

## EDITORIAL NOTE: “Mission Accomplished? Or a New Agenda?”

In 1989, with the start of this series—so many momentous events ago—there existed a Soviet Union and, within it, there had been Soviet republics (all socialist!). The entirety was imperially presided over by Mikhail Sergeyevich Gorbachev, Chairman of the Communist Party and President of the USSR.

But now that is all in what seems a distant, even a hazy, past. The Eurasian space, then occupied by the Soviet Union, today is taken up by over a dozen large and small competing successor states. In the trans-continental *Weltraum* where the Soviet empire once acted as a principle of unity, disunity reigns and further fragmentation threatens. Thanks in large measure to the implacable forces of ethnic separatism, the multi-national Soviet state has irreversibly fallen apart, opening undefined opportunities for new political alignments from the eastern border of Poland to the western frontier of China.

Most of this revolutionary transition transpired in the last twelve months, thanks to the aborted mid-August 1991 putsch, the December 1 elections in Ukraine, the almost immediate failure of the Commonwealth of Independent States to erect an ersatz post-USSR union, and Gorbachev's anti-climatic resignation. Together, they ushered in the new year and its new realities.

In the absence of a single dominant center, each of the successor states struggles to define its identity and scrambles to find independence. This has resulted in the emergence of new regional clusters attracted by the power and magnetism of centers formerly outside the USSR. Turkey and Iran are competing for influence over the Muslim successor states; Romania is casting covetous eyes on Moldova; the Baltic countries are turning towards Scandinavia; and Siberia is awaiting an infusion of Japanese investments that could eventually wean this vast area away from its present artificial Russian Federation context.

In all of these regions-in-formation, unabated inter-ethnic strife threatens further dismemberment and destabilization, including the Russian Federation. Ethnic demands for further secession and border rectifications extend from Moldova, through the Caucasus, to the Pacific. An observer looking back a year from now may have to take into consideration any number of alterations to the present political map, itself a revolutionary revision of the 1991 international borders.

This was the kaleidoscopic reality confronting those attending the fourth annual conference sponsored by the Nationalities and Siberian Studies Program of the W. Averell Harriman Institute, Columbia University. The meeting, ironically, and not unnoticed, coincided with May Day. It marked the culmination of a four-year annual review of the steady onslaught on the

Soviet Union by the potent multi-faceted force of ethnic nationalisms and republican secession politics.

The result has been an annual issue of *Nationalities Papers* in cooperation with the Harriman Institute, a four-issue series tracing the outlines of what turns out to have been an irrevocable process of dismemberment, a process in which even the republican remnants of the Communist Party took an active and unprecedented part, a phenomenon to be studied for years to come by those seeking answers to the last years of the far-flung dominion ruled over by the once monolithic CPSU.

After this four-issue series, *Nationalities Papers* might be tempted proudly to claim "Mission Accomplished!" except for the stark fact that the process of the dynamics of ethnic assertion has by no means ceased. The Soviet Union has expired, but the complex Eurasian realm of turbulent multi-ethnicity remains in flux; this globally geostrategic heartland between Europe and the Far East needs to be watched, analyzed, and assessed. If anything, as the European segment of the former USSR orients itself westward and, thereby, enriches the ethnic complexities of Eastern Europe; as the ethnically chaotic Caucasus region becomes enmeshed with the Turco-Iranian region; and as the ethnic cauldron of Central Asia unavoidably becomes linked to the ethno-dynamics of crumbling Afghanistan and to ethnic stirrings by ninety-million Muslims in west China, *Nationalities Papers*, faces awesome new frontiers, challenging collectively all its future contributors. Hence, "A New Agenda."

As usual, the editorial staff of *Nationalities Papers* extends its heartfelt thanks for the unstinting cooperation it receives from the Harriman Institute. In particular, the editor wishes to thank Charles Furtado for his professional collaboration as co-editor of this issue, as well as Professor Alexander J. Motyl for his unceasing intellectual stimulation.

H.R.H.