CHAPTER 21

Disaster and Crisis Management in Transitional Societies: Commonalities and Peculiarities[1]

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The dissolution of the Soviet Union in the 1990s had myriad social consequences, many of which were unintended. This chapter mainly discusses one such consequence: the effect of the disappearance of the Soviet Union and the reemergence of Russia on disaster planning and crisis management not only in Russia, but also in Eastern Europe societies that had been in the Soviet sphere of influence.

Our objective is threefold: (1) we describe the changes that occurred in organizations, policies, and operations associated with disaster planning and crisis managing; (2) we indicate the conditions, both general contextual and specifics ones, that are affecting the changes; and (3) we note consequences, both positive and negative, for the public and others who are affected by whatever disaster planning and crisis managing is in place at any given time. However, we do not treat changes, conditions, and consequences separately but instead discuss them together within 10 major propositions or generalizations that were produced by our analysis for this chapter.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The change to more democratic systems, which had started to occur 20 years earlier in Eastern European nations as well as those in the former Soviet Union, dramatically changed the countries' existing political regimes including their institutional, legislative, and economic pillars. This tremendous and painful transition involves critical challenges to the resilience of newly established and emerging political and administrative institutions, and the values and norms of communities and society as a whole. We focus on what has and is going on during this transitional period with respect to disaster and crisis management in these systems undergoing major changes.

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[1] Some of the ideas in this chapter were first advanced 4 years ago (see Porfiriev & Svedin, 2002). However, what is set forth here is an extensively revised, extended, rewritten, and updated version of those ideas.

However, this transition is occurring in governmental systems that have to bring together matters of security and safety, accelerating economic growth, and democratization, processes that sometime complement and at other times conflict with one another. These polities also have to deal with problems such as growing poverty, corruption and organized crime, and the decay of critical lifeline infrastructures, as well as excessive monopolization in the economic sphere. To these can be added well known global challenges such as climate change, international terrorism, and new kinds of natural and technological disasters with their own distinctive characteristics (for a discussion of the latter, see the chapters by Boin and 't Hart, and by Quarantelli, Lagadec, and Boin in this handbook). Adding to all these problematical issues have been the recent permutations and economic recessions in the 1990s in the central and Eastern European states and in the former Soviet Union. In short, the changes in disaster and crisis management have to be seen in the larger context of the many problems we have just enumerated, and that we discuss in more detail later.

Moreover, these challenges are associated with increasing risks and crises in vital societal and political domains, implying that the importance of disaster and crisis management in those societies in transition has increased significantly. In fact, there have been significant changes in national disaster management systems in such societies. As described later, these have increased the planning and response capabilities of such systems although many problems persist..

All the aforementioned complications and problems suggest that changes in crisis and disaster management systems in societies in transition may have to occur faster than is typical in highly developed social systems. If this is a correct assumption, it suggests that the top decision makers in societies in transition have to be even more sophisticated and skillful strategic risk managers than their counterparts in the West. Given that, there is a need for an in-depth investigation of the specific hazards that dominate the disaster scene of societies in transition, as well as research on their coping capabilities (which is determined primarily by the state of development of their national crisis management systems). This chapter can be seen as a first step toward that needed research.

From our perspective, one of the basic issues that needs to be studied is the following. The major political and economic transformations in the former socialist bloc have led their national disaster management systems toward an increasing ambiguity about the status of their disaster preparedness. This is paralleled by a growing vulnerability of the transitional societies because of a combination of traditional hazards and new risks. However, some important elements of national disaster management systems are strengthening.

Such an inconsistency most vividly manifests itself in what we label as "net effect of their social and economic vulnerability." Given the scarcity of worldwide data other than traditional numbers about lives lost and economic damage, in our assessment of the world regions vulnerable to natural hazards and calamities in the 1990s, we used certain indicators of such an effect. We recognize that there may be limitations in the data we use, but accepting that, Table 21.1 shows the results of our analysis.

Table 21.1 shows that in terms of economic vulnerability to disasters the transitional societies we are discussing were quite close to the more industrially developed nations in the 1990s. Moreover, according to our preliminary assessment for 2004, the V_e values for the two nation groups were practically equal and lower than those of the developing countries. Meanwhile, the transitional societies are almost twice as much socially vulnerable to disaster impact than the industrially developed nations, but more than four times more resilient than developing nations, leaving aside the least developed states. (For further details see Porfiriev, 2003.)

TABLE 21.1. The World Regions' Vulnerability to Disasters

World Regions	V_s	V_e
Industrially developed nations	0.19	0.98
Nations in transition	0.30	0.91
Developing nations	1.24	1.12
Least developed countries	7.50	2.50

V_s (social vulnerability index) and V_e (economic vulnerability index) are variations of the standard Gini coefficient we developed to measure the world regions' relative vulnerability to disasters. V_s shows the ratio between a region's percentage in the number of those killed by disaster agents in the world and its share in the world population, while V_e reveals the ratio between the region's share in the world economic damage provided by disasters and that of the region's percentage in the global GDP. Both indexes for the whole world are equal to 1.

THE RESEARCH DATA

First, we mention the research data used in this chapter. Then we advance certain generalizations or propositions that we derive from our analyses. What are important and interesting for both academic and practical exploration are fundamental research studies of these and other specific characteristics of the vulnerability of transitional societies to as well as their management of disasters. However, there are very few such studies. Among a few exceptions we can cite two series of books. One of these focused specifically on the former Soviet Union and contemporary Russia and was written in cooperation with and published by the Disaster Research Center (DRC) at the University of Delaware (Quarantelli & Mozgovaya, 1994; Porfiriev & Quarantelli, 1996). The other series was jointly prepared and published by the Swedish Crisis Management Research and Training Center (CRISMART) and currently covers key research issues on disaster and crisis preparedness and response in the three Baltic nations (Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania), Poland, and Russia, along with the volumes on Romania and Ukraine in preparation (see Bynander & Chemilievski, 2005; Hansén & Stern, 2000; Porfiriev & Svedin, 2002; Stern & Newlove, 2004; Stern & Norstedt, 1999).

