

**THE FORMER SOVIET REPUBLICS :
CONSTITUTIONALISM AND THE NATIONALITY
POLICIES**

by

Dr. M. M. Ahsan Khan

Introduction

The Soviet Union occupied one-sixth of the land surface of the globe and its territories were inhabited by more than 100 nationalities and ethnic groups. The nationality problem in the Soviet Union had always been of high gravities and complexities. By adopting Socialism as the state ideology the founders of the Soviet Union and the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) wanted to unify all nationalities and ethnic groups of the state, and to rise above and gloss over religious, national, ethnic and other differences. The Communist Party was used as a militant vanguard of the Soviet State and people irrespective of their national, cultural and religious origin.¹ Apart from the rule of the Russian communists, the Stalinist rule and the extreme totalitarian regimented system had played a major role in suppressing all national uprisings, and their rights of self determination were ignored. The socialist ideals and communism were given all the credit in keeping "unprecedented" harmony among the Soviet nationalities. For an outsider it was really a fantasy

-
1. It should be remembered that the number of the Soviet Communists were considerably less than one per cent of the total population during the early years of the Soviet rule and the overwhelming majority of the communists belonged to the Russian Nationality. See, Donald D. Barry, Carol Darner Barry, *Contemporary Soviet politics : An Introduction, London, p. 102* (1978). The latest statistics show that 58 per cent of the Soviet Communists were from the Russian Federation and 60 per cent of the four thousand seven hundred delegates of the 28th party congress held in July 1990 came from Russia alone. A good number of Russian Communists resided in all other fourteen non-Russian Republics. Thus the proportion of the Russian Communists in the CPSU were well above 70 per cent, while the Russian proportion in the total Soviet population constituted about 50 per cent.

to observe that the national feelings had been replaced by the proletariat internationalism or feelings of *novy Sovetsky chelavek* (new Soviet people).

Gorbachev era came out with a great surprise telling the entire world that the nationality problem were not solved but suppressed. When Gorbachev himself admitted the graveness of nationality problems, then probably no one could try anymore to see the hands of Western or Muslim anti-communist propaganda in them.² Ethnic and nationality conflicts and violence sweeping across the different Soviet republics were of great concern for many quarters. This violence had been taken as a part of Gorbachev phenomenon by many observers. Many analysts and observers are greatly perturbed and seriously concerned about the state of nationality conflicts in the former Soviet Union causing the deaths of thousands of innocent people including old, women and children. At present though the western states are mainly concerned with the deep economic crisis and territorial integrity of some of the former Soviet Republics, yet nationality issues are still a bewildering phenomenon for many quarters.

The failure to resolve the nationality problems will not only portend disintegration of some of the former Soviet republics including the Russian Federation, but also may appear as a difficult obstacle to overcome mounting economic crisis. Abandoning the obsolete communist ideals and the monopoly of the CPSU on power, the Gorbachev era was suppose to create new binding forces among the former Soviet republics, as the previous mechanism and dynamics of the relationship among the different nationalities were destroyed completely. The total failure of the Gorbachev era in handling the nationality problems quickly gave birth to fifteen sovereign states in the territories of the former Soviet Union. In this context some pertinent questions need to be answered. How Moscow would maintain the territorial integrity of the Russian Federation and the

2. In the past, discussions on nationality problems of the Soviet Union were being taken as the anti -Communist propaganda. See for details : V. Zaglagina, Ye Pankova, O. Reingolda (eds), *Krizis Strategie Sovieremennoye Antikommunizma*, Moscow : P. 33,34, 176 (1984).

ascendancy of the Russians over other fourteen newly independent states? Is any new demarcation needed or possible among these fifteen sovereign states? What would be the ultimate reaction of the millions of Russians living outside the Russian Federation? What would be the fate of secessionist or nationalist movements led by the non-Russian nationalities in different parts of the Russian Federation? Does dismantlement of the Soviet Union have any serious longlasting impact on nationalist movements striving for independent states? Is it merely a crisis of socialist ideology or a crisis of federalism experiencing similar tendencies in all other big federal states? This paper is an attempt to address some of these questions.

Nationality problem in Russia : Historical Perspective

In the second half of the 19th century the Russian colonial expansion was so quick and dramatic that all the neighbouring non-Russian nationalities both inside and outside the Empire had to succumb to the irresistible ascendancy of the Russians. The Russian Empire turned into the third largest Empire after the British and Mughal Empires in the entire human civilization.³ But the expansion of the Russian Empire was not always driven by economic causes; it was first and foremost a military occupation by the Russians of the territories inhabited by the other nationalities to fulfill the hegemonic ambitions of the Russian Nationalism.

The Russian occupation over many regions did not prove to be justified economically, rather it tended to appear an economic burden for the Empire. In the absence of modern technology, a shortage of capital for investment and because of inadequate infrastructure the Russians failed to derive economic benefit from her colonies. Maintenance of big colonial apparatus and army itself appeared to be a heavy burden for the Tsarist regime.⁴ During the late years of the 19th century and the early years of the 20th century the Empire was

3. See for details : Michael Rywlin (ed) *Russian Colonial Expansion to 1917*, London, P.1-7, 235-256-. (1988).

4. James Bryce, *Transcaucasia and Ararat*: London, p 116, 117 (1977).

heading towards a deep economic and political crisis. The Russian revolution of 1905-07 was the outcome of socio-political and economic crisis of the Empire. ⁵ Though the **status quo** of the Empire was seriously endangered by that revolution, the Tsarist regime, however, prevailed with some liberalized policies. Along with the Russians, the non-Russian nationalities were also benefited by the post revolutionary relaxation of its earlier regimentation. ⁶

In the wake of the world war I many nationalities, previously suppressed by the Tsarist regime, began to voice their distinct national identities. ⁷ After the October Revolution one after another nationality expressed their firm determination to achieve their sovereign states. ⁸ For Lenin this nationality problem was not a novelty. Even before the October Revolution Lenin himself had been trying hard to unite proletariats of different European countries on various issues and found Marxist stances on nationalism and internationalism utterly ineffective. ⁹ In a bid to seek an accommodation for all nationalities, previously ruled by the Tsars, Lenin initially expressed the idea of a close alliance of all peoples of the Empire and advised the Russians that "they should make it possible for all other nations without exception freely to decide whether they wish to live as separate state, or in Union with whomsoever they please." ¹⁰ But he insisted that it would be better for the Russians and non-Russians alike to form a new Russia as a

