

Germany and France sought to obstruct American policy toward Iraq by using the same United Nations they had—jointly with the United States—circumvented in Kosovo. This led a frustrated American defense secretary to complain impolitely that an “Old Europe” was impeding policies a “New Europe,” such as Poland and Romania, would recognize as salutary. In 2003, United States–European relations approached a low ebb, with the United States president declining to meet the German chancellor and anti-French jokes becoming the grist of the American comedy mill.

Clearly, Europe is not on the way to becoming a military superpower to challenge or influence United States dominance, and European actions were born of frustration as much as perceived moral certitude. In the constitutional discussions, Europeans even had difficulty agreeing on the portfolio of an EU foreign secretary, an equivalent to the American secretary of state to coordinate EU foreign policy; the notion of a potent all-European armed force under some form of joint command remains a mirage. The EU includes nuclear powers (the UK and France) and a wide range of national militaries, and the NATO treaty is what binds them. The United States continues to be that organization’s paramount power. Only the dissolution of NATO would change this landscape.

It is therefore evident that Europe is and will be America’s ally, not a military counterweight. For all the divisive language heard (and actions taken) during the past half decade, the United States and Europe have far more in common, in shared global objectives as well as cultural foundations, than divides them. Indeed, cultural and political divisions within Europe, and within America, in some ways appear stronger than those separating us from each other. When Europeans and Americans are asked to summarize the goals they have for this world, their responses are remarkably similar. The difference lies in the ways to achieve those goals.

In this context it is worth revisiting the geographic issue of Europe’s borders. Surely Americans and Europeans share the hope that Europe’s great experiment will succeed, that its internal boundaries will soften further and that the EU’s external border will move inexorably eastward to incorporate not only Romania and Bulgaria but also a progressive Ukraine, a democratic Belarus, a stable Georgia and, ultimately, a reformed Russia, so that the argument over Europe’s geography may be settled by a simple, hopeful phrase: Europe reaches across Eurasia from Atlantic to Pacific.

## 11

### RUSSIA: TROUBLE ON THE EASTERN FRONT

In this fast-changing world, what a difference a decade makes. In the late 1980s the Soviet Union still was one of the world’s two superpowers, a colonial empire extending from the Baltic Sea to Central Asia, a communist enforcer in control of most of Eastern Europe, a nuclear-armed behemoth capable of global destruction. Ten years later, its empire disintegrated, its ideology discounted, and its army in disarray, Russia, the imperial cornerstone, was struggling to reorganize as a democracy and to reestablish a position of consequence on the world’s geopolitical stage. But by the middle of the first decade of the new century, Russia’s major contest was not with other giants on that stage, but with tiny Chechnya within its own borders. What remained of its armed forces were not at war in some remote Asian frontier but inside Russia itself. Thousands of Russians had died violently, many in terrorist attacks in the capital, Moscow. The cost of this tragedy far exceeded the lives lost and property destroyed. It also compromised Russians’ efforts to sustain their march toward democracy, openness, and the rule of law, and brought widespread fears of a return to the authoritarianism that had marked Russian and Soviet governance for so long. Yet a Russia with representative government, whose armed forces are under civilian control and whose laws function effectively, is key to the stability and future economic and political integration of Eurasia.

#### GEOGRAPHIC PROBLEMS OF A TERRITORIAL GIANT

Not only is Russia the world’s largest country territorially: it has more neighbors than any other state. Geographically, nothing is simple when it comes to Russia, and so it is with this set of neighbors (Fig. 11-1). By virtue of its exclave of Kaliningrad, Russia has Poland and Lithuania as European neighbors, as well as Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Belarus, and Ukraine. That makes seven neighbors in Europe alone, and Russia has issues with almost all of them. In the case of Lithuania, Russia wants free transit for Russian freight



and military traffic (and no inspections) to Kaliningrad. In Estonia and Latvia, which, like Lithuania are former parts of the Soviet empire, Russia wants official status for the Russian language, spoken by large minorities who moved here from Russia during communist times. In Belarus the situation is unusual: that country's Soviet-style, authoritarian ruler has repeatedly pressed Moscow for closer association, even formal union, between the two countries, but the Russians have so far declined the invitation. With a large Russian minority in Ukraine, Moscow has meddled dangerously in the politics of that large and culturally divided country, once the Soviet Union's second-ranking component in terms of population as well as economic output. Today, many Ukrainian leaders want to see their country join the European Union, but others see their future in closer ties with Russia.

Along its southern border between the Black and the Caspian Seas, Russia borders two former dependencies, Georgia and Azerbaijan (Fig. 11-1). But that simple statement belies a complicated geographic situation that is at the root of many of present-day Russia's most dangerous problems. As a more detailed map shows, Russia's borderland in fact consists of a tier of internal "republics" designated to recognize the non-Russian ethnic composition of their populations, and it is these republics, including Chechnya, that border Georgia and Azerbaijan (Fig. 11-2). This is the region Russians refer to as Transcaucasia, and here live ethnic minorities with memories of Russian subjugation and oppression who would have wanted the same independence given to Georgia and Azerbaijan (and their neighbor Armenia) when the Soviet Union collapsed. But that was not to be, and as a result this region became a cauldron of conflict involving not only the Muslims of Chechnya, who oppose Moscow, but also those of Ingushetiya, who have tried to avoid taking sides, the North Ossetians, who generally support Russia, the Balkars of Kabardino-Balkaria, accused by Stalin of pro-Nazi sympathies during World War II and exiled en masse, and literally dozens of other ethnic groups with turbulent histories. Meanwhile, across the border in Georgia, pro-Russian Abkhazians and South Ossetians defy the government in Tbilisi even as Russians maintain military bases on Georgia's soil. And while oil continues to flow from Azerbaijan to Russian terminals on the Black Sea, pipelines are being laid to divert much of it via Armenia to the Mediterranean coast of Turkey. Transcaucasia makes Russia's other borders look uncomplicated by comparison.

