Yeltsin's period of treaty-making mania, "Russia's institutional structure offers few alternatives to bilateralism for intergovernmental negotiations and reform," and that as such, Putin should not expect his centralizing reforms to "alter the status quo" of Russian federalism without the devotion of "vital political and economic resources" to accomplishing this task (p. 160). The fact that the Putin administration has just signed renewed bilateral agreements with Tatarstan and Bashkortostan suggests that Pascal's conclusion is correct. Drawing on a useful comparison of Russia's asymmetrical federal system with that of Spain and Canada, Pascal urges that we not a priori assume that a reliance on bilateralism and the asymmetry it engenders is necessarily a negative thing for Russia. For while she does acknowledge that asymmetrical federations require "constant negotiation to balance regional diversity and national unity" (p. 180), such systems also provide the best way to "maintain the Rikerian bargain in multiethnic, diverse federations" (p. 182).

One of the strengths of Pascal's study is her focus on the bilateral negotiations between some of the lesser-known regions and the center—we have several accounts of the process leading to Tatarstan's treaty in February 1994, but very few detailed accounts of how this dynamic played out in other, non-ethnic regions. In this sense, Pascal's book is a welcome contribution to our understanding of the "on the ground" dynamics of federation building in Russia (particularly interesting is her observation that two of the three regions turn to outside "consultants" to help fashion their strategies and proposals in bargaining with the center—one significant resource certainly not available during the Soviet era!). Her modest, but intelligent conclusions about both the cases she studies and the overall functioning of the Russia federation also seem appropriate and, as noted above, appear to be borne out by subsequent events. Pascal's in-depth fieldwork and her lucid recounting of the paths that led these three regions to three very different treaties make for informative and rewarding reading.

Kate Graney


Russian studies have been confronted with a twin challenge for over a decade. The first, a challenge to the discipline's legitimacy, stems from the charge that the area studies approach failed to predict the collapse of the Soviet Union. The charge has had a particularly deleterious effect in the social sciences where it has contributed to the marginalization of multi-disciplinary approaches and the further dominance of general theory and formal models that largely eschew collaboration with the humanities. The second is a challenge to the field's relevance. During the Cold War, scholars did not have to concern themselves with justifying why it was necessary to study Russia or the Soviet Union. That is no longer the case. For many in both academe and Washington, Russia's relevance is no longer as evident as it once was. The challenge has been made all the more difficult by the emergence of US global hegemony. If the topic is
not related to US management of the international system, then many question its im-
portance. These twin challenges have had unpleasant consequences for the discipline,
universities have been hesitant to hire replacements for retiring “Soviet” scholars,
journals have made less room for area studies articles, and acquisition editors are less
interested in books on post-communism.

The discipline’s response took a long time to form, but its contours are now quite
apparent. In response to the first challenge, Russian studies’ scholars contend that
formal models are too general and can not be applied outside of the geographic and
historical context within which they were developed. They point to the Russian ruble
crisis of 1998 as evidence that the program of radical liberal economic reform favored
by Western-centric scholars and overly zealous politicians (frequently labeled the
Washington Consensus) was simply too blind to the peculiarities of Russia’s past and
present to work. To the charge that Russia may no longer be (as) relevant, Russian
studies’ scholars respond that Russia’s continued instability and its vast nuclear inven-
tory make it relevant.

Lynch offers a contribution to the further development of the discipline’s response
to the twin challenge, one which neatly and elegantly addresses both elements of that
challenge. He argues that Russia’s ability to maintain accountability over its nuclear
inventory is undermined by its economic weakness. That weakness, which erodes its
internal stability and potentially threatens its neighbors, is rooted in the failure of eco-
nomic reform, which has left the country’s industry largely unreconstructed and non-
competitive with its economy overly dependent on the price of oil and natural gas.

What distinguishes Lynch’s contribution is the broad historical view that he takes
of the reasons for the failure of the reforms. Instead of focusing on the Soviet legacy
or institutional inadequacies, his thesis covers the thousand plus year history of Rus-
sia, a history largely shaped by a problematic geography. It is this history that would-
be reformers must understand in order to develop Russia’s economy. Lynch argues
that geographic realities have dictated that the state play the central role in Russian
economic development. Russia is a land power with few barriers to invasion. The
country’s security has, therefore, demanded a highly centralized and militarized state,
one which consumes a significant proportion of the GDP. Hence, the state has always
played an important role in the economy. That role has been enhanced by the eco-
nomic consequences of Russian geography. The vastness of the country together with
a harsh climate has significantly increased the costs of transportation as well as re-
duced the size of the urban population that could be sustained by Russian agriculture.
As a consequence, the costs of production are much higher in Russia than virtually
anywhere else on the globe. Even the cost of extracting oil and natural gas are higher.
In the modern global economy this means that Russia is left with a comparative ad-
vantage in a severely limited line of products and goods. Therefore, if the economy is
to be strong enough to provide the state with the necessary resources for defense, the
state must take the leading role in the country’s development. This has been translated
into the patrimonial state in which political and economic powers have been fused.
The country’s rulers and the owners of its resources are essentially one and the same.

Lynch contends that while the post-Soviet reforms have succeeded in breaking the
nexus between political and economic power for the first time in Russian history,