-
5. I. A. Fedosovalev, *Istoria SSSR, XIX-Nachalo XXB*. London, P. 4-16, 299-304, (1981).
 6. See, Vladimir Molchanov, *Consuelo Sequeral, I am Free to Believe*, Moscow, p. 34-37, (1983).
 7. See, S. Alexeyev, V. Kartsov, A. Troiesky, *A Short History of the USSR : A Popular Outline*, Moscow, p. 75-87 (1981).
 8. See, Shirin Akiner, *Islamic Peoples of the Soviet Union*, London, p. 59, 71, 79, 329. (1986).
 9. See, Mizanur Raman Khan, *Changing Faces of Socialism*, BISS papers No. 9. Dhaka, p. 13 (1989)
 10. V. I. Lenin, *Mandate to Deputies of the Soviet Elected at Factories and Regiments*, *Collected Works*, Vol. 24 Moscow, : p. 355. (1974).

union of free republics. ¹¹ Lenin argued that if the major nationalities were allowed to have their own republics with all distinct territorial and constitutional identities within a Socialist Federation, they would see enough reasons to remain under the Bolshevik state. ¹² Lenin expressed his readiness to recognize the right of secession of non-Russian nationalities at any time in the case of their genuine will. His arguments found expression in the decree on Nationality adopted in the very early days of the Bolshevik regime. ¹³

A federal system or any such an arrangement was completely foreign to the Marxist doctrine. But the Russians justified it the ground that : "we work solely from the fact that during and after the October Revolution federation was accepted as an exception from the general rule, owing to the specific circumstances in which Russia found itself and which were marked by an intensification of national strife and political fragmentation."¹⁴

The Soviets, however, tried to put a Marxist facade on these affairs. They admitted the presence of fierce struggle by the different nationalities against the Bolshevik regime, but only blamed the Bourgeois sections of those nationalities.¹⁵ Similarly the Bolsheviks claimed that their government maintained the territorial integrity of the Soviet Union with the help of the fraternal aid and support of different nationalities and according to them such cooperation was possible because of their ideological commitments and affiliation. ¹⁶ Thus they tried to highlight the efficacy of marxism and downplay the role of the

11. V. I. Lenin, *First All-Russian Congress of Soviets of Workers and Soldiers Deputies*, June 3-14, June 16-July 7, 1917 *Collected Works*, Vol. 25-37, Moscow, pp. (1974).

12. See for details: B. N. Ponomarev (ed) *A Short History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union*, Moscow : p. 205-208 : (1974); Victor Shevtsov, *The State and Nations in the USSR*, Moscow, p. 46-52. (1982).

13. *Obrazovanie i Razbitie Souza Sovetskikh Sotsialisticheskikh Respublik v Dokumentakh*, Moscow: p. 89-91 (1973).

14. Victor Shevtsov, op. cit. p. 47.

15. Ibid, p. 45.

16. Ibid, p. 79-83, B.N. Ponomarev (ed), op. cit. p. 208.

Red Army and the dominating position of the Russians and communists.

Despite pragmatic policy showed by Moscow towards the nationality problem, different nationalities maintained their stubborn refusal to accommodate themselves in the Bolshevik state. Lenin showed further political realism when he accorded independence to Finland and Turkish Armenia. Though Lenin hesitated for about two years, finally in 1920 he recognized the independence of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. However, the generosity to the nationality problem showed by Lenin must not be overemphasized. Lenin was indulgent to those nationalities where there were threat from external powers being involved in the secession movement.¹⁷ Many nationalities continued their struggle for their right of self determination and Lenin expressed his exasperation at the late years of his life.¹⁸ However, he tried to salvage the problem by preaching peaceful co-existence of different nationalities in a proletariat state. At the time of the 1st All-Union Congress of the Soviets in December 1922 Lenin reiterated his plan for the voluntary unification of equal

17. Formally the Council of people's Commissars of the RSFSR issued a decree recognising the independence of Estonia on December 7, 1918 and similar acts were adopted on December 22, 1918 with respect to Latvia and Lithuania. But in reality such decrees or acts meant very little until Lenin was compelled to recognise their sovereignty in 1920 because of the fear of direct involvement of other European forces in the Baltic affairs. On January 31, 1919 the Presidium of the Central Executive Committee of the Bolshevik party adopted a decision recognising the independence of Byelorussia. But the decision was not materialised as there were no fear from outside intervention. The Bolshevik government also granted independence to the Emirate of Bukhara and the Khiva khanate. But as soon as the Bolsheviks succeeded to neutralize Iran and Afganistan, these territories were also incorporated with the Soviet Union. See for details : M. M. Ahsan Khan, Soviet -Afghan relation : Security and Religious dimensions, In : *BHSS Journal*, Vol. 11 No. 2, Dhaka, p. 245-246 (1990).

18. Lenin warned his fellow communists and party leaders by saying. "I think that our colleagues did not give sufficient attention to the very important principal question." Here by "important principal" Lenin meant the nationality problem. In V. I. Lenin, *Poslednie Pisma i statii*. Moscow, p. 17 (1981).

Soviet republics in the Soviet Union.¹⁹ As a result officially the USSR was formed and Lenin stressed that along with Russian Federation, the largest republic, non-Russian republics should enjoy equal status and rights within the Soviet Socialist Federation. Thus he visualized that if the smaller nationalities were given status at par with the Russian Republic, tension would be minimized among the nations. This principle was incorporated in the Soviet constitution of 1924 as the basis of the Soviet Federation.²⁰

Stalin opposed to such a federation recognizing such overt national identity; he wanted a strong unitary form of socialist government transcending all national peculiarities.²¹ However, when he came to the helm of the Soviet affairs he did not challenge Leninist arrangements, but accepted the federation more from administrative convenience than from nationality identity perspective. For that purpose Stalin spilled some non-Russian republics into pieces and also created more Autonomous republics. For example, in 1929 the territory of the then Uzbekistan was divided into Uzbek and Tajik Republics. In 1939 the Kazakh ASSR and Kirghiz ASSR were given the status of union republics. By 1936 the number of Soviet republics reached eleven. Under Stalin aspiration of the smaller nationalities tended to be frustrated to the extent of endangering their nominal existence. Main beneficiary from such arrangement was the Russian nation, already they had the prepondering interests in the federation. Stalinism further reinforced their privileged position.

19. A.K. Vonrosu, O. Natsionalnostyaka ili ob "avtonomizatsii" In : V. I. Lenin, *Izbrannys Proizvedenia V. Trekh Tomakh*. Vol. 3, Moscow : p. 700-705. (1980).