While not as numerous, extensive, and exhaustive as the research publications on and from industrially developed societies (see many of the chapters in this handbook), the aforementioned research publications do provide the opportunity for some generic considerations about crucial features of transitional disaster and crisis management. They are the major research data we use in our analyses in this chapter. Having mentioned this, two reservations should be noted. First, our descriptions and analyses are based mostly on the Russian experiences. Those of other societies in transition, especially the former Soviet Union republics and Eastern European countries, are only occasionally discussed. Second, the generalizations made are preliminary (partially because of the first limitation) and should be treated as hypotheses and propositions rather then solid and unequivocal conclusions.

HYPOTHESES AND PROPOSITIONS

Our analysis produced 10 hypotheses and propositions. The important elements in the proposition are first stated in an overall title, followed by a brief description and then an extended discussion usually providing specific examples and illustrations.

Institutional Erosion and Resource Constraint of Disaster and Crisis Management

This proposition assumes that as transitional societies move from one disaster policy and crisis management regime to another, the eroded institutional frameworks are excessively strained and there is a serious strain on resources. This creates for a society and its institutions an increasing vulnerability to the negative impacts of a disaster agent or crisis factor, which constrains the efficiency of preparedness and response.

The vast data available on transitional nations both within the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe confirms major shifts in regimes in the late 1980s and further into the 2000s. They moved from exclusively centralized disaster and crisis planning and response to a more decentralized model. They also moved from an overdominant orientation toward wartime threats, with civil defense as the organic element of the Ministry of Defense being a key crisis actor, to peacetime preparations with civic or quasi-civilian institutions prevailing on a crisis management scene. For instance, in the Baltic States only Lithuania kept the defense ministry as the key governmental body responsible for comprehensive crisis policymaking including disaster management, while Estonia and Latvia as well as Poland vested this responsibility in the Ministry of the Interior. At the same time, practically all former Soviet Union republics including Russia share the governance of crisis and disaster situations and areas between the Ministry of Interior, the Federal Security Service, and the Ministry for Emergency Management and Disaster Response (EMERCOM in Russia). In all countries, war prevention, preparedness, and conduct of course remained the prerogative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Defense, respectively (see Porfiriev, 2001b).

This major change is consistent with the more generic trend typical for both developing as well as established democracies in Europe in particular. However, a number of new and independent republics were created by the collapse of the Soviet Union. This led to conspicuous changes in the size of territories and populations, particularly in Russia, and, more important, in qualitative political, economic, and social permutations. Such an abrupt upheaval could not but lead to institutional erosion. Norms, rules, and values that had existed for decades in the former socialist bloc nations, in particular existing industrial and ethnic group relationships, were abolished or lost their binding character. These were replaced by alternative ways of proceeding that were often alien to the public conscience, or not replaced at all, creating societal anomie, frustration, and marginalization. In the specific area of disaster and crisis policy, some 10 to 15 years of existence of novel institutions such as a specific ministry or agency for emergency management and disaster response, proves that still a great deal of work is required to make them established and fully effective structures.

At the same time, radiation, ecological, and earthquake disasters in Chernobyl, Karabash, and Neftegorsk in Russia and the major floods in Central Europe, particularly in the Czech Republic in 2002 and Romania in 2005, vividly demonstrate a high degree of strain experienced by current institutional frameworks, particularly those associated with disaster mitigation and alleviation (Vorobiev, Akimov, & Sokolov, 2003). This leaves aside regional wars, armed conflicts, and terrorist attacks that brought major disturbances to the fragile structure of the emerging disaster and crisis management systems, especially in the former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia.

For instance, the Chernobyl disaster, which occurred at the beginning of the large-scale political and economic changes known as perestroika, considerably and negatively impacted the pace and pattern of economic development in Byelorussia, Russia, and Ukraine. Some economists believe that it served as the prime reason for a lasting economic slow down in

the next decade. If true, this means the disaster's adverse impact on and excessive strain for national institutions was indirectly responsible for economic and social reforms.

In addition, the social security system that existed in the former Soviet Union had never considered and thus had not been prepared to handle the problem of multiyear caring of hundreds of thousand of disaster victims, especially workers involved in dangerous "clean up" efforts after disasters. The system had tackled, although not efficiently, such a problem in terms of caring for numerous war veterans, but not for people affected in peacetime crises. The relevant national legislation for social security of those as a specific community was missing, with the aid provided only on an individual basis and in lump sum payments. The emergence of thousands of Chernobyl clean-up and rescue workers who were disabled or in poor health left the existing inflexible institutional and legislative system under high pressure. The federal government of the collapsing Soviet Union and then Russia needed to, under conditions of uncertainty and shortage of time and funds, introduce new laws and regulations and to establish new agencies responsible for the long-term socioeconomic and medical aid to the affected rescuers. In turn, thousands and thousands of rescuers unsatisfied with the pace and amount of such aid as was provided organized a movement to protect their vital interests, which added to the strain on the institutional framework.

The aforementioned major earthquake and flood disasters in 1995–2005 in Central Europe and Russia also created an excessive burden on the developing national emergency management systems in the transitional economies. In this respect, an earthquake disaster in the Sakhalin Island in 1995 serves as an excellent example, with the remoteness of the region exacerbating a key problem in logistics and delivery of resources. This problem existed within the old regime's model of centralized crisis response (see Porfiriev, 1998, pp. 170–190). However, in Sakhalin this turned out to be much more complicated given the existence of a new national emergency management system (USEPE). Its weak points and peculiarities created delays in the preplanned and organized response, and led to wide use of ad hoc solutions and voluntary initiatives. The initial volunteer effort was performed mainly by the victims of the disaster themselves, and lasted over the first critical 36 hours of the response. To a small extent, the volunteers helped to fill the gap for getting a proper response, but could not improve its efficiency.

