

---

**WARNING!**

The views expressed in FMSO publications and reports are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official policy or position of the Department of the Army, Department of Defense, or the U.S. Government.

---

## **The Cossack Brotherhood Reborn: A Political/military Force in a Realm of Chaos**

by Mr. Lester W. Grau  
Foreign Military Studies Office, Fort Leavenworth, KS.

---

This paper updates "Rebirth of the Cossack Brotherhood: A Political/Military Force in a Disintegrating Russia" which was published in July 1992. This article was originally published in *Low Intensity Conflict & Law Enforcement*, Volume 2, Number 3, Winter 1993.

---

*"No matter what the future power in Russia is like, Cossack troops will exist. The state needs such a sound and cheerful population accustomed to order. Cossacks will obey any new power which spells order and an opportunity to work in peace." Ataman of the Don Army General-Lieutenant Bogaevsky, written in exile 1928.*

Uniformed personnel are not an uncommon sight on the streets of Moscow, Volgograd, Alma-Ata, Rostov and other cities of the former Soviet empire. Uniformed military and police mingle freely with the crowds and join in the perpetual hunt for food, drink and other scarce commodities. However, another distinctive and unusual uniformed force has emerged and become a fairly common street sight since 1990. Turn-of-the-century uniforms are now freely worn by swaggering Cossacks carrying sidearms and lead-weighted whips (*nagayka*). A people and a way of life which had been systematically destroyed by the Soviets have risen from the ashes, and they are playing an ever-increasing role as both a military/law enforcement force and "king-maker".

### ***Historical Background***

To a Westerner, the word "Cossack" usually conjures up an image of a dance troupe or choir, a body of light cavalry ruthlessly suppressing a street demonstration against the Tsar, or a close-knit community which shared customs, religion and the Great Russian dialect. In fact, defining a Cossack is much more difficult. Cossacks were neither a racial group nor a nationality. While there were thirteen Slavic Cossack "hosts" in Russia and the Ukraine, there were also tribes and subtribes of Mongols, Turkic-Tartars, Caucasians, Persians, Lithuanian-Tartars, and Poles who were Cossacks. Cossacks were not bound by a single religion, and, although the majority practiced the Russian Orthodox religion, Cossack believers also included Moslems, Russian Orthodox old believers, Lamaists, and Shamanists.

Cossacks were originally groups of Slavic peasants, misfits and adventurers who migrated to the borders to escape the heavy hand of governments, serf owners and the tax collectors. It is difficult to generalize about their past as they have been freemen, oppressive tools of an oppressive Tsar, gallant warriors, earthy libertines, pioneer adventurers, ruthless conquerors, champions of downtrodden serfs, infamous plunderers, defenders of the faith, leaders of every significant revolt against the Tsar from 1600 to 1800, light cavalymen, pirates, fishermen, trappers, herdsman and farmers. Philologists trace the origin of the word "Cossack" to Asia several centuries before the birth of Christ.<sup>1</sup> The term "Cossack" followed Genghis Khan's conquering armies and described Tartar raiders who roamed the southern Russian plain. The Turko-Tartar word from which the Russian version of Cossack is derived meant "free adventurer".<sup>2</sup> Cossacks apparently are descended from Tartars, Turks, Russians, Ukrainians and any number of other peoples who passed through or settled on the traditional southern invasion route from Asia to Europe. Beginning in the 1400s, Russian-speaking Cossacks appear regularly in the chronicles of the day, normally in connection with border security. With the collapse of the Golden Horde and the decline of the other hordes, the southern and southeastern borderlands of Russia and the Ukraine were fortified to prevent Tartar incursions. These fortifications were anchored on the Dnieper, Don and Yaik (Ural) rivers. The vast expanses between the forts were patrolled by mobile Cossack guard detachments.<sup>3</sup> It was in this way that the tradition of using Cossacks for hazardous duty such as guards and border patrols had begun.

The Cossacks of the 15th and 16th Centuries were of two distinct groups--the "free" light irregular horsemen who provided guides, escorts and steppe patrols (and were not above a bit of banditry); and the "town" Cossacks, who were cavalry based in frontier towns and outposts. The latter were individual mercenaries recruited for full- or part-time service. Many were granted plots of land, often for life, and were also farmers. Town Cossacks were found on all frontier areas besides the southern flank.<sup>4</sup> The free Cossacks' way of life created, in effect, a separate people.

Free Cossacks were originally sanctuary seekers who fled serfdom, taxation, penury, starvation or justice. They were primarily of Russian stock, with little respect for Tsarist law and custom; once refugees were accepted by the Cossack community, they would never be delivered up to the Tsar's emissaries--no matter how serious their former crime. Free Cossacks proved to be a source of contention between the Crimean and Tartar Khanates, the Prince of the Nogai Horde, and the Tsar of Muscovy. Each blamed the other for Cossack depredations, while they secretly attempted to subvert or control the Cossacks for their own purposes. Tsar Ivan IV (the Terrible) was particularly adept at disowning the Cossacks and publicly condemning their forays while secretly arming and inciting them.<sup>5</sup> The Cossacks, however, conducted an independent foreign policy and maintained their own government and court system.<sup>6</sup>

Russian Cossack hosts such as the Don, Volga, Cherkass, Grebinsk and Yaik were established during the 15th and 16th Centuries. Simultaneously, Polish Cossacks appeared in Poland and the Zaporozhian, Ukrainian and Slobodsk hosts were established in the Ukraine. The rapid conquest and subsequent expansion of the Russian Empire into Siberia and the Far East was on the heels of Cossack mercenaries hired by powerful Muscovite political and economic interests.<sup>7</sup>