20. See for details : P. N. Fedoseeva (ed), *The Fundamental Law of the USSR*, Moscow : p.10-11 (1980).

21. In fact any sort of liberal federal system was not acceptable to the very of the authoritarian leadership of Stalin. Lenin was very much aware of the dictatorial attitude of Stalin and wrote, "Stalin is too rude and this defect, although quite tolerable in our midst and in dealings among us Communists become intolerable in a Secretary-General. That is why I suggest that the comrades think about a way of removing Stalin from that post" In : V. I. Lenin, *Problems of Building Socialism: Communism in the USSR*, Moscow : p. 68. (1984)

Stalin soon resorted to a policy of ruthless extermination of nationalists trying to be recalcitrant. However, he slackened his grips over them in his bid to seek support to the war effort during the world war II.²² But that was short lived, so he reverted to his well known "blood and Iron policy". During world war II Stalin incorporated the Baltic Republics, soviet western Ukraine and a part of Rumanian territory neighboring with the then Autonomous Republic of Moldavia. Together with the occupied Rumanian territory Moldavia was given the status of a Union Republic. Thus number of the Union Republics reached to fifteen. All nationalities living under Soviet rule by then have resigned to the Russian domination and socialist regimentation as their final destiny. After the death of Stalin a soft critical attitude of the CPSU to the Stalin era did not change the character of nationality policy. But gradually different non-Russian nationalities, sub-nationalities and ethnic groups began to be assertive in their respective republics, autonomous-republics and regions. The nationalists took care not to be overt, rather they tried to make their condition better through the proclaimed socialist ideals of equality and fraternity.

Brezhnev probably being conscious of the damage done to the different nationalities tried to compensate them encouraging equal participation of all nationalities in the Communist Party and the state apparatus.²³ All the non-Russian nationalities took it as an advantage to challenge the Russian supremacy in the party and state organs at least in the Union Republic levels. In some republics non-Russians succeeded in capturing many key posts, replacing the Russians.

Being communists and capturing important party and state posts the non-Russian Soviet citizens, not necessarily, helped socialism. By using their power and consolidating their position in the party and

22. See Alexandre Bennigsen ; S. Enders Wimbush, *Muslims of the Soviet Empire : A Guide*. London : p.14-15. (1986) Lean Emin, *Muslims in the USSR*, Moscow, p. 21-23. (1984).

23. Brezhnev's work "Tselina" shows how closely he was familiar with the people and society of Kazakhstan. See for details : L. I. *Brezhnev. Malaya Zemlya, Vozroshdenie, Tselina*, Tash kent (1981)

state organs they rather helped nationalism to revive. It was a sort of secret war of nationalism against socialism.

Thus it is apparent that more than seventy years' of socialist rule could not make the Soviets a unified nation transcending nationality susceptibility. The different non-Russian nationalities not only took entire period of Soviet history negatively, they firmly tended to view Soviet rule as an episod of colonialism and Marxsim, as a ploy to exploit them.²⁴ Article 72 of 1977 constitution stipulated that "Each Union Republic shall retain the right freely to secede from the USSR." But in reality such provision was not meant for implementation and, therefore, the Soviet nationalities had very little confidence in such written constitutional provisions.²⁵

Declaration of Sovereignty by Soviet Republics : Causes and Consequences.

Gorbachev by initiating his *perestroika* and *glasnost* programmes wanted to bring about radical changes in the "Soviet Society". He described his programmes as "a revolution without bullets".²⁶ His new policies primarily meant for economic and political reorganisation for the entire soviet system. But Gorbachev's programmes had its wide ramification in all East European Socialist countries. Socialist system in all East European countries were at bay, giving rise to democratic atmosphere.

Developments in East Europe was a by-product of Gorbachev's era. However he himself made it clear that Moscow was no more interested to keep any satellite Socialist state and criticized

-
24. "Despite the best efforts of communists over 70-odd year's the Soviet Union is not one glorious socialist; it is a collection of 15 dissimilar republics, whose inhabitants use different scripts, worship different gods and owe greater allegiance to local heroes than to Lenin, Stalin or Mikhail Sergeevich Gorbachev", In : *The Economist* June p. 9. (1990).
25. See *Constitution (Fundamental Law) of the Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics*, Adopted at the Seventh (Special) Session of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. Ninth Convocation, on October 7, 1977, Moscow : 29-47 (1982)
26. *Strategic Survey 1989-1990*, London : The International Institute of Strategic Studies. p. 15. (1990).

his predecessors for their expansionist policies. In fact, Gorbachev wanted to get rid of all proclaimed international proletarian responsibilities across the globe, especially through out the Socialist world. Gorbachev felt that the Soviet Economy could no more could bear the liabilities of other countries. Releasing the Socialist countries, Gorbachev thought he would get a freer hand with his internal restructuring programmes.

Leadership in Kremlin was almost ready to allow all the republics to enjoy western type of freedom and democracy and hoped that it would help implement new economic policies successfully and would make peoples enthusiastic in new programmes. Instead of using new opportunities for liberalization of their economic and political system, some of the republics expressed their willingness to have their own independent sovereign states. Three Baltic republics, Georgia and Maldivia were in the forefront of the demand for complete separation from Moscow. But it is pertinent to ask why these republics so hurriedly went for the programmes intending to achieve their complete independence from Moscow?

The Baltic republics were quick in arguing that historically they belong to Western Europe and the capitalist world. Such a prompt reaction on the part of Baltic republics may find several different explanations. But all sorts of explanations have some grounds in common. These three republics were finally incorporated within the Soviet Union immediately after world war II. It means between the years of I and II world wars they enjoyed full freedom recognized by the Bolshevik regime and the Russians.²⁷ Even After world war II Lithuanians waged armed struggle against Moscow for their independence, while fate of the majority of the Soviet Republics had been sealed in 1920s. The very fact that the Baltic Republics were incorporated lately proves their less deeper socialist character and their greater hostility towards Soviet integration.

But the nationalist leaders of the Baltic republics miscalculated several things. Despite their overall loose integration with the

27. The Soviet sources claim that as a result of agreements with Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania signed on September 28, October 5 and October 10 of the year 1939 respectively Moscow received legitimate rights to hold those territories and protect them. See for details : A. A. Gromyko, B. N. Ponomarieva (ed), *Istoria Vneshnei Politiki SSSR 1917-1945 V Dvukh Tomakh*. Vol 1 Moscow, p. 392. (1980).

mainstream of the Soviet Society, they were economically dependent on Moscow. As such there exists no easy way to go back to western economic fold. These three republics are very small and their economic might is very negligible. They occupy an area of 174,000 sq. km. with a population of 8 million. The presence of a large number of Russians in those republics was often ignored. For example, the proportions of the Russian population in Estonia and Latvia are 28 and 33 per cent respectively. Lithuania, of course, is in a far better situation in this respect, where the Russians constitute only 9 per cent of the total population of the republic. This numerical strength of the Lithuanians perhaps led to an early declaration of independence on 11 March, 1990. Great enthusiasm and courage of the Lithuanians quickly encouraged the Latvians and Estonians to follow the same path, without giving much thought of the consequences of their declarations.