Russia's four Asian neighbors also form a contentious group: Kazakhstan, Mongolia, China, and North Korea (Fig. 11-1). When the Soviet Union collapsed and Kazakhstan became an independent state, several million Russians found themselves on the wrong side of the border in northern

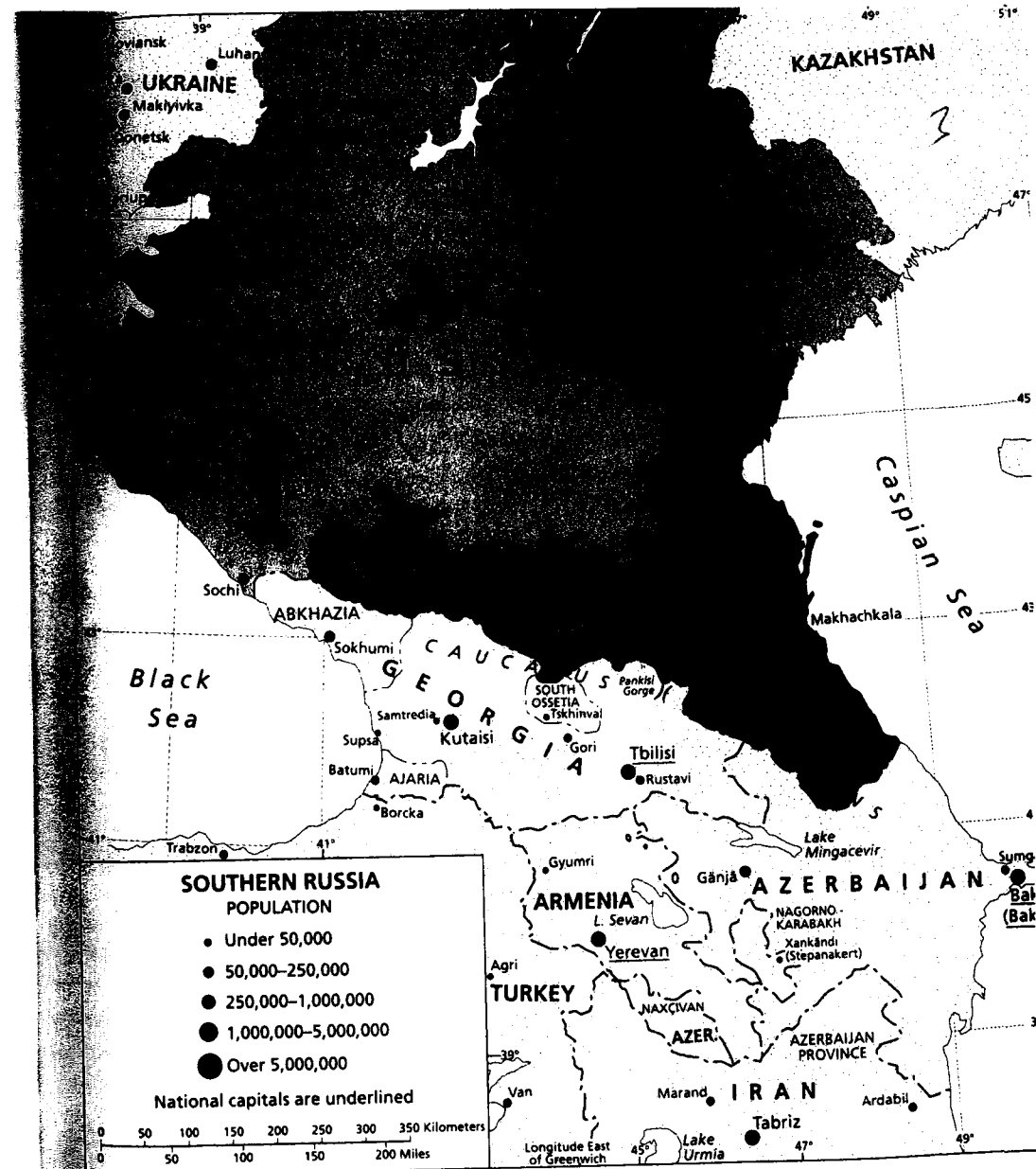


Fig. 11-2

Kazakhstan, where Russia's space port and launching facilities are also located. The new Kazakh government negotiated agreements to allow these operations to continue, but the Russified north presented far more difficult problems because this area had, in effect, become part of the Russian sphere (as the transport systems on the map confirm). While many Russians emi-

grated back to Russia, others agitated for secession, prompting the Kazakh government to move its capital from the Kazakh heartland in the southeast to Astana in the Russified north, underscoring its claim to the entire country. Immediately to the east lies Mongolia, a Soviet satellite during the communist period, then closely associated with Russia after 1990 (Russian was the main foreign language spoken here) but now reorienting toward China, currently its largest trading partner by far. This is changing the significance of the Russian-Mongolian boundary, once merely an administrative device but potentially a marker between Russian and Chinese spheres of influence. Still farther to the east, Russia shares a lengthy and historically contentious boundary with China that has been the scene of territorial disputes and cross-border skirmishes. These issues were settled in recent years through negotiations between the two governments, now on better terms. But another issue is emerging: massive cross-border migration by Chinese traders and workers into the Russian Far East (Davis, 2002). And in the farthest reaches of its eastern frontier, Russia has a short but consequential border with North Korea. North Koreans are escaping their tyrannical rulers by crossing into China, and from there some are reaching Russian soil. Indeed, the local regional government wants to encourage this immigration because, as we will see later, Russia's Far East is losing population. But Russia, once North Korea's ideological ally, has other worries, lying as it does within reach of North Korea's rockets, and potentially, nuclear weapons. Hence Russia is one of the six members of the team of nations seeking to temper North Korea's nuclear ambitions.

Russia's boundaries enclose a country that, for all its continental size, is very nearly landlocked. The czars of old were in a constant drive to push Russia's limits seaward. Peter the Great wanted to make Russia a maritime as well as a land power and built St. Petersburg, his new capital, on Russia's window to the Baltic Sea between Finland and Estonia. Catherine the Great sent her armies to the shores of the Black Sea and into Transcaucasia, but her real objective was an outlet on the shores of the Indian Ocean. The British and the Turks denied her that goal, so that Russia west of the Urals depended on the seasonally ice-blocked Baltic and the narrow, Turk-controlled Bosphorus and Dardanelles for outlets to the sea. True, Russia's eastward expansion to the Pacific Ocean gave it a major port at Vladivostok, but this was no practical alternative to a nation concentrated thousands of miles across Siberia to the west. And Russia's borders create another problem obvious from the map: for all its bulk, the country is almost entirely confined to high, cold latitudes under Arctic influences much of the year (see Figure 4-4). Grain shortages during the Soviet era drove communist planners to expand farm

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production through irrigated megaprojects in the republics, but even then Moscow had to depend on costly imports from the west. Now the Soviet Union's breadbasket, Ukraine, is an independent country and Russia's climatic quandary is even more pronounced. As a Russian geographer once said to me, "our borders have never been our friends."