The response was further reduced by the severity of the quake's impact, which put the local response teams out of operation. It revealed one more dimension of societal vulnerability and suggested the need for improvement of organizational coordination between geographically neighboring response units and higher-level response units. Institutional vulnerability was also associated with crisis communication, in particular with the extent to which disaster response was dependent on well established and functioning communications, particularly by telephones. The system in place at the time was based on a primary local response with availability of backup resources further up in the organizational chain or further away geographically. The vulnerability of the system in terms of communication had tragic consequences as telephone lines were disrupted by the earthquake's impact.

Many other disaster cases and response to those in the countries in transition could be easily added to the above one to corroborate that the efficiency of the new regime disaster and crisis policy was constrained by an excessive burden on institutional entities and by the shortage of funds. This supports our institutional erosion hypothesis in that there is substantial evidence in the post-Soviet and Eastern European nations that disclose a regime shift from the old hierarchical and state-centric crisis management system to a new one. The latter tends to be more decentralized, oriented on mitigation and timely response and open to more non-state (public, private, and mixed) initiatives and solutions. The latest changes in the national

disaster policy in Russia, instigated by the major administrative reform in 2004–2005, have involved moving the responsibility for disaster preparedness and planning from federal to regional authorities, and from the latter to municipalities. This is additional evidence of the trend.

However, how far this shift will progress and what are its implications for disaster vulnerability and crisis and emergency management significantly depends on institutional rigidity. This factor constitutes the essence of the next hypothesis. As a prelude to it, we think it is worth mentioning that in the other latest permutation within the national disaster management system in Russia there is an indication of a backward tendency toward centralization reestablishing its position. For instance, in 2002 the fire service was moved from the Ministry of Interior (in which it had existed for almost two centuries!) to EMERCOM, with the latter's personnel and response capacity increasing an order of magnitude. In addition, EMERCOM was also vested with responsibility for disaster recovery, primarily but not only in terms of reconstruction coordination and supervision. If the impact of terrorist attacks is further added, it would be possible to talk even about a regression to a centralized disaster model and crisis policy in transitional societies.

For the sake of fairness, however, one should mention that such a regression is typical not only in transitional but sometimes in industrially developed societies. It suffices to note that the United States response to the 9/11 terrorist attack led to the creation of the Department of Homeland Security (see the chapter by Waugh in this handbook). Or that Hurricane Katrina in 2005 vividly suggested to many, especially in government, the need for a more centralized and concerted response effort at the time of a major catastrophe (see the several articles expressing different views on this matter on the Social Science Research Council Web site at: http://understandingkatrina.ssrc.org).

Institutional Rigidity and Reduction of Disaster Policy and Crisis Management Efficiency

Implied here is a proposition that the transitional polity persistence of existing institutional structures and practices at the meso- and micro-levels of society and government creates conflict with the swift change occurring in the basic foundations at the macropolitical and macroeconomic levels. This precipitates increasing uncertainty and restricts the efficiency of disaster policy. In addition, those in transitional societies who use polities similar to Western regional institutions such as the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) are likely to experience stress-inducing tension between their domestic norms and European/Western norms.

The basic idea in this proposition suggests that old institutional practices in society and in government persist, particularly at the micro- and meso-levels, despite the rest of the system's overall move toward change. This could even imply dramatic attempts to challenge or destabilize the new regime by proponents of the old regime in the crisis management structure, government, or society at large.

The case of the Chernobyl clean-up and rescue workers provides perhaps the most convincing and comprehensive example of the validity of such a proposition (see Shlikova, 2002). The struggle for better social security between these workers and at first the Soviet, and later the Russian government, was based on and mostly kept relying on the norms, values, and structures typical for the former Soviet social policy carried out by the national government. The poor efficiency of the "pure" state system in the social security area was then replaced by

a mutant "privatized-public" system. This reveals the powerlessness of the national law and/or the weakness of the law enforcement system and is a policy failure.

Not surprisingly, absent an alternative system providing such services, especially during disasters, the administrative system continues to be not interested in or deeply concerned about the living conditions of the Chernobyl clean-up and rescue workers. Moreover, the national government has been gradually reducing the number and amount of privileges provided to these workers. This has been carried out through introducing regulations, which reduce the list of those eligible to use in particular the opportunities provided by the social security reform. Among other things, this implies the so-called monetization of privileges (i.e., replacing services by the payment of money). In addition, the benefits have been cut within the ongoing national administrative (governmental) reform by the shifting of responsibility, but not funds, from the federal and regional authorities to the more poorly funded municipal level.

Such a discrepancy in interests between old bureaucratic structures and clean-up and rescue workers in need created a conflict. This led to the instigation of self-protection initiatives by the workers, who organized action groups and even special nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to regain their rights to receive social aid. National and particularly regional NGOs, which represent the elements of the new regime in crisis management geared more toward a decentralized system and a multitude of actors (including private actors), play an important role in the struggle between the federal government (macro-level) and to a less extent the regional authorities (meso-level) on the one hand, and on the other hand, those directly involved in the alleviation of the Chernobyl disaster (micro- and meso-levels).

The latest experiences in disaster response reveal a persistence of existing institutional structures and practices not only at the lower levels of society and government but also at the top level. In turn, this precipitates conflicts within macropolitical and macroeconomic levels. As an example, one could contrast the recovery from the disastrous floods in Yakutia in 1998 and 2001 to that in the Southern Russia in 2002 (Vorobiev, Akimov, & Sokolov, 2003). This comparison shows that tensions and conflicts between the Ministry for Construction and EMERCOM regarding both responsibilities and implementation issues did not subside over time. In turn, this adversely affected the pace and efficiency of recovery from the floods and increased the risk of a new crisis in the coming winter cold for the residents, who either moved into the newly built but inadequately protected houses or who were left homeless.