Moscow initially tried to accommodate the nationalist movements through negotiations, discussions and public gatherings organized in the capital cities of Baltic republics. Gorbachev himself visited the Baltic republics and tried to convince the Baltic nationalist leaders not to go for secessionist programmes. Failing in all its negotiation attempts to stop the Baltic republics in the process of final declaration of sovereignty, Moscow adopted a policy of total economic blockade.

In the face of economic blockade of Moscow, Lithuania proved to be helpless though initially the Lithuanian leader Vytautas Landsbergis claimed that "until 1944, Lithuania lived on its own products and had a stable economy."²⁸ That might be a matter of pleasure for remembrance, but present reality was completely different. Lithuania was completely dependent on Moscow for its many supplies including oil and gas, and Moscow used to supply them at 25% of their real price.²⁹ Most of the 200 largest industries in Lithuania were controlled by Moscow.³⁰ Over looking the graveness of the problem Landsbergis declared that his intended sovereign

28. *Newsweek*, April 30, 22. (1990).

29. See: *Time*, January 22. (1990).

30. See. *The Economist*, 17-23 March 50. (1990).

republic can "hold out for 100 Years without gas and oil",³¹ But that was simply a rhetoric and Deputy prime Minister of Lithuania Algirdas Brazauskas told the republic's parliament that it would be impossible to survive a blockade for long, warning that unemployment would quickly reach intolerable levels³² and within a short time it was really so.

On June 28, 1990 Lithuanian parliament went for a compromise, suspending its proclamation of sovereignty for 100 days. Though Moscow was not so happy with that temporary moratorium on independence, yet Moscow looked at it favourably and relaxed the blockade and resumed supply of some raw materials to run the factories producing finished products for other Soviet republics. In this tactical compromise both the conflicting parties intended to save their faces at least to their own peoples. On July 19, 1990 Lithuania established its own armed unit and declared a military policy. Such a ploy was done to prove that the Lithuanians did not give up entirely their struggle for complete independence. Strength of independence movements of other two Baltic republics was weaker than Lithuania. These three republics thought that unitedly they might face successfully economic blockade of Moscow. But united efforts failed to bring any favourable result to their side, rather it exposed their helpless condition. On the other hand, since the bloody army crackdown in Baku on January 20, 1990, Gorbachev waited almost a year to use army in Baltic republic. Just before the US attack on Iraq, on January 12 1991, Gorbachev ordered for a similar kind of army crackdown in Lithuania. But bloodshed and casualties were much less than that of Baku. Still this time even the Russian themselves did not endorse such frequent use of force against the non-Russian peoples and many Russians demanded the resignation of Gorbachev.

In general the Russians were in support of peaceful methods for keeping the territorial integrity of the Soviet Union. Declaration of sovereignty by the Russian federation in fact was the greatest deterrent and challenge to all other republics. The Russian Federation occupies three fourth of the former Soviet Union and it is

31. *Newsweek*, April 30, 22. (1990).

32. *Ibid*, p. 23.

inhabited by a little more than half of the total Soviet population and it abundant has valuable natural resources.³³ Previously inter-republic trade and business were governed by the socialist principles and the Russian Federation had to sacrifice both in terms of price and volume in its transactions with smaller and poorer republics. The Russians thought that in the case of their sovereignty over all natural and human resources of the Russian Federation, their country would not only be greatly benefited in its inter-republic trade, it may also can claim billions of dollars from some of the republics for its subsidies previously provided to them.³⁴

The quest for sovereignty by the Baltic republics would have been greatly accelerated if the western world had come with substantial moral and financial support. But the west appeared to act more as an observer of the Baltic scenario than an active champion of the right of self-determination of the subjugated people. The West European countries were busy with the task of accommodating the liberated East European Socialist countries into their orbit, while the Americans were seriously concerned about their influence on European and Middle Eastern affairs in the future.³⁵ Thus no external force was interested to involved in the Soviet Baltic affairs. The Baltic republics achieved their independence depending upon themselves

33. The Russian Federation accounts for 90 per cent of oil output, 70 per cent of gas output, 70 per cent of hard-coal production, 58 per cent of steel, 81 per cent of timber, 60 per cent of cement of total Soviet output. See for details: USSR Yearbook 1988 (Moscow. p. 116-117 (1988). *Newsweek* June 11, p.28. (1990).

34. Gorbachev himself demanding hundreds of billions rubles says : "In the case of a divorce, it is not important whether the marriage was contracted legally or not, the property must be divided nonetheless." Cited in : *Time*, April 2, p. 16. (1990) It can be mentioned here that Gorbachev admitted that Nazi-Soviet pact of 1939 was unjust.

35. After the end of cold war and the reunification of two Germans the Soviet Union is no more a potential threat to the West European countries and in this context in the near future American military presence in the West European countries would be undesirable for Europeans as a whole. In the absence of American military power, US' influence on the European politics would be insignificant.

Ukrainian republic declared its sovereignty on July 16, 1990. Among all the fourteen non-Russian Soviet republics this republic can form a stable and viable independent state and in the USSR it was the second largest state after the Russian Federation with a population of 52 million and a strong industrial and agricultural base. Despite all political and economic difficulties, along with three Baltic republics, Moldavia and Georgia immediately followed their footsteps. Since the death of Stalin Georgian nationalists from time to time wanted to challenge the authority of Moscow over their republic. Moldavia anticipated active help from Romania because of its historical and cultural links and its parliament declared independence on June 24, 1990.

Declaration of sovereignty by Azerbaijan on 23 September, 1989 in fact remained unnoticed and was not taken seriously by the outsiders. But encouraged by the situation of other republics, some of the so called five Central Asian Muslim republics had been trying to drift from the grip of Moscow. Uzbekistan also declared its sovereignty on June 20, 1990. The at that time declaration of independence by any Soviet republic was a tactical step to increase its bargaining capacity with Moscow. However, Uzbekistan and the Uzbeks had some advantages in their favour in achieving independence. The Uzbeks formed the largest Muslim nationality with a size of population of 15 million, about a fourth of the total Muslim population of the then Soviet Union. It achieved its membership of the UNO on March 2, 1992.