Cossacks, particularly the free Cossacks, were a mixed blessing for Russia's rulers. They provided a buffer force between Russia and the Ukraine and Turkey. They were a source of inexpensive warriors and good light cavalry, yet their lack of discipline and propensity to loot during vital phases of the battle limited their value. Further, during the 17th and 18th Centuries, Cossacks led or supported every revolt against the throne. Bogdan Khmel'nitskiy, Stenka Razin, Kondrati Bulavin and Yemelyan Pugachev all led major Cossack-backed revolts which threatened to topple the throne. This led Peter the Great and Catherine the Great to launch campaigns which would eventually bring the Cossacks to heel.<sup>8</sup> The Zaporozhe Cossack host was disbanded, and the Yaik Cossacks were renamed the Ural Cossacks and resettled. Cossack military colonies were moved to the very edges of the Empire and loyalty to the throne was assured through a system of watchful army officers and governors empowered to use any means to prevent further Cossack uprisings. New Cossack hosts, loyal to the throne, were formed.<sup>9</sup>

The relation of the Cossacks to the Tsar fundamentally changed. The Cossacks, who previously answered only to the Cossack elders, now were firmly controlled by the Tsar, becoming tools of the Tsar and an extension of the Tsar's might. They were responsible for military service to the Tsar, with each Cossack furnishing his own uniforms, mount, saber, saddle and horse furniture. The government furnished the Cossack with his rifle, but charged the host for half the cost of each rifle. Each able-bodied male Cossack was liable to military call for up to a 25-year term of service (later reduced to 20 and then 18 years). Cossack forces and their families were ordered to the far-flung frontiers of the expanding Russian Empire as military colonists, where they served as border guards and the first line of defense. In return, Cossacks were paid during their time of service and could also receive up to 30 desyatins (81 acres) of land.<sup>10</sup> Cossack forces were used extensively to combat all of Russia's external and internal enemies. The history of Russian Siberia, Russian Central Asia, Russian Caucasia, Russian Crimea and the Russian Far East is basically a history of the Cossacks.<sup>11</sup>

The Cossacks lived in Cossack towns (*stanitsa*), farms and garrisons. Military service began at age 18, when every able-bodied male was enrolled into service. The first three years of service were spent in basic training. The first two years of this training was conducted in the Cossack town while the last year was spent in a Cossack garrison training center. The youth's family had to arm and equip the fledgling warrior themselves. Twelve years of active service and five years of reserve service followed this training period. But of the twelve years' active service, only the first four years were actually with the colors. For the remaining two four-year periods, the soldier returned home and was called up only for seasonal refresher training or emergency service.<sup>12</sup> Thus, service with the colors was usually about five years in total. Over 60 percent of the Cossack male population served, compared with an average of 31 percent of the rest of the Tsar's subjects.<sup>13</sup>

The basic Cossack military unit was the *sotnya* (100 men) which was the base of the cavalry squadron and the infantry company. The cavalry *sotnya* was divided into four platoons and each platoon was divided into two squads. Four to six cavalry *sotnya* were in a cavalry regiment and two-three cavalry regiments made up a cavalry brigade. Cossack cavalry divisions and corps were fielded. Cossack infantry (*plastun*) units were also employed. Four platoons were in a *sotnya*. Three or four infantry *sotnya* made up a battalion while 2-3 battalions made up a regiment. Cossack horse artillery originally had

twelve guns per *sotnya*. In 1834, this was reduced to eight guns in an artillery battery. By the turn of the century, a cossack battery consisted of six guns.<sup>14</sup>

Cossack forces earned a reputation as fierce irregulars during the Seven Years War (1756-63); the War of 1812; the Crimean War (1853-56); all the Russo-Turkish wars of the 17th, 18th and 19th Centuries; and the First World War.

In 1897, there were approximately 3.5 million Cossacks in the Russian empire.<sup>15</sup> By 1916, the Cossack population stood at 4,434,000 and included eleven Cossack hosts-the Don, Kuban, Terek, Ural, Siberian, Amur, Semirecheniye, Astrakhan, Ussuri, and Yenisey, as well as Cossack forces of the Irkutsk and Yakutsk Cossacks (Figure 1). During First World War, the hosts fielded 474,000 combatants and held title to 63,000,000 desyatins (1,701,000,000 acres) of land.<sup>16</sup> During the war, the Cossacks fielded 164 cavalry regiments, 119 of which were organized into 28 cavalry divisions. In addition, they fielded 35 separate, 142 general purpose and 4 home guard cavalry companies and 78 convoy security cavalry half-companies. The Cossacks contributed two separate infantry divisions, comprised of thirty infantry battalions organized into five separate infantry brigades. They further fielded 27 horse artillery battalions consisting of a total of 63 batteries, plus an additional 15 separate horse artillery batteries. Reserve Cossack forces consisted of sixteen cavalry regiments, three cavalry battalions, eight cavalry companies, three infantry battalions, eight infantry companies, one horse artillery battalion, two horse artillery batteries, two horse artillery platoons and a command structure.<sup>17</sup> Cossack military contribution to the war effort was clearly significant.

### ***Death of the Brotherhood***

The rule of Tsar Nicholas II ended when Cossack loyalty to the Tsar dissipated. In March 1917, the war-weary populace of Petrograd (formerly St. Petersburg) were striking and demonstrating against food shortages. These may have been suppressed or dispersed except that the Cossacks, who had been detailed to support the police, declined to intervene, leaving their *nagaykas* in their boots and their sabers in their sheaths. As revolution broke out, the 1st, 4th and 14th Don Cossack Regiments and the Guards Cossack Regiment went over to the rebel side. The Cossacks could have conquered the revolution. They chose not to and the reign of the Tsars ended.<sup>18</sup>