As to the part of the proposition concerning some of the transitional polities likely to experience stress-inducing tension between domestic and European/Western norms, the issue of industrial and environmental safety standards provides a good example. These are the battles between local communities and enterprises as well as the federal authorities, phenomena also widespread in Western societies. However, what is absent in the West is the disregard for standards by personnel at hazardous facilities who are more interested in keeping their jobs than in lives and health (a situation also well known in developing countries). Further, as some case studies show (Mozgovaya, 2002), at times local communities with large numbers of miners and their families fiercely oppose the federal and regional authorities trying to enforce stricter (Western-like) safety rules and regulations.

In addition, we could mention the case of the air disaster in Ukraine in 2001 when a civilian passenger aircraft heading from Israel to Russia was accidentally downed by a missile launched during military drills, or the sinking of the Kursk submarine in 2000 or the AS-28 bathyscaphe near-disaster in 2005 in Russia. These cases reveal serious failures by national authorities attempting to meet Western standards of disaster and crisis communication, primarily openness in contacting local communities in an attempt to obtain public trust. (We of course are aware that at times even in the West this effort may be more nominal than actual.)

In this respect, it is worth mentioning the "theatre crisis" and the "school seizure crisis," both provoked by major terrorist attacks in 2002 in Moscow and in 2004 in Beslan. There was a major dispute between Western-oriented citizens and experts in Russia (leaving aside emergency professionals, politicians, and the mass media in the West) and supporters of a hard line approach that showed the wide gap between advocates of rather different cultural standards. We should add to this the discrepancy in the coverage of the response to the terrorist attack, particularly its aftermath, by Western and Russian independent media and by official sources of information. An in-depth analysis of the mass media and crisis communication issues during those terrorist attacks also supports the next proposition, which involves the under-institutionalization issue.

Under-Institutionalization and Mass Media Structuring of Disaster and Crisis Policies

Involved here is the idea that as transitional societies move toward Western style democracy and a market economy, crisis management and disaster policy, to overcome existing under-institutionalization, will tend to be increasingly politicized. In parallel, the mass media will play an increasingly important role both in reporting crises (disasters) as well as being crisis management actors. This results in disasters being seen as they are shaped by the mass media and in their becoming a political issue. It also implies that a more open and extensive reporting by the media, together with a real or imagined shift in crisis and emergency management regime or socio-economic changes in general, might generate increased expectations by the public that the government should be able to better cope with a disaster.

Numerous experiences of the recent past and present provide abundant evidence of the mounting openness and mass media coverage of disasters and emergency and crisis management issues in transitional societies. This is particularly obvious when compared with what went on under the former socialist bloc. In earlier times the phrase "no victims, no destruction" captured the description of major disasters in the official media with no alternative independent data sources available. This leaves aside accidents at military sites and activities, which almost never were made public. Since the late 1980s, the press media and television have produced countless articles and comments on disasters using both domestic and international data sources. Widespread coverage of major floods in the Central European countries in 2002 and 2005 and of regional wars and armed conflicts in the former Yugoslavia and in former Soviet Union republics are but a few illustrations of the point.

Increasing coverage, however, does not mean full transparency in disaster reporting, for example, in Russia, the cases of the sinking of the Kursk submarine and the AS-28 bathyscaphe in 2000 and 2005, respectively as well as the previously mentioned terrorist attacks in Moscow and Beslan. The evidence is that the new disaster and crisis regime indeed is more open than in the times of the former Soviet Union and even about media coverage of the accidents at strategic military objectives. On the Kursk tragedy alone, five books along with hundreds of newspaper articles and TV comments were issued within a year—far beyond the number of writings about Chernobyl, the most publicized previous disaster in Russia.

What should be compared, however, is the media's complicated access to and distortion of some essential data concerning coping with the crisis that left significant room for media and public speculations on these disasters. A side effect of the new critical media reporting on disasters in Russia and other nations in transition is that, like in Western countries, they tend to fill in the blanks with whatever they can or see fit. This kind of reporting sometimes

produces sensational stories that generate the risk of a second-order crisis (Cherkashin, 2001, pp. 36–44).

Some interesting observations in support of the crisis politicization and media structuring hypothesis also can be seen from findings about the Neftegorsk earthquake in Russia and the floods in Czech Republic and Romania. Such disaster issues were not a substantive part of either the old political regime at large and crisis management in particular or official media policy. However, various social actors, particularly citizen groups and NGOs, pushed these items further up on the political and media agenda.

In this, the "theatre crisis" in Moscow provides another good illustration. Three days of silence by the responsible agencies about the gas that was used by special antiterrorist teams left the media free to speculate about the nature of the combat and the chemical weapons used. In turn, those speculations, which spread both within and outside Russia, gave rise to suspicions of a political nature and increased political tensions. After the issuance of official statements, most of the public pressure lessened. The families of Ukrainian hostages, however, started a media campaign and their lawyers initiated suits against the Russian government, openly using this opportunity to put together this case with the aforementioned accident in 2001, when a Ukrainian missile accidentally hit a T-154 aircraft flying from Israel to Russia.

With regard the NGOs, worth mentioning is the case of Karabash (the Ural region in Russia considered by environmentalists as the most contaminated area in the world), where a local "green peace" organization started to picture ecological issues as a "new" type of threat (new in the sense of becoming recognized as a disaster). The emergence of NGOs and other private groups as active interest or influence groups that structure the disaster management agenda is a sign of the shift in the crisis regime, leaving the new context more open to the media and the public. In particular, adding to the influence of other groups and interests in addition to those of the federal, state, regional, or local governments and official media is the increasing influence of the new independent information sources.

At the same time, the mounting politicization of disaster and crisis events, especially those associated with compensations, property redistribution, and all-level authority elections, pushes in the opposite direction by reducing the number of such sources, primarily at the local and regional levels. Moreover, the politicizing of these sensitive issues in the mass media and in public forums can increase tension between different ethnic and social groups. For instance, this resulted from the speculations that developed about the gap in the amount of compensation (sometimes of a considerable magnitude) received by the neighboring communities located in the Chernobyl plume area in Byelorussia, Ukraine, and Russia, and what was given to the families of those killed in the Moscow and Beslan terrorist attacks.