Crossing those borders overland during the Soviet era was a daunting experience. I rode a bus from Helsinki to (then) Leningrad in June 1964, my first field trip to the U.S.S.R., and I learned that the boundary on the map was in fact a wide zone on the ground. We reached the Finnish border just before dark, and formalities were quick and courteous. We reboarded the bus and proceeded into a treeless corridor, to be met by a carload of uniformed, armed guards who escorted us several miles down the road. In the distance was a patch of bright light, so bright that when we reached it, it was as if the bus had been driven into a surgical theater. There we were ordered off the bus and all luggage and cargo was unloaded. Passengers were separated into three groups, Soviet, European (I was traveling on a Dutch passport), and others, including a group of Canadian and American academics. Every piece of luggage was examined in minute detail, and we were physically searched in ways that make the current airport-security procedure seem casual by comparison. Then we were instructed to sign documents stipulating that we were not carrying items ranging from books and "documents" to weapons and "propaganda." The entire operation took about three hours, and I wondered how long the wait would be when a line formed. "Never a queue," said the English-speaking guard handling the North Americans. "Only three buses a day and maybe five cars." I thought about that as heavy armored gates swung open and our driver headed into the darkness of the road to Vyborg. The main road between the capital of a neighboring country and the main port of Russia, and the daily traffic amounted to fewer than ten vehicles. Soviet borders were barriers indeed.

#### A VAST REALM

Even after the loss of its 14 dependencies, Russia remains the world's giant state territorially, nearly twice as large as the next-ranking country, Canada, and with 13 neighbors (no. 2 Canada has one). From the volcano-studded Kamchatka Peninsula in the Russian Far East to the great port city of St. Petersburg in the west, the country stretches across 11 time zones. A television program called *Good Morning Russia* airing in Moscow at 7 A.M. local time would be seen in Vladivostok at dinner time. Russia's northernmost Arctic-sea islands lie north of 80 degrees latitude; its southernmost sliver

of land adjoins Azerbaijan in Transcaucasia, still above 40 degrees. Putting this in North American terms, all of Russia lies north of the approximate latitude of Boston.

It is worth taking a moment to look at the map of world climates (page 88) to see just how cold Russia really is. Neither distance nor mountains protect it against invasions of Arctic air. Almost all of it is dominated by D climates, which in the west have a short warm summer that diminishes eastward, creating the frigid conditions for which Siberia is a synonym. Not until maritime influences moderate the climate along the Pacific coast do Siberian conditions let up. Looking at the map of world population distribution (page 98) we can see that most of Russia's over 140 million people cluster in the mildest corner of the country, the west, and in a ribbon along the southern margins of Siberia, where the Trans-Siberian Railroad links cities and towns and connects the populated west to the sparsely peopled Far East.

Just as Americans use geographic references such as "Midwest" and "Great Plains," so do Russians refer to their vast country's broad physiographic regions. The great divider of Russia is the Ural Mountains, the Appalachians of Russia but located farther into the interior (Fig. 11-3). The Urals extend from the Arctic Ocean, where they rise above the water as glacier-carrying Novaya Zemlya Island, to (and beyond) the desert border with Kazakhstan. West of the Urals, in the perception of many people, lies "European Russia"; to the east, therefore, lies something else, though the cultural landscapes of Russian towns to the east of the Urals are remarkably similar to those of the west. In any case, the heart of Russia, its core area in geographic lingo, lies on the Russian Plain, an extension of the North European Lowland, cooler and drier but still productive agriculturally. At the center of it is Moscow, on its short Baltic coast lies St. Petersburg, and crossing it is the great Volga River, flanked by industrial cities all along its course.

Siberia begins on the eastern slopes of the Urals and does not end until the shores of the Bering Sea, but its relief does change from west to east (Fig. 11-3). Westernmost Siberia, region (3) on the map, has comparatively low relief and is drained by a major river system, the Ob-Irtysh, whose gradient is so slight that Soviet engineers talked of reversing it to irrigate farmlands to the south (Lincoln, 1994). In this forbidding, forested, frigid countryside lay many of the prison camps of the infamous Soviet gulag, in which, historians estimate, between 30 and 60 million inmates perished during the seven decades of communist rule (Remnick, 1993). Along Siberia's more livable southern margin lie cities such as Omsk and Novosibirsk, strategically crucial during World War II when much of Soviet industry was shifted eastward, across the Urals and away from the Nazi advance.

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At the eastern margins of the West Siberian Plain, the relief changes quite dramatically, especially in the south, where jumbled mountain ranges rise from the plain. In the north, Siberia takes on the character of a rugged plateau. Here the Trans-Siberian Railroad passes through narrow valleys and hugs the walls of steep gorges, eventually emerging from this rough terrain to reach the key city in the area, Irkutsk, gateway to Lake Baykal. This freshwater lake lies in a rift valley similar to those of East Africa's Great Lakes, but Lake Baykal, nearly 400 miles (640 km) long and averaging 30 miles (50 km) in width, is even deeper, reaching more than 5,300 feet (1,620 m) in depth. By some calculations Lake Baykal contains one-fifth of all the freshwater on the Earth's surface, and its unique ecology attracts an endless stream of researchers from all over the world to study it.

Now comes Russia's vast, forested, mountainous east, region (6) on the map, lower in the Yakutsk Basin and higher in the spectacular Kamchatka Peninsula, the country's most geologically active zone. Don't expect to drive to this earthquake-prone, volcanic slab of tectonic plate (ironically, north-eastern Russia is geologically part of the North American Plate!), because there are no connecting roads. The people who share this peninsula with more than 20 active and over 100 dormant volcanoes live as though they were on an island, fishing for a living and boating or flying to the mainland when the need arises.

As Figure 11-3 shows, the Russian Far East incorporates one real island, named Sakhalin, and this is an important component of this region's physical as well as cultural geography. From the mid-nineteenth century on, the Russians and the Japanese repeatedly fought over Sakhalin Island, and not until the end of World War II was Soviet control confirmed. When the Russians held it, they used Sakhalin as a penal colony (the great writer Anton Chekhov in one of his books described the terrible conditions under which prisoners lived), but during Soviet times Sakhalin became an increasingly important source of fuels ranging from oil in the north to coal in the south. In post-Soviet years additional finds of oil reserves have made Sakhalin Island a key constituent of the commodity-based Russian economy.