Empire\* 1914



**Figure 1** - Main Cossack Groupings in the Former Russian

At first, the Cossacks welcomed the revolution with fervor and elected a "Union of Cossack Hosts" [SVRK] in this time of disunion. The Union sent representatives to the March preliminary All-Russian Congress of Soviets, where they extracted a promise from the Provisional Government guaranteeing "the rights of the Cossack to their land."<sup>19</sup> A second Cossack Congress was held in June 1917. Don, Terek and Kuban Cossacks held their own *krugi* (assemblies) and began steps to form a union of the three hosts. A small group of Cossacks, however, were not in favor of the Union of Cossack Hosts, but preferred a radical, leftist orientation. They formed the "Central Soviet of Cossacks," chaired by a Kuban Cossack student named Kostenetsky. The Central Soviet of Cossacks followed Lenin's Bolshevik line of opposition to Kerensky's provisional government.<sup>20</sup> A propaganda battle ensued between the Union of Cossack Hosts and Kostenetsky's group (which became known as the "Party of the Working Cossacks"). When the Communists attempted to seize power, the Petrograd Cossack units crushed the attempt and then raided the offices of *Pravda* and Kostenetsky's Cossack Bolsheviks.<sup>21</sup> While statesmen tried to create the first Cossack state, war-weary Cossack soldiers fought to preserve order for Kerensky's provisional government. The Kerensky government's insistence on continuing the war with Germany and Austria created disaffection among the Cossack soldiers. On the night of 6 November (new calendar), a deputation of the Union of Cossack Hosts called on Kerensky and insisted on a showdown with Lenin's supporters in the Smolnyy Institute. Kerensky agreed, and General Krasnov, a Don Cossack serving at the front, was ordered to the capital. The 1st, 4th and 14th Don Cossack Regiments were ordered to move against the Communists, but the Cossacks

chose to abstain. Krasnov was arrested and the Bolsheviks seized power. The second revolution also succeeded due to the Cossacks refusal to act.<sup>22</sup>

The Cossacks, however, found the Bolsheviks no more to their liking than the Tsar or the Social Revolutionaries. The Bolsheviks had clear designs on Cossack lands and property. Further, the Cossacks represented an organized, armed military group which could threaten the existence of the communist state. Lenin saw the Cossack borderlands as a base for counterrevolution and disbanded the Union of Cossack Hosts. Armed communist columns were sent south to seize control of the Cossack lands. Many of the poorer Cossacks joined the communist ranks. The Cossack authorities, on the other hand, saw the communists as a threat to the Cossack way of life and vowed to save Moscow and the motherland during this "time of troubles." The Russian Civil War was joined.<sup>23</sup>

Although Cossacks fought both with the "Reds" and the "Whites" during the Civil War, the majority supported the Whites. Those Cossacks who supported the Bolsheviks soon found Bolshevik rule oppressive. The Bolsheviks stabled their horses in Novocherkassk cathedral (the spiritual center of the Don Cossacks), pulled down the statue of Yermak (the Don Cossack conqueror of Siberia), and pillaged Cossack villages indiscriminately.<sup>24</sup>

When the Civil War had ended, the Cossacks were clearly among the losers. The war had ravaged their lands and Bolshevik scavengers were determined to extract what little grain and goods remained to supply loyal Bolshevik regions. Thousands of Cossacks immigrated to Paris, Tunis, Egypt, Turkey, China, England and America. Those who stayed behind were subject to depredations by armed bands of renegades and Bolshevik forced industrialization and agricultural collectivization programs.<sup>25</sup> The communist regime was determined to eliminate every vestige of Cossack life. Their property and livestock were confiscated, over two million Cossacks were repressed, more than 1.5 million were killed and over 53 million desyatins (1,431,000,000 acres) of their land was taken.<sup>26</sup> Cossack institutions, laws, self-government and customs were abolished. By the late 1920s, the Cossack brotherhoods had ceased to exist.

Stalin maintained a few Cossack trappings. Before World War II, he established a "Cossack" cavalry division in the Soviet Army.<sup>27</sup> However, it appears that Cossack ancestry was not a prerequisite for membership in the division. When Germany invaded the Soviet Union, some 100,000 soldiers of Cossack parentage were in the Red Army. Many fought heroically for the Motherland, but others supported the Germans in hopes of future Cossack autonomy. During World War II, the Soviets raised a "Cossack" cavalry corps and several other "Cossack" units, but there was no effort to place Cossacks in these units. Rather, some "Cossack" uniforms were designed and issued to 17th Cavalry Corps soldiers, while the Corps was redesignated a Cossack Cavalry Corps.<sup>28</sup>

The German Army also raised some "Cossack" units from among their POWs, Red Army deserters and the Russian emigre population of occupied Europe. The Wehrmacht raised a Cossack division which eventually became a Cossack cavalry corps and saw action in Yugoslavia. After the war, its members were forcibly repatriated to the Soviet Union by British forces, where many of them were executed.<sup>29</sup>

After the war, the Cossack uniform again disappeared from the Soviet Army, as Stalin and his successors again attempted to bury the very memories of a Cossack past.