Are there increased public expectations about the government's mounting ability to improve disaster management as a result of more open and extensive reporting by the media and a real or perceived shift in this management's regime or socioeconomic changes in general? Our observation is that the experiences of transitional societies seem mixed. People in general do not expect, or accept to the same degree as with other services, a decrease of a government's ability to cope with a crisis when the "old" way of doing things allows room for the "new" disaster or crisis policy. Available studies of the mass media in the former Soviet Union nations reveal that the developing critical scrutiny of disasters and emergency management does put pressure on decision-makers acting as crisis managers. The question of whether the mass media actually succeed in creating change is still unclear. Media reporting itself, however, creates expectations among the public with the further possibility of leading or not leading to a second-order crisis or crisis amplification (Kasperson, 1988).

From a different perspective, the persistence of the social security problem of the Chernobyl clean-up and rescue workers is not totally the result of gaps in disaster recovery programs. The problem is partially rooted in the unwillingness of some of the victims and those indirectly affected by the irradiation to waive their claims and receive social security instead of direct compensations from the government. Thus, the ongoing struggle between the clean-up and rescue workers and the government could be portrayed as a part of the new regime, meaning that issues such as compensation to disaster victims and their families in Russia (and other post-Soviet nations) can really be managed through lawsuits as in the West.

The aforementioned issue can be considered a reaction to a perceived failure by the state to provide the proper care for citizens who sacrificed their lives and health for their homeland. A "caring" government, solidarity and perception of those who sacrificed themselves for the nation as heroes, are values that were very entrenched in and associated with the old Soviet system. These traditional values still persist in many ways in the post-Soviet Russia transitional societies. There is therefore an emotional and open negative expression when the government is perceived or really fails to perform its expected duties.

The recent experience of transitional economies supports the assumption that the more lasting a crisis or disaster is, the less the public expects it to be managed efficiently. The case study of recovery from a creeping ecological disaster in Karabash shows that the local people perceived that the government was not responding to their environmental concerns (Mozogovaya, 2002). But there was a public expectation that the heavy dependency on the mono-production of copper, which gave birth to the town but resulted in a very high hazardous contamination, would be replaced or compensated in some way when the federal authorities decided to do something about the ownership of the plant and its future work. However, the authorities did not show any eagerness to take any responsibility to do something concrete to alleviate the environmental disaster. When in the late 1990s they understood that the government was not going to step in and intervene in the privatization of the plant, the plant workers and citizens organized action groups to protest the move (Mozgovaya, 2002).

In a sense, this new social movement was about experiencing the new goals and aims of the crisis management regime, with new identified problem areas and new processes for managing them. But at the same time, it was a perception of the very real and tangible lack of hands-on management of the problem. For the people concerned, very little changed in their living conditions and everyday priorities. The practical solution to the government's new way of looking at the plants' ecological impact was not by any means readily at hand (no other means of employment were available, for instance). Therefore the local people did not perceive the authorities as taking their part of the responsibility in this case. From this perspective the new regime can be viewed as not institutionalized enough, thus leaving some substantial implementation issues unresolved.

Institutional Overstrain and Zugzwang: An Impact on Disaster Preparedness and Response

The hypothesis here is that in transitional societies overstrained decision-making units increasingly experience institutional *zugzwang* (this word is a chess term describing a situation in which a player needs to make a move that will lead to a worsening of his (her) position). This will lead to poor detection (identification of threat) and a delayed prevention of or an inefficient response to a specific crisis occasion.In turn,the frequency and severity of these tend to escalate, thus transforming them into major disasters.In conjunction with mounting

politicization,this also leads higher level emergency managers to focus on acute rather than creeping crises and disasters and on short-term political and economic implications at the expense of longer term social and environmental effects.

Much crisis and disaster research literature exists that highlights different types of gaps in disaster preparedness and failures in response. However, only a small portion of it considers institutional issues involved in such loopholes that are precipitated by specific transitional conditions of development of nations in Europe, Asia, and Latin America. Conceivably, the Russian disaster and crisis management context could provide the most convincing evidence of the above proposition.

First, this involves the vulnerability to disasters resulting from the legacy of centralized planning and an excessive militarized economy that existed in the former Soviet Union, and from the problems of transition from a totalitarian regime to a more democratic and market-oriented polity that is characteristic of Russia, the former Soviet republics, and Central European countries as well as China and Vietnam. For instance, our analysis of the 1995 Neftegorsk earthquake disaster showed that the increased vulnerability of communities was primarily due to the poor construction of residential buildings in late 1960s through the early 1970s. In contrast to the earthquake disaster in Armenia in 1986 and Turkey in 2001, this happened not only because construction companies were attempting to reduce costs so as to maximize their profits, but also from a tradition of sticking to "universal" design and construction standards that was typical for centrally planned economies in the Soviet Union. This approach assumed that a "universal" design was applicable to practically every construction site, in contrast to using a more flexible but more time-consuming and resource-intensive construction technologies that take into account the particular conditions of sites.

This loosening of industrial and occupational safety measures was further exacerbated by the recurrent social and economic hardships and political disturbances that surfaced in the transition to the new economic and political regime in Russia and other societies in transition in the 1990s. These conditions strongly added to the existing uncertainty that considerably complicated not only disaster preparedness and crisis prevention, but also socioeconomic policy in general, thus involving the development process into a continuing national systemic crisis. Almost every major disaster and/or crisis in transitional economies reveals significant adverse impacts of such systemic crisis on specific disaster development paths and crisis management efficiency.