Russia's enormous size bestows it with a large inventory of natural resources, among which oil and natural gas have been the key money makers during the post-1991 period. The Soviet Union's first dictator, V. I. Lenin, was determined to speed his country's industrialization, especially its heavy manufactures. For this the U.S.S.R. contained almost everything it needed, from coal to iron ore and from other metals to alloys. When World War II loomed, this resource base allowed the Soviets to build their own weaponry with which to defeat the German invaders, and afterward Russian factories

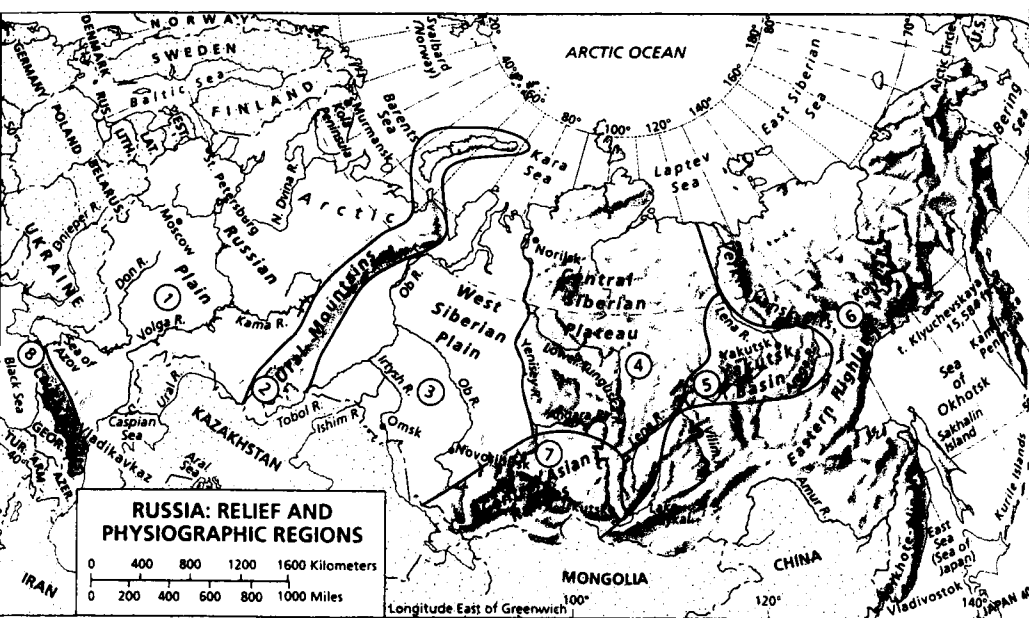


Fig. 11-3

produced most of what the country required, from automobiles to railroad cars and from tractors to passenger planes. When, during the 1950s, the Russians launched the first Earth-orbiting satellite and a Russian cosmonaut was the first in space, it was a homegrown project that astonished the world, proving, it seemed, the superiority of the Soviet system.

But for all its size and large population (third largest in the world while the U.S.S.R. lasted), economic interaction with the rest of the world was very limited. Soviet products did not appear on international markets; Russian automobiles were not seen, except as a curiosity, on foreign streets. The state enterprises of the command economy produced goods at costs and quality levels that would have made them uncompetitive in any case, so that the largest volume of exports was not consumer goods but weaponry, sold by the Soviet government to allied regimes. The economic geography of the Soviet Union resulted from assignment, not efficiency—certain cities and towns were allocated production tasks based on criteria other than cost. The potential for corruption in such a system can only be imagined. When the Soviet Union collapsed and Russia faced integration into the world economy, the massive sale of commodities—oil and natural gas—became the major source of badly needed external revenues. Russia was fortunate to possess substantial energy reserves from its share of the Caspian Basin in the west to Sakhalin Island in the east, with ready customers including Europe, Japan, and China. But overdependence on a single commodity entails risks and

skews development. It opened the way to “crony capitalism” as high-level insiders bought up state enterprises, tax collections faltered, factories failed, and, in 1998, the government defaulted and the economy crashed, driving away the first wave of investors. A vast reservoir of natural resources alone is not enough to ensure this (or any other) country’s prosperity.

### SOVIET LEGACY, RUSSIAN CHALLENGE

In the political-geographic arena, too, the problems Russia confronts are daunting. Organizing the administration of so vast, remote, and isolated a realm has posed a historical challenge for Russian czars, communists, and democratically elected leaders alike. Expansion was one thing—Russian armies were able to penetrate deep into Central Asia, and Russian colonists claimed Alaska and built their southernmost fort near San Francisco Bay—but consolidation was quite another. When United States secretary of state William Seward offered to buy Russia’s Alaskan holdings in 1867, the Russian government quickly agreed, because these outposts were becoming more trouble than they seemed to be worth. In truth, successive czarist rulers never established a satisfactory administrative structure for the numerous peoples, Russian and non-Russian, under their control. Europe’s democratic revolution passed Russia by, and its economic revolution touched the czars’ domain only slightly. Most Russians, and tens of millions of non-Russians under czarist domination, faced exploitation, corruption, subjugation, and starvation. When desperate rebellions erupted in 1905 and full-scale revolution broke out in 1917, there was no political framework to hold the state together (Shaw, 1999).

Thus it fell to the communist victors in that revolution, the Bolsheviks, to design the regional framework that would constitute the Soviet Union. The basic structure created 15 “Soviet Socialist Republics” (SSRs) among which the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR) was first among theoretical equals. The other 14, from the Estonian SSR on the Baltic to the Tajik SSR bordering Afghanistan, were designed to accommodate non-Russian peoples who had fallen under Russian domination during czarist times. That system, of course, fell apart when the Soviet Union collapsed. More durable was the framework the communist planners laid out within Russia itself, because this is what the post-Soviet leaders inherited, and with which they had to work in their effort to transform the vast country from communist dictatorship to democratic consensus.