### ***Revival***

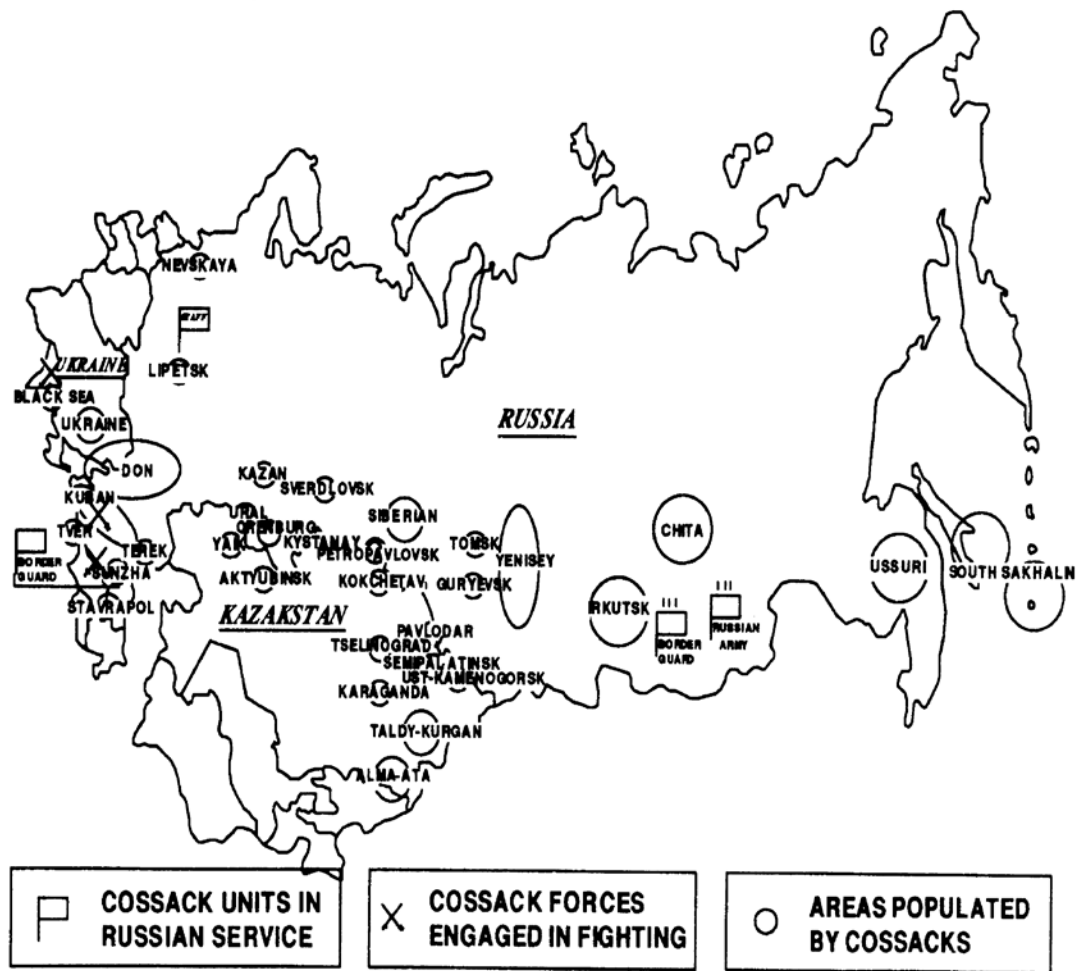
The impetus behind the present Cossack movement came from singers and dancers in folk-ensembles--not from a warrior clan. In the late 1970s, folk ensembles in Moscow discussed a revival of the Cossack culture, but nothing happened until the spring of 1989, when the chapter of Cossack countrymen in Moscow was created under the auspices of the All-Union Historical and Cultural Monument Preservation Society Central Propaganda House. It was officially registered at the start of 1990. This led to the founding of countrymen chapters, communities, clubs and finally Cossack political movements countrywide.<sup>30</sup>

In the Don region in the spring of 1990, the first Cossack assembly was held in the Starodonye Club. Lawyer Samsonov was elected as its ataman or chieftain.<sup>31</sup> The local Communist Party committee did its best to destroy this and other "unofficial" groups, but due to political turmoil, the party failed to wield the same power it had controlled in the past.<sup>32</sup> The Rostov Oblast Communist Party Committee received secret instructions to keep the Cossack movement away from the democrats. The party was not to lose control of the Cossacks at any cost. Party members were instructed to leave the party publicly, if this was necessary in order for them to gain leadership positions within the Cossack movement.<sup>33</sup> Party apparatchiks began coming to Cossack assemblies, and the First Assembly of the Don Cossacks, held in November 1990, elected a lot of party functionaries to leadership positions. This process was repeated among other Cossack groups and the Cossack movement began to split among "Reds" and "Whites".<sup>34</sup>

In Moscow, the Communist Party's attempt to control from within the original Moscow Countrymen's chapter failed. A group of pro-communist Cossacks separated from the chapter at the end of May 1990. On 29 June, a Grand *Krug* was convened under the leadership of the Communist Party Central Committee. The *krug* announced the founding of the Union of Cossacks.

Relations between the Moscow Countrymen's Chapter and the Union of Cossacks was stormy at best. The "Red" Union of Cossacks supported former Premier Nikolai Ryzhkov while the "White" Countrymen's Chapter plus ten other Cossack organizations signed an open letter of support of Boris Yeltsin. The final break came when the Union of Cossacks publicly announced its orientation toward the Russian Communist Party.<sup>35</sup>

During July 1991, over 30 "White" Cossack organizations conducted a *krug* in Moscow. Sponsors for the *krug* included the Cossacks in Moscow Countrymen Chapter, the Rostov Dolomanovskaya Cossack stanitsa, the Cherkassy region of the Don Host, the Siberian Host, Kuban Host and Yenisey Host. The *krug* resurrected the Union of Cossack Hosts of Russia (*SVRK*), which had been abolished by the Bolsheviks.<sup>36</sup>



**Figure 2 - Cossack Groupings in the Former Soviet Empire 1992**

Cossack communities and hosts began to appear all across the former Soviet Union (Figure 2). By 1992, they occupied a belt stretching across the width of the land mass of the former Soviet Empire, and, ominously, across borders of newly independent republics. It became readily apparent that the Cossack movement was concerned with reclamation of Cossack lands, establishment of Cossack self-government and protection of Russians who suddenly found themselves living in newly independent republics as "strangers and outsiders". Cossacks took over local government or established parallel organs of power to that of local government, including courts.<sup>37</sup> Accepted, but by no means all-inclusive, hallmarks of the Cossack movement are Cossack land ownership; maintenance of Cossack military forces; Cossack self-rule; preferential tax treatment for Cossacks based on their military readiness and agrarian/production role; and Orthodoxy.<sup>38</sup>

Although the Cossack movement shares many goals, it is hardly monolithic. Instead, the Cossacks mirror the political picture of contemporary Russia. Russia is not a two-party



democracy. Some of the parties now struggling for power are descendants of the parties which vied for power during the Civil War. Reds (bolsheviks), Blacks (anarchists), Greens (populists), Browns (fascists), Whites (monarchists and conservative nationalists) and Blues (national democrats) are among the political players. Alliances, such as the Red-Browns and the Black-Greens, are common. While the atamans may reflect a certain political inclination, the member Cossacks may have very different convictions.<sup>39</sup> There is a major feud between Reds and Whites. Independent, regional associations, such as the Union of Cossack Republics and the Cossacks of Southern Russia have formed. The Kuban Cossacks have resurrected and combined two Civil-War era political parties, the Greens and the Anarchists, into the Anarcho-Green Cossack Union.<sup>40</sup> Yet, despite the multiple factions, Cossacks form a powerful political element in Russia, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Moldova, Armenia and Georgia. They represent a potential organized, coherent polity which can rapidly generate popular support or discontent within their geographic areas. They have a recognized leadership which clearly states their political demands. The hosts also carry a popular appeal to ethnic Russians, who see Cossacks as far more willing to defend their interests than the Russian government.