For instance, the rescue efforts carried out in response to the Neftegorsk earthquake and Kursk submarine disasters were of limited efficiency because of the shortage or the absence of modern rescue equipment and rescue personnel. The key reason for this was that the EMERCOM and Defense Ministry budgets were limited if not cut back as a result of the deep and lasting economic slow down and increasing indebtedness in the 1990s. In addition, in 1995, when the Neftegorsk earthquake occurred, EMERCOM had to respond to more than 1500 other emergencies that also used much needed resources and personnel. In 2000, when the Kursk submarine sank, the Russian Defense Ministry had to use its scarce resources in responding to a number of other, fortunately less serious, military accidents as well as carrying out routine operations. Moreover, almost at the same time as the Kursk disaster, EMERCOM and other ministries had to cope with the terrorist attack and a major fire at a TV tower in Moscow.

These multiple and overlapping crises created external synchronicities and internal event overload, leading to competition for limited resources and thus significantly complicating the handling of disasters. Such conditions excessively strain the existing institutional framework, putting the national disaster management system in particular into a zugzwang position. This system, like those for management of social, economic, and political crises, have been forced

to focus on crises that have already occurred, rather than trying to anticipate possible future ones. This means that some crises are not detected, are detected too late, or that responses are considerably delayed.

In the case of Russia, this problem is exacerbated further by the fact that its vast territory extends over 11 time zones, which has major negative implications for national disaster policy. The very large area involved results in a reduction of prevention/mitigation capability, contributing to increased vulnerability, crisis recurrence, and substantial costs. In the late 1990s, the latter amounted to 6% to 7% of the gross national product (Ragozin, 1999).

As previously noted, there tends to be a focus on the short-term social and economic issues involved in instant crises (e.g., sheltering, compensations, etc.) rather than on long-term social and environmental effects of creeping crises. Evidence for this comes, for example, from comparing the Neftegorsk earthquake disaster and the Kursk tragedy with the slowly moving Karabash ecological disaster and the long-lasting Chernobyl clean-up and rescue workers' crisis in Russia. Additional supporting data come from looking at the considerable strengthening of the national disaster and emergency management policy with EMERCOM as the lead organization, in contrast to the national environmental policy. In the 1990s, the latter was increasingly losing its position. The responsible federal body was first reduced from a ministry to a committee (agency). Then in 2000 the agency was further downgraded to a department within the federal Ministry for Natural Resources which is responsible for resource development rather than for conservation and the prevention of excessive exploitation.

The Bureaucratic-Politics of Disaster Response and Recovery

The point of this proposition is that transitional polities are likely to experience a high frequency and a high intensity of bureaucratic political behavior in both everyday routine times and in disaster and crisis situations.

Studies of political and financial crises and crisis management present good illustrations for this proposition, for example, the economic overheating in Estonia in 1997 (Stern & Nohrstedt, 1999), the major financial default in 1998 in transitional and some industrialized economies, as well as the smaller banking crises in Russia in 2000. They all involved considerable bureaucratic political behavior.

However, research studies of "classic" disasters also provide convincing data for the notion of a close relationship between crises and bureaucratic organizational politics. For instance, investigation of the mass media coverage of the Kursk submarine disaster clearly reveals the ambiguity in both the crisis response and crisis communication of the various social actors involved. In particular, comments on and explanations of the submarine's sinking varied from external impact (e.g., collision with or even attack by an alien submarine, or impact with a civilian Russian warship or a sea mine), to internal explosion of torpedoes because of some technical deficiency or human error. A similar gamut of stories was characteristic in the discussion of the opportunities for the survival of the crew and early rescuing. (For a detailed discussion see Cherkashin, 2001; Kouznetsov, 2005; Ustinov, 2005).

Apparently, these varying stories partly followed from the complexity and uncertainty of the disastrous accident as such, as well as the heterogeneity of the units involved both in the initial military exercise and the later rescue activity. To a not lesser extent they reflect underlying intragovernmental and intraorganizational tensions (Kouznetsov, 2005). However, regardless of which version is closer to the truth, an important observation becomes crystal

clear: the extremely hectic conditions, with key crisis decisions being taken in an ad hoc way, provided much room for bureaucratic maneuvering and politicking by specific crisis actors. This amplified the adverse impact of the event by adding crisis communication issues to the earlier severe implications of a major technological accident, thus exacerbating the damage that occurred and escalating it to major disaster in the public perception, both in Russia and internationally.

A crucial question here is to what extent the transitional state of a society (Russia or any other) contributes to a bureaucratic–organizational and a bureaucratic–political behavior by the actors responding to a particular crisis and/or disaster. Admittedly, bureaucratic and political maneuvering was quite typical in the former Soviet Union but it also occurs in established democracies. There are often situations when responsible officials or institutions try to shift responsibility to some other crisis actors, especially to journalists, political opponents, and citizen groups. One might assume that especially in hierarchical institutional and social systems, such motivation explains the frequent organizational and political tendency to assign blame to parties other than themselves, and to seek in man-made disaster scapegoat culprits.

At least two factors are specifically associated with the predicament of transitional societies that are conducive to bureaucratic politics. One of these involves the impact produced by frequent replacement of top political leaders accompanied by significant reshuffling in their teams, which are typically composed of a specific mixture of both newcomers and "veterans" in administration. These high-level decision support makers use different, often opposing, principles and methods of disaster communication. This makes the dialogue between the crisis actors and especially with the mass media and the public very difficult. This is further complicated by the involvement of international political and media communities, which monitor and evaluate disaster response and rescue operations commanded by the new leaders. Such psychological pressure, along with organizational innovations, cannot help but encourage routine bureau–political maneuvering.

One additional factor is associated with the increased mass media involvement in disaster and crisis policy. The great number and activities of the new independent media information sources that seek more transparency of official reports on crises sometimes forces responsible officials and institutions to manipulatively seek an "exit strategy." To do this they often use holes and gaps provided by 'transitional' but not fully established legislation, and by competition between different social actors to justify specific (in)action or shift of responsibility.