It is useful to take a look at this convoluted Soviet system, because it contains the seeds of the troubles post-Soviet Russia has faced in the years



following 1991 (Shaw, 1999). The Soviets, always mindful of status and hierarchy, divided the RSFSR into internal "republics," autonomous regions (*okrugs*), provinces (*oblasts*), and territories (*krais*). The "republics," like those beyond Russia's borders, were established to recognize the largest ethnic minorities within the RSFSR. Although this administrative order reflected a descending level of importance and, in a very general way, distance from the capital, that order could be countermanded through the powerful personality of a local leader. Kremlin watchers knew that when you began to hear the name of some remote kray frequently, it was likely that a party leader from there was ascending the political ladder and gaining influence in Moscow. Nor were all krais unimportant by definition: the one located farthest from Moscow, Primorskiy Territory, was home to the huge Soviet naval base of Vladivostok, a strategic city closed to the outside world whose borders were controlled even more tightly than those of the country as a whole.

The Russian "federation," of course, was a federal state in name only. The RSFSR, like the Soviet Union as a whole, functioned as a centralized unitary state, and all essential power resided in Moscow. The rights of ethnic minorities, despite their "republics" on the map, were strictly limited, and during World War II minorities tended to be suspect as potential allies of the invading Germans. The story of what happened to the Muslim Chechens is among the worst: Stalin accused them of collaboration and in 1944 ordered the entire population loaded on trains and exiled to Central Asia. Tens of thousands died along the way, their bodies thrown from the railroad cars. Many who survived this horror then perished in the harsh and unfamiliar environment at their destination. A man named Shamil Basayev, whom we will meet later, claims to have lost 40 relatives in this genocide, a fateful as well as dreadful personal calamity. Pardoned by Stalin's successor and permitted to return to their homeland in 1957, the remaining Chechens never forgot what Russians did to them, and when the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991 they seized on the opportunity to declare their independence. This started a cycle of violence that has killed thousands more and continues to this day—not just in Chechnya but in Moscow and elsewhere.

When Russia emerged from the wreckage of the U.S.S.R. as a geographically redefined country embarked on a course toward democratic government and a true federal system, Chechnya was not its only problem. The new Russian administration, led by the redoubtable Boris Yeltsin, could not simply sweep away the structural legacy the Soviets had built; it was the only game in town. So the Russian leadership took stock of the Soviet map and began to modify it to facilitate what would be a difficult transition. Counting all the administrative entities (whatever their rank) in the Soviet system, Russia was

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endowed with 89 regions, including 21 republics (Fig. 11-4). The regions were given an equal voice in the government through elected representatives, but special status was given to the republics. Early on, before Chechnya became Russia's nemesis, several of these republics proclaimed their independence, autonomy, right to self-determination, and other separatist intentions (Kaiser, 1994). One of them was historic and still substantially Muslim Tatarstan, astride the Volga east of Moscow, whose president in 1992 refused to sign the Russian Federation Treaty. Before long Tatarstan was flying its own flag over its assembly building, had launched an airline, and was insisting on "equal partnership" with Russia rather than mere membership in the 89-unit federal framework. In the Far East, a recalcitrant governor of the Primorskiy Region, now centered on an open Vladivostok where the Soviet fleet lay rusting and smugglers brought in contraband by the boatload, refused to send Moscow's cut of the (legitimate) tax take to the capital, defying the parliament. But here and elsewhere in the Russian federation, common sense eventually prevailed and notions of sovereignty faded. Still, although Russia did not fall apart during the Yeltsin presidency, chaos and near anarchy reigned as regional governors ignored the administration's laws, friends and associates of the president bought state enterprises for a song, organized crime flourished in Russia and spread its tentacles abroad, the armed forces sank into disarray, corruption was rife, and public health and well-being suffered.

#### TROUBLE IN TRANSCAUCASIA

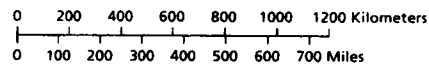
As the government's failures mounted, the situation in Transcaucasia deteriorated. When the new Russia emerged in 1991, the Chechens shared their republic with their Muslim neighbors, the Ingush, but strife between the two groups had to be headed off. The Russian parliament in 1992 decided to split the republic in two, Chechnya and Ingushetiya, hoping to isolate the more militant Chechens from their more compliant neighbors. The effect, however, was to redouble the determination of Chechnya's non-Russians (30 percent of the population, then about 2 million, was Russian) to take control of their republic and to declare independence. It was the start of a cycle of increasing violence and failing negotiations that exposed the weaknesses of Moscow's government, the failures of its armed forces, and the depth of Chechnyans' resentment toward their rulers.

Chechnya, about the size of a small New England state, has three regions: the Caucasus mountains of the south, which provide refuge for insurgents seeking independence; the plains north of the Terek River, where Russians, who make up about 30 percent of the population, have been farming for

# RUSSIA AND ITS REGIONS

- Ethnic Republics and Autonomous Regions
- ▨ Russian Regions

National capital is underlined>



## RUSSIAN ADMINISTRATIVE UNITS (named after their capitals)

- |                |                 |                    |
|----------------|-----------------|--------------------|
| 1. Astrakhan   | 11. Kursk       | 21. Rostov         |
| 2. Belgorod    | 12. Lipetsk     | 22. Ryazan         |
| 3. Bryansk     | 13. Mariy-el    | 23. St. Petersburg |
| 4. Chelyabinsk | 14. Moscow      | 24. Samara         |
| 5. Ivanovo     | 15. Novosibirsk | 25. Saratov        |
| 6. Kaluga      | 16. Omsk        | 26. Smolensk       |
| 7. Kemerovo    | 17. Orenburg    | 27. Stavropol      |
| 8. Kostroma    | 18. Orel        |                    |
| 9. Krasnodar   | 19. Penza       |                    |
| 10. Kurgan     | 20. Pskov       |                    |
|                |                 | 28. Tambov         |
|                |                 | 29. Tula           |
|                |                 | 30. Tver           |
|                |                 | 31. Ulyanovsk      |
|                |                 | 32. Vladimir       |
|                |                 | 33. Volgograd      |
|                |                 | 34. Voronezh       |
|                |                 | 35. Yaroslavl      |