Both the Reds and the Whites claim to hate the Communist Party and everything for which it stood.<sup>41</sup> Prominent Cossack leaders, especially in the Red camp, were ranking Party functionaries and, although most of them have denounced the Party, old allegiances die slowly. Local opposition parties are quick to accuse a local ataman of a lust for power and being part of the Party nomenklatura. A. Martynov, a former Communist, is the ataman of the Union of Cossacks. Sergei Meshcheryakov, his bitter opponent and also a former Communist, is ataman of Southern Russia and ataman of the Don Cossack Host.<sup>42</sup> Prominent ultra-right-wing Red-Brown leaders, such as former KGB general Aleksandr Sterligov (leader of the National-Patriots) and Aleksandr Barkashov (Russian National Unity), are paying avid court to Meshcheryakov and, by extension, on the Don, Kuban and Terek Cossacks.<sup>43</sup>

It goes without saying that Russian politicians see the Cossacks as an organized, armed, potentially coherent force which, if harnessed, could assure the ascendancy of a political bloc. The politicians wish to make the Cossacks their pawns. But, on the Russian chess board, a pawn can advance to control or become a king.

### ***Law Enforcement***

Participation/control of local law enforcement has always been high on the Cossack agenda.<sup>44</sup> In some regions, volunteer Cossack auxiliaries help maintain order. In Rostov Oblast, they patrol the streets; maintain order on public transportation and during mass events; help in the fight against hooliganism, drunkenness, moonshine production, and drug addiction; and assist the Prosecutor's Office, the courts and the tax inspectorate.<sup>45</sup> In other regions, Cossacks have taken over law enforcement and maintenance of public morality entirely. This has led to over-zealous behavior and indiscriminate use of the *nagayka* in public flogging.<sup>46</sup> Cossacks in Chita (Eastern Siberia) gave a vote of no confidence to their ataman and his aides because of the ataman's use of public flogging, creation of his own intelligence service, creation of morality patrols, and maintaining files on all the members of the Cossack community.<sup>47</sup>

## ***Cossack Border Guards***

Cossacks have actively sought to reestablish their traditional border guard role, and based on their current locations (Figure 2), are well positioned to perform this duty [although many Cossacks are located well across the borders in Ukraine, Armenia, Georgia, and Kazakhstan]. A Cossack border guard *sotnya* is based out of the Cossack stanitsa of Nezlobnaya--either as the guard unit or as an auxiliary in the area close to troubled Northern Ossetia.<sup>48</sup> In the Transbaikal area, a Cossack border guard regiment is replacing the Internal Security border guards and establishing a traditional military colony which will combine military duties with agriculture and local industry.<sup>49</sup> The regiment will guard the border with Mongolia. In the Far East, border guard units have been established near Khabarovsk and Ussurilsk.<sup>50</sup>

## ***Cossack military units***

As early as Spring 1991, the Don Cossack *Krug* petitioned then Chief of Staff Moiseyev to allow formation of Don Cossack units within the Soviet Armed Forces. They proposed establishment of mounted Cossack cavalry regiments, Cossack *spetznaz* brigades, separate infantry (*plastun*) divisions, mounted border guard companies and complete ship crews. They also asked to take over the Novocherkassk Higher Military Command Signal School (a commissioning school) and use it as the Don Cossacks Junkers school with a faculty to teach combined arms, artillery, signal, service support, and military medicine.<sup>51</sup> Serving generals and officers began accepting the office of ataman or other military positions with Cossack hosts.<sup>52</sup>

On or about 20 May 1992, President Yeltsin signed legislative acts which restored Cossack regiments to the Russian Army. Each Cossack host would raise its own units and bear part of the expense for the maintenance of the units. Military chaplains would be reintroduced into these Cossack units.<sup>53</sup> The first Cossack regiment in the Russian Army is stationed in Transbaikal near the Mongolian border.<sup>54</sup> Decree 632, entitled "On Measures to Implement the Russian Federation Law 'On the Rehabilitation of Repressed Peoples' in Relation to the Cossacks," dated 15 June 1992, further states:

The Russian Federation Defense Ministry and the Russian Federation Ministry of Internal Affairs, in conjunction with other interested organs, should submit proposals on the procedure for and special features of the military service performed by Cossacks, and also safeguard the state borders and public order.<sup>55</sup>

The issue of Cossack units incorporated into the Russian Armed Forces has been continually raised. On 15 March 1993, President Yeltsin issued a decree "On Reforming Military Structures of the Frontier and Internal Troops on the Territory of the North-Caucasian Region of the Russian Federation and State Support for the Cossacks". The decree would provide Cossack units within the security and military forces and provide land and other benefits to the Cossacks. However, an extraordinary Congress of the Peoples Deputies session suspended implementation and sent the decree to the Russian constitutional Court for review. The Russian Ministry of Defense declared that it will take no steps to implement the decree until the Constitutional Court has considered the impact.<sup>56</sup>

However, incorporation continues. A Cossack regiment is to be stationed in Tyumen and a Cossack Brigade will be stationed in Omsk. The recruits will come from Cossack youth within the Siberian Cossack community. Cossack officers will be trained in military schools in Novosibirsk and Irkutsk. Cossack officers are already being trained in Novochoerkassk.<sup>57</sup>

In addition to Cossack units in the Armed Forces, there are large, armed Cossack units whose allegiance is nominally to their Cossack host.<sup>58</sup> The Don Cossacks claim two divisions, though their strength and armament is unstated. In the current, unsettled political/economic crisis which is gripping Russia, there is ample opportunity for free-booting gangs. There are many parallels between modern Russia and Germany following the Thirty Years War or Germany following World War I. Armed semi-military forces of brigands loosely controlled by various warlords or *freikorps* frustrated German recovery and created the conditions for authoritarian central government. Such parallel developments among the Cossacks are a distinct possibility and could play havoc with Russia's recovery.

