changes only slowly, yet change it does. Identity is not infinitely malleable, but it is significantly so. And within this matrix of forces, particularly in a time of large-scale socioeconomic transformation, the importance of intellectual innovation and enlightened leadership is as great as ever. So far, in the post-Gorbachev era, such leadership has been notably lacking—and not only in Russia. Its continued absence, or reassertion, will be critical in determining the fate of Russia's beleaguered Westernizers for decades to come.