Fig. 11-4



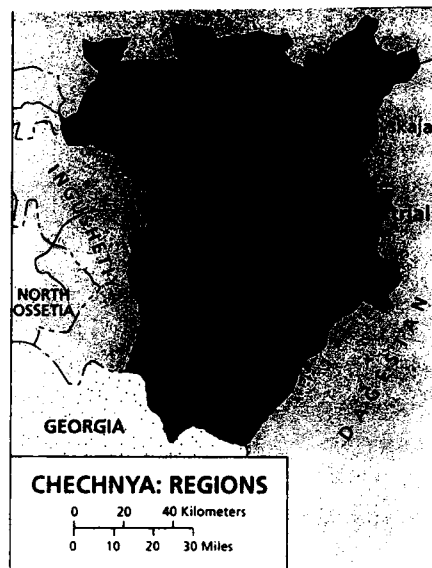


Fig. 11-5

generations; and, between these, the urban-industrial middle zone where the capital, Grozny, other towns, and the territory's oil installations are located (Fig. 11-5). Power over this middle zone means control over the territory, and here most of the conflicts that began in 1994 have been fought as the Russian army, at times exceeding 80,000 soldiers, fought rebels in a war conjuring up memories of Afghanistan, or perhaps Iraq. The capital was totally devastated, other towns were severely damaged, and negotiations after stalemates soon were followed by renewed fighting, with high casualties on all sides. Meanwhile what had been a nationalist campaign for independence turned into a wider war involving Islamic causes as fighters and funds from Afghanistan to Saudi Arabia arrived to support the Muslim Chechens (Tishkov, 2004).

However, Chechnya is only one of a tier of seven ethnic republics along the northern flank of the Caucasus mountains, from Dagestan in the east to Adygeya in the west (Fig. 11-2). Each one of these republics presents its own particular set of cultural, political, and economic problems in this fractious region: Dagestan's 2 million people are divided into some 30 ethnic groups; mainly Muslim Ingushetiya is divided between pro-Russian and pro-Chechen supporters; North Ossetians, generally pro-Russian, want union with their South Ossetian neighbors across the border with Georgia; the Muslim Balkars in Kabardino-Balkariya have memories of Russian mistreatment during World War II; many Muslim Karachay in the Karachayevo-Cherkessiya Republic were forcibly exiled during that war as well; and only

Adygeya is without latent ethnic conflicts. Sympathies for the Chechen cause extend well beyond Chechnya's borders, even after terrorists began to extend the conflict into this region and beyond.

This terrorist campaign, which soon reached Moscow itself, did incalculable damage to the Russian state and its political and economic hopes. Shamil Basayev, the Chechen who lost so many family members during the Chechens' Central Asian exile, was in Moscow supporting President Boris Yeltsin during the 1990s, seeing the president as Chechnya's only hope for autonomy. But when that hope was dashed with the 1994 intervention by Russian forces, Basayev was ready to play his role. In 1995, after Russian attacks leveled his family's home and killed 11 of his relatives including his wife, two daughters, and a brother, Basayev became Russia's Usama bin Laden. He began a terrorist campaign that has continued for more than a decade, unsettling not only the region around Chechnya but also Moscow itself.

Basayev's first high-profile action occurred a month after his family's demise, an attack on a hospital in neighboring Dagestan in which his fighters took 1,500 hostages of whom more than 100 were killed. In 1996 his forces drove the Russian army out of Grozny and in effect achieved the autonomy Moscow had denied him, but in the "presidential" election that followed he received less than a quarter of the vote. Although he was included in the government, Chechnya in effect was a failed state by then, and Islamic jihadists and Arab funds were flowing in. Basayev became prime minister of the Chechen-controlled part of Chechnya they referred to as the Republic of Ichkeria. With Russia in political disarray and Boris Yeltsin about to relinquish his presidency, Basayev's terrorists mounted another raid into Dagestan and bombed two apartment buildings in Moscow. When the new president, Vladimir Putin, ordered Russian forces back into Chechnya in late 1999 for what was to be the second war for control, he had the almost universal support of Russians. The Chechen regime they attacked was recognized by only one other government: Afghanistan's Taliban. By midwinter 2000, Chechen forces had been driven out of devastated Grozny and into their mountain hideouts, and from then on Basayev was reduced to planning and ordering a series of terrorist strikes. Perhaps the most dramatic was the takeover of a crowded theater during a performance in Moscow in October 2002 by a group of 41 Chechens and their allies, leading to a prolonged standoff, a bungled rescue effort, and the deaths of 130 theatergoers.

Consider the impact on Russia of such actions in just the year 2004: in February, a bomb in the Moscow subway killed 41 and injured more than 100. In May, a bomb planted under a row of seats in a Grozny stadium killed the new Moscow-approved president, Akhmad Kadyrov. In June, an

assault on police stations in neighboring Ingushetiya killed nearly 100. In August, a raid on police installations in Groznyy killed more than 50. In September, a team of terrorists took more than 1,000 children, parents, and teachers hostage in a school in Beslan, North Ossetia, resulting in the deaths of at least 370 children and adults. Also in September, suicide bombers simultaneously blew up two airliners flying from Moscow's airport, killing 90. With no prospect of changing the course of history through such actions, the Chechens, having lost their republic and seen many of their allies depart to fight the infidels in Iraq, now take opportunistic revenge and wait for a time when their cause will return to center stage.

### DEMOGRAPHIC DISASTER

Russia's political, economic, and strategic struggles continue against a background of social problems so severe that they are routinely described by demographers as disastrous (Demko, 1998). In 1991, when reconstituted Russia emerged from the disintegrated Soviet Union, its population was approximately 148 million. By the beginning of 2005, it had declined to just over 143 million—even though several million ethnic Russians had immigrated during this period from the former Soviet republics. Geographers who study population issues calculate that, since the end of communism, Russia has seen about 10 million more deaths than births. Such population decrease usually accompanies a lengthy, major war or massive emigration. But in Russia, neither war nor an outflow of people is to blame. Rather, the situation signals severe social dislocation.

It should not be surprising that Russia's birth rate dropped markedly during and after the breakup of the Soviet Union, as uncertainty tends to cause families to have fewer children. Although the birth rate has more or less stabilized just below 9 per thousand, it is the death rate that has surged to more than 16 per thousand, causing an annual loss of population of over 7 percent or nearly 1 million annually. Only net immigration slowed a decline so severe that many demographers refer to it as catastrophic.