### ***Cossacks and International Relations***

Russian Cossacks have created problems with Russia's neighbors-Ukraine, Moldova, Armenia, Chechen-Ingush, Georgia, Kazakhstan, and Japan, plus Muslims and Jews in general.

*Ukraine:* The Ukrainian government has seen fit to raise its own Cossack forces, apparently not by a popular movement but rather by government sponsorship. This has been in response to the oath of allegiance taken by Krasnodon Cossacks (who live in Ukraine) and the Don Cossacks (who live in Russia and Ukraine) to the Don Republic and Russia.<sup>59</sup> This threat to Ukrainian sovereignty has led to the spectacle of Ukrainian Cossacks solemnly abjuring the oath of loyalty sworn to the Tsar of Muscovy in 1654. Hetman Vyacheslav Chornovil stated that this was not done to break the friendship between Russia and Ukraine; rather, it was to correct the mistake of national hero, Bogdan Khmel'nitskiy, and "to expiate the involuntary sin committed by our Cossack forbearers 388 years ago." Ukrainian Cossacks then swore a loyalty oath to Ukraine. The first voluntary Cossack company is being formed in Ternopol Oblast and will be offered to the Ukrainian MOD for incorporation into the Ukrainian Armed Forces.<sup>60</sup>

*Moldova:* Armed Don, Kuban and Terek Cossacks, a large number of them former paratroopers, *spetznaz*, reconnaissance specialists and Afghanistan veterans, volunteered to come and fight as Cossack units in defense of the break-away Russian Dnestr Republic and the Russian Black Sea Cossacks. By most reports, the Cossacks fought well, at least ten died, and they were important to the morale of the ethnic Russian defenders. They were finally withdrawn following a visit by Vice President Ruskoi--a visit which they saw as a vindication and a sign of Russian government support for extraterritorial adventures.<sup>61</sup> Now, there are reports that Cossack freebooters have returned to Moldova.

*Armenia:* One hundred Cossacks, backed by two armored personnel carriers, seized the town hall of Kurganinsk in the Krasnodar region on 22 June 1992. This was their reaction to the refusal of the local government to clear Krasnodar region of ethnic Armenians.<sup>62</sup>

*Chechen-Ingush:* Fighting between Cossacks and Chechen-Ingush people has been going on since April 1991. Numerous deaths on both sides have resulted. Terek Cossacks are

sending *sotnya* into the area since "only Russians can defend Russians in the Northern Caucasus."<sup>63</sup>

*Georgia:* Fighting in Northern Ossetia has involved Cossack forces while the Sunzha Cossacks are emigrating from the area. A thousand Terek Cossacks were reportedly preparing to fight in Northern Ossetia.<sup>64</sup> A Krasnodar Cossack delegation visited the Transcaucasus Military District to offer Cossack units to serve as part of the Russian Army in the Caucasus region. Since the district forces are at 60% strength, this is a tempting offer to General-Lieutenant Fedor Reut, the district commander. The Cossack representatives also wanted arms to train their Cossack forces with. With all the fighting going on in Georgia and the fact that Cossacks are already fighting the Georgian Army, the Georgian authorities are not favorably disposed to the Cossack offer. However, it appears to be the only reasonable way to bring the Russian forces up to strength.<sup>65</sup>

*Kazakhstan:* Many Russian Cossack communities are located within Kazakhstan (Figure 2). Cossacks established a Union of Cossacks of the Volga and Ural whose boundaries include large portions of Kazakhstan.<sup>66</sup> During September 1991, some 700 Cossack "volunteers" crossed into Kazakhstan in order to help local Cossacks "liberate" Cossack lands. They were driven back by some 5,000 Kazakhs. The 1992 New Years issue of the Cossack newspaper, *Stanitsa*, discussed the Cossack lands in Kazakhstan: "the land is temporarily under Kazakhstan control, and a well-founded struggle is being waged for bringing about its annexation to Russia, the historical homeland. We offer our caring hands to Ural Cossacks, Siberian Cossacks and Semirecheniye Cossacks." Articles in the Kazakh press call for arming the citizenry against brigands and Cossack depredations.<sup>67</sup>

*Former Yugoslavia:* Cossack volunteers are fighting with Serbian forces against the Muslims in Bosnia. Many of these are Don Cossacks from the Rostov area.<sup>68</sup>

*Japan:* Japan has asked for return of the Kurile Islands as part of Japanese aid to Russia. South Sakhalin, Ussuri and Amur Cossacks are loudly protesting and claiming that the Kuriles have always been Russian. The Cossacks' protests seem to have bound Russia's hands on negotiating for the return of the islands. Meanwhile, South Sakhalin Cossacks have petitioned President Yeltsin to let them settle Shikotan island in the Kuriles and replace army forces in guarding the island.<sup>69</sup>

*Moslems and Jews:* Historically, Cossacks have been anti-Turkish and anti-Semite and frequently led the *pogroms* against Jewish settlements. The Don Cossack leadership continues to incite social tension and extremist tendencies with anti-Moslem, Anti-Jewish and anti-Caucasian pronouncements and proposed segregation measures.<sup>70</sup> In January 1992, Don Cossacks actively participated in a *pogrom* against Jews.

## ***Conclusion***

The Cossacks are back and the issues are land, power and restoration of a lost way of life. Political forces of all persuasions are trying to bend them to their wills, and some have been very successful. President Yeltsin is attempting to curry their favor, but is accepting politicized units into his armed forces in doing so. Loyalty to the leader in Moscow has never been the Cossacks long suit. The price of Cossack support may be more than Yeltsin can pay. If so, the forces of demagoguery may be able to find the necessary capital.