Such behavior occurs not only during the trans-disaster phase (at the height of a crisis as such), but also in post-disaster situations. One can see bureaucratic tricks to attempt to postpone or even to denounce any official recognition of the conscription in the republics of the former Soviet Union of clean-up and rescue workers in the response to Chernobyl, and attempts to move the responsibility for social security and aid from the federal government to municipal authorities, the families of the rescuers, and NGOs. Similar behaviors could be cited from studies of recovery from disasters, particularly the compensation to the communities affected by the major floods in Central Europe and Russia in 2002 (Vorobiev, Akimov, & Sokolov, 2003).

These and other cases highlight some of the sophisticated bureau–organizational maneuvering in disasters. This indicates that the existing political–administrative system is relatively weak and likely to attempt to change emergent patterns of procedures, functions, and powers including that of interagency coordination in disaster response and recovery. At the same time, this illustrates that the new group syndrome at the policy regime level, where conflicts easily escalate into power struggles, is really a major characteristic for transitional polity.

Institutional Reflexive Change, Overlearning, and Disasters.

Our point here is that when transitional societies face disaster and/or crisis conditions, they tend toward reflexive institutional changes and volatility. Also, in transitional as opposed to established democracies, there is a greater chance that crises will generate "double loop" and/or "third order" learning processes (explained later), and by inference, a higher likelihood of overlearning the lessons of the last crisis for the next one.

Research studies show that in the last 15 years there have been significant institutional changes in national disaster policy in the former Soviet Union republics, and notably Russia. The very organization and development of EMERCOM in Russia and its analogues in the other members of the CIS, i.e., state agencies that did not previously exist in these countries, is good evidence for this point. To a great extent, these transformations reflect past experiences and lessons learned from them, with the earlier changes being the quickest and reflexive. For instance, in 1991–1993, the chief of EMERCOM was ordered by the president of Russia to step in and handle the conflict between Northern Ossetia and Ingushetia, although before (and afterwards) this was not a formal function of the agency. In the same period, the earlier independent hydrometeorological service was incorporated into EMERCOM but soon after was separated again and returned to its earlier status. Similar situations occurred in 2004, a decade after the start of the ongoing major administrative reform in Russia.

However, this and other examples indicate such transformations use a medium-term perspective rather than an after-every-event restructuring such as happened in Estonia or Poland (Bynander & Chemilievski, 2005; Stern & Nohrstedt, 1999). For instance, between 1994 and 2000 EMERCOM underwent serious but incremental reorganization, with disaster policy shifting from emergency response to specific events in the early 1990s, to emergency preparedness and more comprehensive response in the mid-1990s, and to disaster mitigation and risk reduction in the late 1990s to the early 2000s. The same process has been underway in the Interior Ministry, manifested in intraorganizational changes. There have been attempts to cope with the sharp increase in organized crime, involving but not limited to the creation of new kinds of special task forces (*spetsnaz*). Meanwhile, in the ministry dealing with crises such changes have been more frequent than in EMERCOM, being instigated by a more recurrent replacement of its top management, rather than just changes in the crime pattern alone.

This puts to the fore the institutional volatility issue that is part of the proposition mentioned earlier. An important factor is the role of personality and the decision-making framework created by and within the historical development and culture (including the political culture) of a given polity. The more modern nations that have replaced the former socialist bloc, particularly most of those of the former Soviet Union, are no longer totalitarian and authoritarian societies. Yet their political systems still preserve much of a hierarchical structure, with a high concentration of power in the hands of a head of multilevel authority. This creates conditions for relatively easy structural and functional changes and replacement of top management in a specific ministry or state organization. It is even more so in disaster and crisis policy areas, which according to the constitutions of the CIS members is the exclusive prerogative of the president. If he or she favors changes and personnel replacements, as did the first president of Russia, the present-day leaders in Byelorussia in the Ukraine, and the Central Asian nations, the changes will actually happen and make institutional volatility more organic and persistent.

The reflexive institutional changes in transitional societies when there are disasters also provide mixed evidence about overlearning from previous crises. While this learning was notable in some Baltic states, for example, Estonia and Latvia (Stern & Newlove, 2003;

AU: No 2003 ref for Stern & Newlove in ref list—or is this the 2004 ref? If it's a different ref, pls add.

Stern & Nohrstedt, 1999), in Russia and in the Ukraine at least one should have more reason to talk about underlearning. This implies drawing few if any lessons from earlier disasters.

A case study of the Chernobyl clean-up and rescue workers (Shlikova, 2002) illustrates the point. Despite the failure of the existing official institutions to provide adequate social security services to thousands of those workers in Russia, Byelorussia, and the Ukraine, that turned a radiation contamination disaster into a creeping and long-lasting sociopolitical crisis, almost nothing changed. This forced people to organize action groups and NGOs to protect their legitimate interests. The same was also done by the families of those killed in submarine disasters and terrorist attacks in 2000–2004. However, it should be noted that actions such as these in modern Russia and most of the CIS economies are few, thus showing that the development of civil society there is only at the earliest stage.

These and other recent experiences of recovering from disasters show that learning from crises may be more characteristic of citizens than of governmental institutions. If press reports are accurate, it might be argued that the response to Hurricane Andrew in 1992 and Hurricane Katrina in 2005 showed that the government did not learn much from the first experience. However, perhaps a transitional polity government will not have time or experience to allow its political and bureaucratic interests to become entrenched and fail to become more open or may see its practices and institutional arrangements as provisional and call for revisions in response to negative feedback from the public. This leads to a suggestion that in a risk society, historical, cultural, and other social core factors determine the pace of post-crisis reflexive change and learning from crises to a much larger extent than the very process of transition itself.

TRANSITIONAL VULNERABILITY, CRISIS DEVELOPMENT, AND DISASTER MANAGEMENT[2]

Research studies of disasters and disaster policy in the new democracies give us a basis for the identification of the common characteristics that affect the vulnerability of nations to and the severity of crises (Hansén & Stern, 2000). The most important political, institutional, and sociocultural features are uneven/unstable regulations, the shadow of authoritarianism, discrepancies and conflicts between public values and norms accompanied by intra- and intercommunity strain (including ethnic tensions), and changing mass media cultures. The most crucial economic characteristics involve resource constraints and infrastructural decay. We discuss these matters in the following sections.