What is causing this calamity? The birth rate is held down by widespread abortion practices and by sexually transmitted diseases, but the death rate, especially among males, reveals the real trouble: rampant diseases such as tuberculosis, heart disease, and underreported AIDS, endemic alcoholism that is linked to these diseases and is also part of a culture of excess in which vodka and more recently beer play a major role, heavy smoking, especially among young males, traffic and industrial accidents, suicide, and murder. On average, a Russian male is nine times more likely to die a violent or ac-



Fig. 11-6

cidental death than his European Union counterpart. Male life expectancy in Russia has declined from 71 in 1991 to 59 in 2004 (female life expectancy has also dropped, but much less, to 72). Fewer than half of today's Russian teenage males will reach 60.

What will happen to Russia if this continues? The Russian Parliament, the Duma, has been pressing the fast-growing beer industry to limit its advertising and has tried to legislate against beer consumption in the streets, but the culture of vodka consumption is so entrenched that this campaign is unlikely to have the desired effect. Yet if the rate of population loss continues, Russia may have a mere 100 million inhabitants by 2050, possibly fewer, and given its vast territory, this may so weaken the state as to make it unsustainable. Already, the Far East has lost 17 percent of its population since 1991, the South 12 percent, the Northwest, more than 8 percent and Siberia nearly 5 percent (Fig. 11-6). The Far East, with an area the size of the contiguous United States, now has a mere 6.7 million inhabitants, labor shortages are common, and development is mostly stalled (Thornton and Ziegler, 2002). The only solution seems to be a large influx of immigrants, and they are ready to come: North Koreans, Chinese, and others. But whether the government in Moscow will approve the immigration of as many as 250,000 East Asian immigrants is another matter. The Russian presence in the Far East is already tenuous, and the arrival of large numbers of Koreans and Chinese might create new social problems even as it begins to solve economic ones. Russia is in demographic trouble, and the way out is not in sight.

In 2000, Russia achieved a feat that a decade earlier was unimaginable: a democratic transition in the president's office. Vladimir Putin succeeded Boris Yeltsin, who for most of the decade held the office. Younger, more energetic, and determined to set Russia on a new course, he took on the oligarchs who had been favored by his predecessor, revived the economy, and began to reform the armed forces. He made it clear in public statements that he wanted Russia to acquire a stable political system, become a world-class economic power, and regain the international respect and strength it had lost during the nineties. He also proclaimed an adherence to the rule of law, and used this principle to corral several of President Yeltsin's favored oligarchs and put them in jail. But by rule of law, President Putin seemed to mean his own arbitrary power rather than a set of regulations passed by the Duma, the lower house of parliament.

Russia has a history of authoritarian government that goes back centuries, and the decade of President Yeltsin's chaotic and warped versions of democracy and capitalism made many Russians yearn for a stronger leader, even the old autocratic kind (Trenin, 2002). To a certain degree, this is what they got, and the ongoing conflict in Chechnya and its terrorist extension did much to create the opportunity. Immediately after the Beslan atrocity, President Putin said that "democracy does not result in stability, but rather instability . . . it does not unify, but rather divides" (Myers, 2004). Ethnic and religious tensions in culturally divided areas can only be controlled "with an iron hand from above." Most ethnic Russians appeared to agree with him, and many seemed willing to yield personal freedoms to accomplish it. Living in fear makes people worry less about individual rights and freedoms, and skillful exploitation of such an atmosphere can allow political leaders to concentrate power. President Putin approvingly pointed to the absence of Chechnya-like conflicts during the Soviet period, when such strife was "harshly suppressed by the governing ideology." Seizing the opportunity, the president began taking control of still-independent television, radio, and other media, and started manipulating regional and local elections.

The strategy to achieve more effective control over Russia's 89 politically still unpredictable regions was foreshadowed some years ago when the first Putin administration divided the country into seven new administrative units—not to enhance their influence in Moscow but to expand Moscow's authority over them (Fig. 11-6 displays these units). Each of these seven "federal" administrative districts has its capital city, which became the conduit for Moscow's "guidance," as the official plan put it. Then, in 2004, the other shoe dropped. President Putin introduced legislation to reverse the fundamental

democratic right of representation in the regions, enshrined in the Constitution, by ending the regions' authority to elect its own governors. Henceforth, these governors would be appointed by the president, not elected by the people in the regions. Earlier, the governors had already lost their membership in the Federation Council, the upper house of parliament. Coupled with this move, the president announced plans to change the electoral system for seats in the Duma, so that party appointees, not independent legislators, will fill those seats. All this was approved in the Duma, where parties loyal to the president have a huge majority; it was even supported by some of the elected governors themselves. It was, in the words of a Russian colleague paraphrasing China's line on economics, a retreat to "democracy with a Russian face." Western governments, however, expressed strong reservations. In Bratislava, Slovakia during his visit to Europe in February 2005, President George W. Bush conveyed to President Putin American concerns over Russia's apparent drift toward authoritarianism in a private meeting followed by an awkward press conference that saw the two leaders talking past each other rather than with each other. President Putin reiterated his doubts about democracy; he cited America's Electoral College as evidence that American democracy has its own contradictions. The election of regional leaders in Russia, he argued, was no less democratic. As to the restrictions imposed on Russia's media, this, too, had precedents in other not-so-democratic "democracies." While the two presidents emphasized areas of agreement, including control over nuclear arms and the War on Terrorism, the issue of Russia's apparent course toward greater authoritarianism clearly eroded what had been a budding personal relationship.

#### RUSSIA AND THE WORLD TODAY

Russia may not have the capacity to recapture the position of global power once held by its Soviet predecessor, but this remains an important country. The status and operational condition of its nuclear arsenal is uncertain, but Russia remains a nuclear power. Russia's armed forces are in disarray, but reform is under way. Russia continues to wield influence in several members of the otherwise defunct Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), an association of Soviet Socialist Republics formed to succeed the U.S.S.R. Russia maintains military bases and installations in 9 of its former 14 Soviet partners. Russia's large energy resources are already crucial to Europe and increasingly so to China and Japan. And Russia has taken independent, sometimes obstructionist positions in international strategic matters such as action in the former Yugoslavia, intervention in Iraq, and nuclear

ambitions in Iran. For all his determined initiatives in fighting the War on Terrorism, President Putin declined to support the United States-led intervention in Iraq, taking an independent course when a different one might have yielded greater short-term benefits. Clearly the president wants his country to be a superpower again, an economic tiger in the making, and a political force to be reckoned with.

