"Political Violence in the Former Soviet Union, Past and Present" was the subject of the 26th Annual Stanford-Berkeley Conference on Russia, Eastern Europe and the Former USSR, co-sponsored by CREES and the Institute of Slavic, East European and Eurasian Studies (ISEEES) at UC Berkeley. Held April 26, the one-day conference consisted of panels on contemporary political developments, Twentieth-century Soviet political violence, and Nineteenth-century writers and radicals.

The morning session consisted of a panel on "Political Violence and Terrorism in Post-Soviet Space," chaired by Michael McFaul (Stanford, Political Science). Gail Lapidus (Stanford, IIS) assessed "Putin's War on Terrorism," and John Dunlop (Hoover Institution) discussed and read excerpts from two recent books on the war in Chechnya - *A Dirty War* by Anna Politkovskaya, and *Chienne de Guerre: A Woman Reporter Behind the Lines of the War in Chechnya.* Ned Walker of the Berkeley Program in Soviet and Post-Soviet Studies discussed "Ideologies, Identities and Cleavages" in Chechnya and Afghanistan. Ron Suny of University of Chicago concluded the panel with a discussion of how we view ethnic identity: "Why We Hate You: the Passions of Ethnic and Religious Violence."

Two panels were presented in the afternoon session, beginning with "Violence from Above: Leninism and Stalinism." Dan Orlovsky (Southern Methodist University, currently Visiting Professor of History at Berkeley) presented "Roots of Violence in Revolutionary Russia, 1914-1929," followed by Amir Weiner (Stanford, History) on "State and Communal Violence, 1918-1968." Steve Barnes (Stanford, History) discussed "The Gulag and Political Violence in the Soviet Union." The third panel "Violence from Below: Terrorism in Nineteenth-Century Radical Thought," was chaired by Reggie Zelnik (History, Berkeley), and included two literature-based papers: "Heroes of Words, Heroes of Deeds: S. Ansky on the Jewish Reaction to Violence," given by Gabriella Safran (Stanford, Slavic) and "Political Provocation as Russia's Masterplot: Andrei Bely and Vladimir Burtsev" by Lynn Patyk (Stanford, Slavic). Discussant Norman Naimark (Stanford, History) provided formal commentary on the presentations. Lively discussion followed the panels, particularly the morning session, dominated by the subject of contemporary terrorism and the war in Chechnya.

Next year’s joint conference, hosted by ISEEES, will be held at UC Berkeley March 7, 2003.

(Continued from page 6)

Afghanistan -- 40,000 NATO peacekeeping troops were deployed to keep the peace. "That's being serious about security," Stedman said.

Jenik Radon, a visiting law professor who founded an Afghan relief organization following the Soviet invasion in 1979, said the country never has been a nation-state. Even during the rule of the former King Zahir Shah, who was deposed in a 1973 coup, "it was a land of communities with state trimmings, with a headquarters in Kabul," he said. "It was not a state in the way we know it."

In contrast to the views of some of the other panelists, Radon said decentralization of power should be supported. "The 'government of unity' which they have now will not work," he said. "It can only go in a decentralized fashion, which imposes an incredible burden on the international community."

Stedman said decentralization would work only if the international community would be willing to commit 200,000 troops for 20 to 25 years. "That's not going to happen," he said. Stedman also said decentralization would make sense if the local authorities were legitimate. "But when you are talking about widespread depredation and insecurity, the amount of what you would have to do to protect aid from the local warlords is staggering," he said. "We want basic stability. The way you're going to get there is by creating a central state that holds the purse strings that gradually extends its authority."

White said he could envision the development of a centralized state for major projects such as road construction, with aid being spent at the local level for projects that support the production of crops or goods.

"What we must try to avoid is imposing an idea from the outside," he said. "The image of what we think is good for the Afghans is not necessarily what Afghans themselves think is good for them."

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