Among the Soviet Central Asian republics Uzbekistan is in a better situation both in industrial and agricultural terms.³⁶ These advantages would not be enough to achieve immediately the status of a prosperous sovereign country for several reasons. Firstly, prolonged Russian and Socialist rule over Uzbekistan has deepened their economic dependence on the Russian Federation for many essential supplies and Uzbek nationalist leaders are poignantly aware

36. See, USSR Yearbook 1988 op. cit. p.122123.

of this. Adilov Miralam, leader of Uzbek nationalist party, *Birlık*,³⁷ says: "Moscow treats us like slaves. We are the poorest republic in the Soviet Union but rich in resources, which Moscow takes from us."³⁸ Moreover, extensive cotton cultivation directed by Moscow over last several decades has created a devastating situation in the entire republic.³⁹ Apart from the adverse affect on the fertility of the cultivated land, water resources of Uzbekistan in many places were either remarkably shirnked or dangerously polluted. Secondly, the Uzbeks believed that Moscow by establishing various settlements of Russian, Tatars, Meshketians and many other in their republic in fact greatly weakeend their national solidarity. Ethnic problems in the Muslim republics is not an unexpected phenomenon. Moscow encouraged settlements of Russian people in non-Russian republics in order to defuse their national militancy.⁴⁰

It is not certain yet whether creation of independent states for different nationalities is a viable answer to the nationality problems. In the present circumstances, establishments of complete separate states of major former Soviet nationalities in fact added only another new fifteen states to the group of LDC-s. For example, condition of Tajikistan might be similar to that of Afghanistan from tribal, ethnic and economic perspective. Economic situation in Azerbaijan and Maldavia also might be worse than the Iranian Azerbaijan and Romania respectively. Likewise the three Baltic states may quickly turn into the poorest countries of Europe. Proably condition of Turkmenia would be no better than others, which declared its independence on 24 August, 1990 and become member of the

37. *Birlık* (unity), a strong Muslim nationalist party. consisting of more than one million members. Along with other nationalist parties *Birlık* played an important role in achieving political independence of Uzbekistan. It has been struggling for economic independence and for a confederation of Central Asian Muslim republics, See to details : Far Eastern Economic Review, July 12, p. 24-25. (1990).

38. *Ibid.* P. 24.

39. *Ibid.*, also see *Soviet Muslim Brief*, Vol. 6 no. 2, July-August (1990).

40. See for details : M. M. Ahsan Khan "Demographic changes in the Muslim population of Soviet Russia : facts and fiction" In : Journal, *Institute of Muslim Minority Affairs*, vol. 9, no. 1 London, p. 134-154. (1988).

UNO on 31 July, 1992. A third of this republic's 3.5 million inhabitants lived on 75 roubles a month which is well below the then was Soviet poverty line.⁴¹ Twenty per cent of the Turkmenian, population are already unemployed and the number of unemployed workers is still mounting. In fact in every Muslim republic within the next couple of years one third of the adult population would be unemployed.⁴² Moreover, conditions of millions of Russians living in non-Russian Republics would also adversely affect the situation because of their neighbourhood and centuries-long interaction.

Kazakhstan stands as a stark testimony of the painful and difficult nationality scenario-if the principle of complete self determination is conceded. The Kazak republic covers a territory of 2, 717,000 sq. km. and inhabited by about 18 million people. The proportion of the Muslim and non-Muslim population of the Republic is almost equal and the history of annexation of Kazakh territories by the Russians goes back to seventeen century. Any attempt to make the republic purely Russian or Kazakh would surely lead to civil war and bloodshed. For the sake of the establishment of socialism in Kazakhstan, Stalin took the lives of more than a million Kazakhs.⁴³ The Kazakhs would definitely try to take revenge on the Russians in retaliation of the massacre perpetrated on their forefathers. So rights of self-determination or establishment of sovereignty by any former Soviet republic can not be viewed in isolation from the interests of one nation from another. The dislocation created by the seventy years' of socialist rule and the world war II in many places are of historical reality and the entire history can not be reversed.

41. *Soviet Muslim Brief* Vol. 6. No. 1, May - June (1990) op. cit.

42. You D. Mashyakov, the Chairman of the Central planning Commission (Gosplan) estimates that the country-wide introduction of market economy would make 40 million Soviets unemployed (See: *Newseek* June, 4 P.16 (1990). But the Muslim Republics would be the worst effected because of their less skilled labourers.

43. See for details: M. A. Kettani, *Muslim Minorities in the world Today* (London, p. 6 1986) : Alexander Bennigsen S. Enders Wimbush, *Muslims of the Soviet Empire*, London, p 70. (1985)

The Russians tended to view the demand of the Muslim nationalists for self-determination with more apprehension vis-a-vis stirrings of other nationalities. Islamic element in the Russian Empire and Soviet Union was a traditional factor and it had become more and more marked since the Afghan crisis and the Islamic Revolution in Iran. Therefore, the Russians were circumspect about the Muslim nationalities and still it is not unlikely that they would try to play one Muslim nation against the other against the backdrop of sharp divisiveness among the Muslim nationalities.

Violences and riots between the Uzbeks and the Kirgizes in the city of Osh in Kirgizia in June and July 1990 probably suggested a newly devised Russian strategy to challenge Muslim nations.⁴⁴ Some observers think that "the Kremlin appears to be intent on trying to buy time by putting Muslim against Muslim."⁴⁵ Though Osh is situated in Kirgizia, it is inhabited by a sizable Uzbek Muslims who traditionally cultivated lands in the region. In the name of privatization, attempts had been made deliberately to take the lands from the Uzbeks and to give them to the Kirgizes, an unprecedented policy in privatization process followed in other republics. If, however, such principle of privatization of land was followed in other republics then the Russians would be disadvantaged in procuring ownership of land. Privatization of land and introduction of free market economy have been creating chaos and confusion in all Muslim republics and as a result ethnic violences are becoming increasingly endemic in all Muslim republics. State authorities can easily use them as a pretext of reviving Stalinist method of suppressing the situation. Gorbachev's heavy handed dealing with the Azari and Tajik nationalities in January 1990 was the glaring example of that. Despite almost the similar character of nationalist movement in Baltic republics and Muslim republics, one could easily discern the sharp contrast in Gorbachev's approaches towards Muslim nationalist movements compared to other non-Muslim nationalist movements.

44. *Soviet Muslim Brief* Vol. 6. No. 2 op. cit. p. 4.