## ***Endnotes***

1. G. B. Gubarev, "Kniga o kazakakh" [Book about cossacks], *Voyenno-istoricheskiy zhurnal* [Military history journal, hereafter cited as *VIZh*], February 1992, 82. *VIZh* has published a part of Gubarev's book, published in Paris in 1957. *VIZh* has incorporated a new feature entitled "Kazachestvo: V proshlom, nastoyashchem i budushchem" [Cossackdom: Past, present and future]. This is the first article under this rubric and is an attempt to undo the Sovietized history of the cossack hosts.[BACK](#)
2. Albert Seaton, *The Cossacks*, (Berkshire: Osprey Publishing, Ltd., 1972), 7. There are several English-language books on the history of the cossacks. Since this study is mainly concerned with the contemporary cossack movement, the following are also recommended for additional historic background reading: Albert Seaton, *The Horsemen of the Steppes*, (London, The Bodley Head, 1985); Philip Longworth, *The Cossacks*, (London: Constable, 1969); H. N. H. Williamson (edited by John Harris), *Farewell to the Don*, (London: Collins, 1970); Samuel J. Newland, *Cossacks in the German Army 1941-1945*, (London: Frank Cass, 1991); Maurice Hindus, *The Cossacks*, (London: Collins, 1946); and C. E. Bechhofer, *In Denikin's Russia and the Caucasus, 1919-1920*, (London: Collins, 1921).[BACK](#)
3. A. P. Pronshtein and K. A. Khmelevskiy, "Kazachestvo" [Cossackdom], *Bol'shaya sovetskaya entsiklopediya* [The great Soviet encyclopedia], (Moscow: Soviet Encyclopedia Printing House, 1973), Volume 11, 175.[BACK](#)
4. Ibid.[BACK](#)
5. Seaton, *The Cossacks*, 8.[BACK](#)
6. "Kazachestvo" [Cossackdom], *Sovetskaya voyennaya entsiklopediya* [Soviet military encyclopedia, hereafter cited as *SVE*] (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1977), Volume 4, 32.[BACK](#)
7. Pronshtein & Khmelevskiy, 175.[BACK](#)
8. Ibid.[BACK](#)
9. New Cossack hosts were formed as follows: Astrakhan-1750, Orenburg-1755, Black Sea-1787, Siberian-1808, Caucasus line-1832 (repositioned with Kuban and Terek Cossacks in place of the Black Sea Cossacks in 1860), Baikal-1851, Amur-1858, Semirechniye-1867 and Ussuri-1889 (see Pronshtein & Khmelevskiy, 176).[BACK](#)
10. *SVE*, 33.[BACK](#)
11. G. V. Glinka, *Aziatskaya Rossiya* [Asiatic Russia], (Saint Petersburg: 1914), Volume I, 361.[BACK](#)
12. *SVE*, 34.[BACK](#)
13. Seaton, *The Cossacks*, 23.[BACK](#)

14. *SVE*, 34.[BACK](#)
15. Pronshtein & Khmelevskiy, 176.[BACK](#)
16. *SVE*, 33.[BACK](#)
17. "Godovshchina soyuz kazakov" [Anniversary of the Union of Cossacks], *Sovetskaya Rossiya* [Soviet Russia], 29 June 1991, 2.[BACK](#)
18. Longworth, 285-286.[BACK](#)
19. Ibid, 288.[BACK](#)
20. Ibid, 288-289.[BACK](#)
21. Ibid, 289.[BACK](#)
22. Ibid, 290-291.[BACK](#)
23. Ibid, 292-297.[BACK](#)
24. Ibid, 298.[BACK](#)
25. Ibid, 299-329.[BACK](#)
26. V. Medvedev, "Terpi, kazak..." [Patience, Cossack], *Komsomol'skaya pravda*, 2 April 1992; and V. Perushkin, "Kazachiy krug" [Cossack assembly], *Argumenty i fakty* [Arguments and facts], 15 April 1992, 4.[BACK](#)
27. *SVE*, 35.[BACK](#)
28. A. Ya. Soshnikov, P. N. Dmitriyev, and A. S. Arutynov, *Sovetskaya kavaleriya* [Soviet cavalry] (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1984), 214.[BACK](#)
29. Newland's book provides an excellent overview of Cossacks in the German Army. Maurice Hindus' book provides a more-biased look at Cossacks under Soviet rule.[BACK](#)
30. Yuri Averyanov, "The Present-Day Russian Cossacks: Political Portrait", *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 19 May 1992, as translated in FBIS-USR-92-067, 5 June 1992, 70.[BACK](#)
31. Russian Cossack chieftains are atamans, while Ukrainian Cossack chieftains are hetmans.[BACK](#)
32. Alexander Andrusenko, *Moscow News*, No. 3, 19-26 January 1992.[BACK](#)