This chapter has enumerated some of the realities that cloud this vision, but there can be no doubt that Russia's energy position is favorable and highly lucrative. Indeed, it is a strategic asset as well. In 2005, China and Japan were vying for pipeline access to the oil field at Angarsk, not far from the southern end of Lake Baykal in the Siberia Region. The Chinese want to build a pipeline to a refinery at their Northeastern oil center of Daqing, whose long-productive reserves are dwindling. The Japanese want Angarsk's oil to flow to a terminal at Nakhodka on the Russian coast, from where it would be shipped to Japan across the East Sea. Moscow, aware of China's fast-rising demand for oil and of Japan's already substantial energy needs, is looking for the best deal.

With such economic advantage comes political clout. As noted earlier, the Russians have a long-standing territorial dispute with the Japanese over a group of four small islands off the northeast corner of Japan's northernmost large island, Hokkaido. These islands were occupied by the Soviets shortly before the end of the Second World War, and they never gave them back. Russia inherited them when the Soviet Union collapsed, and it did not return them either, despite continuing demands from Tokyo. These tiny Kurile islands are the reason why the Soviet Union, and now Russia, never signed a peace treaty with Japan ending their conflict. Over the years, various attempts to settle the issue have failed, despite generous offers by the Japanese to fund development projects in the Russian Far East, help develop ports and infrastructure, and initiate joint ventures. About 50,000 Russians have settled there, and when the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) took effect, the islands acquired not only a 12-mile territorial sea but also a 200-mile maritime exclusive economic zone (EEZ), enhancing their value. As to the Japanese, for all their bluster they cannot afford to play hardball with a Russia whose energy resources they badly need. The Russians will be on their Kurile outposts for awhile yet.

At the opposite end of Eurasia, Russia's relationships with the West, and especially with the European Union, are more complicated. Russia was remarkably cooperative during NATO's expansion to its very borders, and that cooperation was rewarded with NATO's practice of inviting Russian representatives to take their places at the table with NATO government ministers

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during administrative and planning sessions; Russians also participate in other alliance deliberations. This once-unthinkable arrangement symbolizes the new position Russia has taken in Eurasia and the world: it is no longer the adversary for which NATO was forged in the first place.

But the relationship between the European Union (EU) and Russia is less satisfactory. Those who argue that an EU capable of considering the eventual admission of Turkey should be able to contemplate the ultimate expansion of the EU into Russia face powerful counterarguments. Once again, Russia is a casualty of Chechnya: EU members abhor the brutality with which Russia has pursued its military objectives in the republic, its manipulation of elections, and its discrimination against minorities in the federation itself, justified as part of the necessary war on terrorism. EU governments see deterioration, not progress, in Russia's democratic reforms and human-rights practices, notably in the government's selective pursuit of "oligarchs" who enriched themselves during the chaotic Yeltsin presidency. Russia is the obvious state to encourage and support free, open, and fair elections in its CIS neighbors Ukraine and Belarus, but instead Moscow has been silent about Aleksandr Lukashenko's authoritarian actions in Belarus and meddled inappropriately in Ukraine's 2004 elections. Further, the Europeans want Russia, which has had a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement with the pre-expansion EU, to approve to a similar agreement with the new, 25-member Union, which now touches its very borders.

The Russians, on their part, have their demands too. Unlike NATO, they are on the sidelines when it comes to EU decision making, and they want a seat at the table in Brussels as well. They want the EU to buy more Russian oil and gas, aware that the resulting dependence will enhance their negotiating position. The Russians want trade concessions from the EU countries, because the new European map will close nearby (or common) borders against goods ranging from steel to farm produce; in addition they want the EU to agree to visa-free travel between Russia and the EU. They further want the EU to agree to give the Russian language official status in EU countries where large Russian-speaking minorities continue to reside, and an end to anti-Russian discrimination there. And always on the table is Russia's demand for free transit for commercial and military traffic between the exclave of Kaliningrad and Russia (a look at the map shows that such free transit, through Poland or Lithuania, will only reach Belarus, not Russia itself. Apparently no concern exists over transit through Belarus).

This enumeration of obstacles contains both intractable and far-reaching issues as well as comparatively minor ones. In Russia itself, a large and vocal segment of the parliament is in no mood to contemplate negotiations for EU

admission even if the EU proposed this; rather, they see Russia as a counterweight to the EU, with its own economic and political sphere including Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Armenia, and even some of the Central Asian republics. After all, Russia still has a population much larger than any EU member, is territorially more than three times as large as the European Union, has a distinct culture, is ethnically more complex than any neighbor near or far, and has a history of empire unlike any European country. An Atlantic-to-Pacific European Union would constitute an ultimate confirmation of the goals set in Rome half a century ago, but it may take that long again to accomplish.

## HOPE FOR AFRICA?

Informal but persuasive surveys indicate that, among geographic realms competing for American attention, Africa ranks dead last—the “real” Africa, that is, the Africa lying south of the vast Sahara, the Africa of the defiant Ashante and the mysterious builders of Zimbabwe, of the powerful Zulu Empire and the stone city of Zanzibar, of the bustling markets of Dakar, the oil platforms of the Niger Delta, and the gold mines of the Witwatersrand. It is the Africa of the vast Congo Basin and the great Kilimanjaro, of Victoria Falls and Table Mountain, of the Great Lakes and the Kalahari. There is nothing like it in the world, its diverse peoples a kaleidoscope of cultures, its endangered primates a mirror of humanity, its dwindling wildlife populations a fading link with the early Tertiary.

It is also *terra incognita* to Americans more than any other part of the world. When Africa does gain America’s attention, it tends to happen because of civil wars, health crises, natural disasters, or terrorist attacks, and only rarely because of the kinds of positive developments that occasionally emerge from other parts of the world. When the murderous dictator Abacha ruled Nigeria, he and his excesses were regular fodder for United States newspapers, but when the country achieved a remarkable, generally peaceful transition to democracy and President Obasanjo was elected, his tribulations in Africa’s most populous and religiously divided country gained far less attention. South Africa’s dramatic transition from apartheid to democracy generated a brief surge of interest and endowed President Mandela with celebrity status, but how much attention are the United States media giving today to what is by many measures Africa’s most important country?

United States leaders do from time to time signal momentary awareness of Africa’s plight and use it to make high-profile forays to states deemed deserving, as did President Clinton during his second term (with little or no outcome despite much emotional rhetoric), or highly publicized commitments to help solve Africa’s problems, as did President George W. Bush during his first term with a \$15 billion fund to combat AIDS (but also to