45. *Ibid.*

The cases of Tajikistan, Daghistan, Checheno Ingushetia, Tataria, Bashkeriah and Nagorno Karabakh crises bear testimony of Russian double standard towards the Muslim nationalists. Even the Gorbachev era meant very little for the liberalization of the Muslim republics. "The beginning of perestroika or as it was called the process of democratization, was viewed as progressive in many parts of the country. But in Central Asia it was viewed as reactionary when an attempt was made to introduce anti-Islamic and anti-nationalist measures."⁴⁶ During the Gorbacher era a renewed anti-Islamic policy was adopted in Central Asian Republics and attempts had been made to replace local Muslim leaders by the Russians. With the help of local communists the Russians indirectly are still holding power in Tajikistan and thousands of Tajik Muslims had to take refuge in Afghanistan. This policy can be regarded as a continuation of Communist vision on central Asian Republics.⁴⁷

GORBACHEV'S LEGACY AND CIS

It was apparent that during Gorbachev era endemic nationality problems and ethnic violence endangered the very basis of the Soviet Federal system. Gorbachev shifted the entire responsibility on the past. He asserted that there was "distortion of the nationality policy. There was even imperial oppression of various nationalities as well as attempts to Russify other peoples"⁴⁸ He had been trying to salvage two integral aspects of Russian life—Russian nationalism and

46. Diloram Ibrahim, *The Islamization of Central Asia. case study of Uzbekistan*, U. K. p. 20. (1993).

47. At the initial stage, Gorobachev adopted a policy of expelling leading Musim-communists from the CPSU and state organs, and replace them with Russian-communists. However, expulsion of the Muslim-communists from the party and their removal from the highest state organs of the Muslim republics provoked the Muslims to forcefully protest the Kremlin decisions. In this comtext Gorbachev, retorted Islamic Fundamentalism has bared its teeth. See to details M. M. Ahsan Khan, "Muslims in Central Asia : A Recap", In: Journal institute of Muslim Minority Affairs. Vol. 13, No. 1, London, p. 180-181. (1992).

48. *Time*, June 4, (1990)

the communist ideology. Among the Soviet nationalities the Russians spearheaded the Bolshevik Revolution and they were the vanguards in establishing Soviet Socialist Federal system.

Gorbachev tried to keep the Russians in good humour and at the initial stage of his rule he was required to pay at least lip-service to the communist ideals. Gorbachev knew very well that those ideals were instrumental in sustaining the federal system accommodating so many diverse nationalities and ethnic groups. Moreover, to the Russians, the communist ideals were not merely economic principles, they were rather a way of life and integral part of Russian culture. Loss of Christian heritage and wide dislocations of many Russian settlements caused by the world war II made the Russians obliged to accept communism as their way of life. That is way Gorbachev did not want to undermine neither Russian nationalism nor the highest ideals of communism. His main concern was how to protect the territorial integrity of the Soviet Union. Admitting the fact that the Soviets lagged much behind the west in all parameters of life, he did not see the salvation in the dismantlement of the Soviet Union. Rather he wanted to put to an end of "splendid isolation" for the Soviet Union from the capitalist countries. He was enthusiastic in carving a niche in the Western World and hoped that the west would provide a bonanza for the crumbling Soviet economy.

This was not entirely a Gorbachev phenomenon. Since the death of Brezhnev, Kremlin tried not to be a rival to the West, but "an important and integral part of new global economy."⁴⁹ But a weaker Soviet economy did not allow the Russians to be the real business partner of the developed industrialized countries. With the help of Western technology and capital Gorbachev wanted to rejuvenate the Soviet economy. He was convinced that once the Soviet economy starts reaping the fruits of open market, economic solvency would defuse nationality problems. But Yeltsin found it impossible to move with such a huge limping economy. Yeltsin representing solely the interest of the Russians, in fact, wanted disintegration of the Soviet Union and waited for a favourable time.

49. Ibid.

On his part Gorbachev came with two formulas : a) Common European Home and b) New Union Treaty. While the former formula intended more integration with the European countries, the later purposes more cohesion with the internal nationality interests. But his emphasis on Europeanism tended to alienate him from the Asian nationalities. In defence of his New Union Treaty (NUT) Gorbachev voiced that "there should be real sovereignty for the republics in all spheres of their life. There should be qualitatively new relations between the republics and the centre and also among individual republics."⁵⁰ On March 9, 1991 Kremlin published the text of NUT, which allowed every Soviet republic to establish diplomatic relations with foreign countries and to join the international organizations freely. Three Baltic republics, Georgia and Maldivia simultaneously and categorically rejected the NUT and insisted on their full independence from Moscow. Other republics, though outrightly did not reject the treaty, expressed their dissatisfaction over some of the provisions of the treaty.

Against this backdrop of the nationality problems and crisis of Soviet federal system, Gorbachev hoped for enthusiastic support of his Western partners to strengthen his personal grip on power. But once the nightmare of communism and cold war fizzled out from European scene, the Western leaders became less enthusiastic in their support for Gorbachev. The western countries main concern was the nuclear arsenals of the Soviet Union particularly in Kazakhstan. "A wave of nationalism and religious fundamentalism is propelling Muslims towards independence. Given the fact that some of the most dangerous Islamic nations might have nuclear weapons".⁵¹ Not a Soviet leader, but a Russian leader could ensure the West that the Russians would not allow any non-Russian nations to possess nuclear weapons. Yeltsin was ready to offer this service to the West on behalf of the Russians.

But still Yeltsin was not the dominant personality vis-a-vis Gorbachev on the Russian scene and, therefore, the western leaders did not want to betray Gorbachev overtly. The military coup of

50. Ibid.

51. The Sunday Times, London, June 10, (1990).

August 1991 against Gorbachev paved the way for Yeltsin to become sole representative of the Russian Federation in the international arena.⁵² Soon after the coup, formation of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) made the dismantlement of the Soviet Union a reality for all. Thus Gorbachev's initial success in managing the recalcitrant nationalities was more apparent than real. As a protector of the Russian interests Yeltsin has started jettisoning the vociferous nationalities and drifted to influence them indirectly.

THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION AND THE FOURTEEN OTHER INDEPENDENT STATES.

Both the nuclear arsenals and the veto power in the security council of the UN are controlled by the Russian Federation. The western help to Boris Yeltsin is entirely meant for the Russians. All other fourteen independent states are almost forgotten entities to the western big powers. All the fourteen states are increasingly becoming helpless in their relations with the Russian Federation. Along with Kazakhstan, Ukrain and Belo-Russia had to surrender unconditionally their all nuclear arsenals to the Russian Federation. The Russian Federation on its turn even did not ensure security to any of the fourteen states, but become a trustworthy ally to the West.