33. Vladimir Zharinov, "The Sin of Old Grievances", *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 9 January 1992, as translated in FBIS-USR-92-016, 18 February 1992, 43-44.[BACK](#)
34. Andrusenko, 47.[BACK](#)
35. Averyanov, 71.[BACK](#)
36. Ibid.[BACK](#)
37. L. Mazirin, "Kuda kazak skachet" [Where are the cossacks galloping?], *Sovetskiy patriot* [Soviet patriot], No. 13 (March 1991), 7.[BACK](#)
38. Vladimir Kiselyov's interview of Sergei Meshcheryakov on page 14, *Moscow News*, No. 22 (31 May-7 June 1992).[BACK](#)
39. A. Ganelin, A. Khantsevich, and A. Khokhlov, "Hetman's squadron. Some call Cossacks in Dnestr Region mercenaries, others call them Saviors. So what are they?" *Komsomol'skaya Pravda*, 21 March 1992, as translated in FBIS-SOV-92-058, 25 March 1992, 67.[BACK](#)
40. Averyanov, 71.[BACK](#)
41. The apparent disconnect of Reds claiming to hate the former Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) is that the Reds are Bolsheviks who publicly claim that the CPSU strayed far from the Bolshevik line and failed to bring true communism to the state. This approach also allows the Reds to avoid being blamed for the ills of the old system, while maintaining ideological purity should the march toward communism resume.[BACK](#)
42. Galina Mashtakova, "On the Cossack's Quarrel", *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 25 June 1992, as translated in FBIS-USR-92-088, 15 July 1992, 28. Of course, there are often more than one claimant to the title of ataman. G. Moiseyev of Canada proclaims that he is ataman of the Don Cossack Host-from Canada.[BACK](#)
43. Ibid.[BACK](#)
44. *Moskovskiye novosti*, No. 19, reporting on the aftermath of the clash between Ingush and Cossacks on 28 and 29 April 1992.[BACK](#)
45. RFE/RL Report on the USSR, Volume 3, No 42, 18 October 1991, 40.[BACK](#)
46. An ataman is empowered to order five strokes of the *nagayka* for infractions of Cossack morality. Additional strokes for more serious infractions are usually dictated by actions of the *rada* [council]. A. Orlov, "Kazachata" [Cossackdom], *Komsomol'skaya pravda*, No. 44, 29 February 1992.[BACK](#)
47. *Moscow News*, No 45, 10-17 November 1991.[BACK](#)

48. A. Aleksandrova, *Na boyevom postu*, October 1991.[BACK](#)
49. Moscow All-Union Radio Mayak, 0030 GMT 12 October 1991, as cited in FBIS-USR-91-044, 29 October 1991.[BACK](#)
50. Mark Galeotti, "A Military Future for the Cossacks?", *Jane's Intelligence Review*, March 1993, 104-106.[BACK](#)
51. Mazirin.[BACK](#)
52. Lieutenant General V. Bogachev, Far East Military District and Chief of the Rear Services, accepted the post of ataman of the Union of Transbaikal and Far East Russian Cossacks. The gold epaulets of a Cossack general and an engraved saber accompanied the appointment. "Kazaki poluchili atamana, ataman--shashku" [The cossacks receive an ataman and the ataman--a saber, *Krasnaya zvezda* [Red star], 23 March 1991.[BACK](#)
53. ITAR-TASS, 1715 GMT 5 May 1992, as cited in FBIS-SOV-92-088, 6 May 1992, 19.[BACK](#)
54. Conversations with a serving Russian officer during July 1992.[BACK](#)
55. *Rossiyskaya gazeta*, 18 June 1992, as cited in FBIS-SOV-92-122, 28.[BACK](#)
56. Alexander Kaltakhchan, "Russian Cossacks: Between past and future", *New Times*, May 1993, 16.[BACK](#)
57. Anatoly Ichev, "The Siberian Cossack Community", *International Affairs*, April 1993, 95.[BACK](#)
58. Alexander Luganskiy, ataman of the Naur district of the Terek Cossacks, said that the Cossacks would set up their own military units and that five *sotnya* were already formed in Vladikavkaz. A thousand Cossacks from Arkhonskaya of the Mozdok district have volunteered to serve in Northern Ossetia. INTERFAX, 1600 GMT 22 February 1992, as cited in FBIS-SOV-92-036 24 February 1992, 59.[BACK](#)
59. INTERFAX, 1622 GMT 25 March 1992, cited in FBIS-SOV-92-059, 59; and Kiev Radio Ukraine World Service, 1300 GMT, 1 April 1992, as cited in FBIS-SOV-92-064, 2 April 1992, 66. In an interview, Hetman Chornovil of the Ukraine Cossacks stated that the Don Cossacks' oath of loyalty to Russia, while living in the Ukraine, is an attempt to restore the Soviet Union and the totalitarian order. Yuri Pryhornytskyy, *Literaturna Ukrayina*, No. 20, 21 May 1992, cited in FBIS-SOV-92-080.[BACK](#)
60. Radio Ukraine World Service, 1300 GMT, 17 July 1993 as cited in FBIS-SOV-93-136, 19 July 1993, 50.[BACK](#)
61. Mashtakova, 29.[BACK](#)



62. POSTFACTUM, 1052 GMT 23 June 1992, as cited in FBIS-SOV-92-123, 25 June 1992, 54.[BACK](#)
63. Aleksandr Simonov, "Zashchitit' russkikh na Severnom Kavkaze mogut tol'ko russkiye" [Only Russians can defend Russians in the Northern Caucasus], *Situatsiya* [Situation], No. 21 (1992), 6-7.[BACK](#)
64. INTERFAX, 1600 GMT 22 February 1992, as cited in FBIS-SOV-92-036 24 February 1992, 59.[BACK](#)
65. Guga Lolishvili, "Cossacks in Transcaucasus? 'Stanichniki' visit District Headquarters", *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 28 November 1992, page 1 as cited in JPRS-UMA-93-004 dated 3 February 1993, 2.[BACK](#)
66. Radio Moscow, 2 December 1991, as cited in 4 December Radio Liberty Report on SOVSET.[BACK](#)
67. Nuri Muftakh, Three part series: "Uralsk incidents: 1. What means are there for resistance? 2. A dog barks, the caravan moves on. 3. Kazakhs need weapons.", *Yegemendi Qazaqstan* [in Kazakh] 20, 21 and 24 March 1992 pages 2 as translated in FBIS-USR-92-090, 20 July 1992, 93.[BACK](#)
68. "Kazaki-dobrovol'tsy v Bosnii" [Cossack-volunteers in Bosnia], *Izvestia*, 23 February 1993.[BACK](#)
69. *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 24 June 1993, 2 as cited in FBIS-SOV-93-120, dated 24 June 1993, 40.[BACK](#)
70. V. Zubkov, "Kazachestvo pered litsom istorii" [Cossackdom before the face of history], *Izvestiya*, 21 March 1992.[BACK](#)