In short, this can be regarded as the scenario of the relationship between the Russians and the non-Russian peoples of the former Soviet Union. But it has also wide implications manifested in the affairs of European civilization. The Serbs are the traditional allies of the Russians. Though militarily the western powers, with the help of NATO, could easily stop the atrocities, war crimes and violation of all sorts of human rights by the Serbs against the Bosnian Muslims; by adopting strong policies against the Serbs, but they did not want to

52. "Once widely thought of as a drunk and a demagogue, Mr. Yeltsin has seen his reputation rise over the past year as it became increasingly apparent that it was he, not Mr. Gorbachev, who most strongly advocating the sort of reforms the West favours. He performed well on a recent visit to America." In : *The Economist*, August, 24th-30th p. 25. (1991).

hurt the Russian interest in the former socialist Yugoslavia. The Russian support for the illegitimate interests of the Serbs fully manifested itself in the UN sponsored Geneva Human Rights Conference held in June 1993, when eighty members of the UN voted for a proposal of lifting arms-embargo against Bosnia. The Russian Federation was the only state which voted against such a proposal, while the rights of self-defence of the Bosnian Muslims, at least theoretically, was recognized by all the Western powers. It is needless to mention that because of arms-embargo on the Bosnian Muslims, they have been completely denied to the rights of self-defence.

The foreign policy of the Russian Federation is quite happy with the present Serbian atrocities in the territories of Bosnia, which is an independent state and a member of the UN. This is not an incidental Russian foreign policy. The parochial view of the Russian Federation as tilted towards Serbia for obvious reasons of historical and ethnic alignment could not put Serbia and Bosnia in the same footing as independent states. The situation is very similar to that of Armenia and Azerbaijan. With the help of the Russian soldiers Armenia has been occupying more than twenty per cent territories of Azerbaijan.⁵³ In fact, the Azeri nationalists spearheaded the independence-movements of all the non-Russian republics of the former Soviet Union. It was the Azeri parliament, who became champion in realising their constitutional right, stipulated by the constitution of the USSR, to secede from the Soviet Union. Now the Azeris have been paying a heavy price in terms of material and human resources for their independence and for many hundreds of thousands Azeris their independent status became a symbol of untold sufferings. And in a bid to save the Azeri people from further Armenian and Russian aggression, the Azeri government joined the CIS in 1993.

53. "The mercenary problem is bound to grow worse. The Russian army demobilized 72, 000 officers last year, and plans to let an additional 25, 000 go in 1993 ... So far, Russian's dogs of war are a disorganized lot, but they could grow into a menacing pact." In : *Time*, January 25. 34. (1993).

The Russian nationalism with the help of western capitalism might easily overcome its economic crisis for the simple reason that all the fourteen non-Russian states are no more an economic burden for the Russian Federation. At present none of those fourteen states can blame the Russians for their own problems and failure. Similarly the Russian Federation can not accuse other fourteen states for its own backwardness. Because of its territorial vastness, resources and better organizational structure of state organs, the Russian Federation is in an advantageous position vis-a-vis other fourteen states. It was the earner of eighty per cent of hard currencies of the then Soviet Union. By virtue of the rules of free-market economy all these newly independent states would possibly find themselves more dependent on the Russian Federation than before. But still the principles of free-market economy in the Russian Federation remains in the papers.

Democratic constitutional principles have yet to regulate the nationality issues. After the referendum held in 1993 Yeltsin now has wide ranging executive powers. But in the process of achieving strong executive power challenging the supremacy of the Russian parliament, Yeltsin government demonstrated its military might killing five hundred people in besieging the parliament house in 1993 and putting some parliamentarians in jail. As a consequence Yeltsin and his supporters could not win the majority seats in the first parliamentary election of the Russian Federation. Success of the extreme Russian nationalists in this election is remarkable and the ultra-nationalist forces are posing a real threat to the Yeltsin government. All these sequence of events have their implications and ramification in all other fourteen republics.

The Russians living in the non-Russian states can easily claim their representation in the respective parliaments. But achieving independence from the Russians, the non-Russian nations are still blaming the Russians for their own miseries and are not ready to provide the Russians a proportionate representation in their parliaments. "Today, more than twelve million Slavs live in central Asia,

almost twenty five per cent of the total population."⁵⁴ Ninety per cent of these Slaves are Russians. In Kazakhstan about forty per cent of its total 18 million population are Russians. Though the Russian colonial rule brought these Russian people to these Muslim states, still their legitimate rights should not be denied as the majority of them were born and brought up in these traditional Muslim lands. More importantly, Islam does not allow the Muslims to persecute the non-Muslims living in the Muslim states. But prolonged colonial rule made the Muslim rulers and citizens downgraded in spirit and values. Morally they are not in a position to adopt the Islamic principles to be followed in their state system.

In terms of legislation the Muslim states are still in a formative stage. They have just rejected the colonial legislations, but yet could not develop their own system. In these circumstances, the Russians can not demand a very ideal situation for them in the six Muslim states. Situation in other eight non-Russian states is in no way better for the Russians. In the three Baltic states the Russians have been treated as the second class citizens of those countries and even are under the pressure of forceful migration to the Russian Federation. The Russian Federation providing the legitimate rights to its twenty per cent non-Russian population can yet set an example to be followed by all other fourteen states. Muslim autonomous republics, Tataristan and Bashkiria of the Russian Federation, cover an area of 68,000 and 143,600 sq km. respectively and about fifty per cent of their eleven million population are Muslims. Chuvash, Daghistan, Checheno-Ingushetia, Crimea, Kabardino-Balkaria have strong Muslim heritage. All these autonomous republics and regions of the Russian Federation demand appropriate attention of Moscow and their proportionate representation in the Federal and provincial state organs, specially in the legislative bodies. Granting such a constitutional place in the parliament probably the Russian

54. Diloram Ibrahim; Op. cit, PP. 19-20.

Federation can only hope to protect the legitimate rights of the thirty million Russians living in other fourteen states.

Beside these constitutional problems Yeltsin has been facing more serious ideological and political problems. Yeltsin could not organize his own strong political party to rely on. His popular support is mainly based on capitalist ideals and democratic ideas, none of which are ingrained in the Russian soil. During the Soviet rule interests of socialism and Russian nationalism had been converged in the major policies of the CPSU and Kremlin. Majority of the Russians could easily see their national pride and glory in implementation of the socialist policies in the non-Russian republics. Now the situation is completely different. Until now the ordinary Russians can not see the success in the rules of capitalist mode of production and distribution. In fact, the ideals of the western democracy are still distantly related with the hopes and aspirations of the Russians. On the other hand, the newly emerging Russian capitalist class is still in a disorganized shape. Moreover, the exploitative character of capitalism and the Western democracy is so apparent in all the former Soviet republics that the Russians are increasingly becoming disillusioned with the positive aspects of liberalism and individualism. The Russian are not yet psychologically ready to take "blood-bath" to earn their livelihood in the free-market dynamics.

The problem with the capitalism is that it needs resources to be given in the hands of private individuals. Religious or national identities of the capitalists are irrelevant to the Western democracy. For its effectiveness democracy needs big tax-payers. It has no time or scope to be selective in collecting taxes. Thus the Russians have no scope to deny the rights to the non-Russians to be asserted as capitalists. The few years' experiences show that the non-Russian citizens of the Russian Federation are much more enthusiastic and successful in the capitalist mode of ownership and possession. The Russian Federation is abundant in natural resources including oil, gas, steel and other valuable mineral resources. But in the absence of highly technological might and efficient management the Russian Federation can not exploit those resources. Though the world's

largest oil reservoir, the Russian Federation has been failing in using the oil industry for its economic emancipation; rather it invites foreign investors to exploit all natural resources including oil. This is the reason why western powers fear that in the absence of Yeltsin leadership Russians may witness a backlash, an unpalatable phenomenon for the West. Moreover, many westerners believe that their cooperation with the Russians in introducing capitalist economy in Russia would not only allow the Western capitalists to have an access to the vast natural resources, which the Russian Federation command, but also burgeoning consumer market there. Huge Russian consumer market is wide open for western goods, but very rarely Russian rubles can buy them. Not of speaking about millions of unemployed Russians, even the majority of employed Russians hardly can buy the necessary commodities needed for their normal daily life. Chances of bright success of capitalism in the near future is very slim, but the constitutional crisis demands an urgent solution of power sharing system between legislative and executive branches both in central and provincial level.

CONCLUSION

The founders of the Bolshevik state pinned their hope that the proletariat internationalism would eventually usher a unified Soviet Russia transcending creed, colour, ethnic and other peculiarities. But history went wrong for them. It was not the socialist creed but totalitarian regimentation, Stalinism and the Red Army that played pivotal role in enforcing their envisioned unity. But the necrosis of nationalism was only marking time. Gorbachev's *perestroika* and *glasnost* programmes together with his abandonment of international proletariat commitment provided the long awaited moment for the hydra of nationalism to expose itself. As a result, all the fifteen Union republics of the former Soviet Union declared their independence in quick successions during the early months of the 1990. Some of the autonomous republics also followed suit. At the initial stage except three Baltic republics, other republics declaring their independence wanted to boost their bargaining lever in the ongoing agreements for a new form of federation, or at least a confederation.

The leadership of several republics knew very well that they were lacking in necessary economic muscle to give concrete expression to their sovereign will. They were helplessly dependent on the Russian Federation for many essential supplies. Free market economy put them in a disadvantageous position as most of the republics had few valuable articles in their store to sell to other republics.⁵⁵

During the Gorbachev era the West could come up with succour to resume republics in their quest for sovereignty. Such an opportunity would have been seen as a heaven-sent opportunity by the West in the cold war era. But the Western countries kept themselves as silent observers in this regard. Rather they had been helping Gorbachev to implement his policies throughout the former Soviet Union. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the Gorbachev era had to be finalised simultaneously. The Russian Federation under the leadership of Boris Yeltsin followed the American policy in all important international affairs except Bosnia. Gorbachev had been allowing the Soviet republics sufficient lee-way to assess their position, while Yeltsin wanted to see non-Russian republics to be dismantled from the Russian Federation. The west European leaders were cautious about the nationalist movements in the former Soviet Union because of its repercussion in the entire Europe. The Americans had no problems with the secessionist trend in the Soviet Union, but could not foresee that the tempo of pan-European integration would ultimately reinforce anti-Americanism in Europe.

In view of impending secessionist threat, Gorbachev came out with two new formulas to salvage the Soviet Union from collapse. His common European Home policy aimed at more accommodation with the West, whereby he hoped to take advantages of the Western

55. "That question—how to earn money and make their way in the world—is the toughest one facing the Balts. Their road to independence has been hard and bloody, and the jubilation that followed their success was short-lived. They have virtually no natural resources, few products good enough for export to the West and little hard currency to pay for their needs on the world market." In : *Time*, September 9, 22. (1991).

technological and managerial expertise. The economic dividend that might follow from such Western co-operation could extinguish nationalist chauvinism. His proposed new Union treaty, a loose federal system among the republics, while ensuring national cultural distinctiveness for all nations hoped to maintain a semblance of Soviet unity. Apparently the Russian Federation might be a loser from such an arrangement. In reality economically and politically advanced Russian Federation could gain more in a competitive economy. Thus Gorbachev could only bolster the dominance of the Russians. There was sign that Gorbachev's plan was bearing some fruit. But August military coup of 1991 turned table entirely against him and Yeltsin himself finalized the dismantlement of the Soviet Union and declared the formation of the CIS. Except the three Baltic states all other twelve former republics gradually joined the CIS in a bid to make use of their socialist legacy.

As an idea the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) is very similar to that of the British Commonwealth. Gorbachev was categorical in his view to oppose the idea of CIS and argued that it would never be a viable alternative to the Soviet Union. Yeltsin needed a formal alliance of the former Soviet republics to neutralize the forces subscribing to the ideas of Gorbachev. The existence of the British Commonwealth has provided a strong argument to Yeltsin in favour of his CIS policies. During the second half of the twentieth century the British Commonwealth has been serving the neo-colonial interests and apparently there is no reason why the Russians can not use the CIS in a similar way. During the struggle of independence from British rule, the British imperial rulers playing with the national and religious issues put the colonies in an inferno and divided the colonies in a way, which ensured internecine conflicts among the newly independent states and nations. Moscow has been using Nagorno Karabakh issue to prolong the war between Azerbaijan and Armenia. It is also helping the Serbs against the Bosnian Muslims. In the near future many more issues are at sight,

where the Russian military involvement may play a very dominant role.⁵⁶ Abkhazja and Krimea are two examples of such issues.

It is most probable that without many other war fronts for the purpose of its compelling security and economic stratagem, Moscow has little opportunity to establish its upperhand in the affairs of the former Soviet republics. Some of these countries along with central European states have been struggling hard to acquire the membership of NATO. But unlike the British, the Russians are almost surrounded territorially by the non-Russian nationalities sharing socialist legacy. In the hands of all these people capitalism is now a tool to salvage their national and religious interests. The Russian Federation occupying the three-fourth territory of the former Soviet Union with a population of 150 million of different nationalities is still facing crucial choice between constitutionalism and dictatorship or real federalism and further dismantlement.

56. "Outside the Caucasus, Russian mercenaries have turned up in Moidovia and Tajikistan. There have been numerous reports of whole companies of Russian "Volunteers" fighting on the side of the Serbs in what used to be Yugoslavia, and at least 30 Russians are known to have joined the French Foreign Legion." In : *Time* January 25, 34. (1993).