Key Sociocultural and Politico-Institutional Changes in Transitional Societies

All transitional societies by definition have been evolving from state socialism toward various forms of liberal democratic states and societies. In addition, a number of the polities have made a transition from being an internal part of the Soviet Union, to national sovereignty as independent states. These profound changes in the sociopolitical order pose great challenges to the new democracies.

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[2] This section builds upon and expands the conclusions of Hansen and Stern (2000) as well as the creative comments of Paul 't Hart.

First, the public values and norms long existing and rooted in the societies of the former Soviet Union republics were replaced by new ones. This resulted in a shift from a totalitarian and authoritarian state to deregulation and a liberal, people-oriented, public policy that provided for more community and individual freedoms including those of private property, entrepreneurship, and ability to move around. These were almost immediately shared by the younger generations much less experienced or having mostly negative experiences of living in the old political regime. However democratic and positive, though, these radical changes could not but conflict with those of giving priority to public and collective interests over individual preferences and willingness, nonmonetary over monetary values, and others. These dominated before and are deeply entrenched in the mass consciousness of older generations, who only two decades ago lived rather different lives but now have lost their social orientation and find themselves in conditions of social anomie.

Second, the old institutions and regulatory arrangements have been discarded or incorporated into a radically changed political and institutional context, with the de-legitimization of the existing regime in many cases having been so profound that large areas of legislation and legal practice were eliminated. Given the laissez-faire zeitgeist, often the plan-based or authoritarian structures have not been replaced promptly with the kinds of regulatory bodies common in the West, which could moderate and mitigate market failures of various kinds. Thus, a highly segmented and uneven process of legal and political reform has left lacunae and politicoeconomic disequilibria of various kinds.

Implications for Crisis Development and Disaster Vulnerability: Particular Role of Ethnic Tensions

The aforementioned transitional processes, which involve social norms and value conflicts and legislative and institutional gaps and imbalances, have major implications for dealing with both crises and disasters. In terms of crisis and disaster development, they often create a fertile environment for the incubation of new kinds of crises or catalyze existing latent crisis conditions into producing creeping and instant crises. Such conditions also mean increasing vulnerability to disaster impact or directly lead to the escalation of disasters.

For crisis and disaster policy, the transitional processes mentioned earlier have a number of implications. They imply that there will be increasing complexity and uncertainty in preparedness and response operations, persistent and pronounced shortage of resources in competition with profitable market segments of the economy, and a weak state only loosely interested in producing public benefits, including disaster protection. For example, the banking crises, which occurred in both Latvia and Estonia, paralleled in some respects what took place after waves of deregulation in Sweden and the United States in the 1980s and early 1990s, as well as the property redistribution in various industries and issues of social security including those privileges of rescuers in Russia. Similarly, the need to redefine the criteria for citizenship (which affected primarily Russian communities there) as part of the national restoration of Latvia and Estonia became a source of much domestic intra- and intercommunity ethnic strain and international controversy including tensions between these Baltic States and Russia. In addition, there were disastrous regional and ethnic conflicts in the latter, with the North Caucasus being the major "hot bed," the existing tensions in the modern Ukraine between the Russian-speaking southeastern part, Crimea region with a high percentage of the Muslim Tatar communities and the other parts (the bulk) of the country.

The above results in the exacerbation of the already high level of regional and ethnic tensions as a striking characteristic of many transitional polities. Dramatic population shifts following the dissolution of the Soviet Union contributed to making the rising tensions a thorny issue in many post-Soviet countries. The changing social, economic, and political status of both local ethnicities and what have become Russian expatriate communities pose major challenges in many transitional states. Particular national identities deemphasized (some would use stronger language) during the Soviet era have been heartily embraced by the newly independent nations. In some of these areas (Latvia, the Central Asian nations, to a lesser extent Georgia, and even in the Ukraine) this placed the status of Russian minorities in doubt.

Resource Scarcity and Infrastructural Decay as Disaster Vulnerability Factors and Crisis Management Constraints

The sociocultural and sociopolitical permutations in the transition of old regimes to more democratic societies are exacerbated by resource constraints and infrastructural obsoleteness. These both encourage crisis conditions and reduce the disaster mitigation potential of transitional polities.

Urbanization is placing increasing demands on the infrastructure of major cities at the same time as this infrastructure is aging and in need of major investments for maintenance and/or modernization. This is a global trend and is true irrespective of the level of industrialization or democratization of a nation, as can be seen in the examples of recent power blackouts in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Sweden as well as in Russia, Georgia, and Argentina. However, in many of the new democracies this problem is particularly acute, following from former Soviet practices regarding construction and urban planning that often failed to meet modern standards for safety and performance. A related problem has to do with infrastructural interdependence. In many of the transitional societies, infrastructure was developed as part of the larger Soviet or Soviet Bloc systems. For example, Estonia shares water and electric infrastructure with Russia, which may lead to conflicts.

To make matters worse, such structures have not been properly maintained, mostly because of the shortage of funds or, in more generic terms, resource constraints. Many of the new democracies are handicapped by severe shortage of resources. While infrastructure as well as institutions and legislation vitally need modernization, political and especially economic resources are already stretched very thin. Given these limitations, potentially avoidable crises occur when preventative investments might well have averted them. Deficiencies in preparedness are often revealed when crises occur and may be hard to remedy on an ad hoc basis when there are so few extra resource capabilities in the system (Cyert & March, 1963; Levinthal & March, 1981; Meyer, 1982).

Implications for Crisis and Disaster Management: Authoritarian Reflex and Development Strategy

A decreased disaster and crisis preparedness as a result of an imbalanced institutional framework and a resource-deficient economy is particularly evident when the kinds of crises new to the former socialist bloc nations (and not always to them alone) occur. These involve refugee crises in Estonia and Russia; the insolvency of banks and property redistribution crises in

Latvia, Russia, and other countries; as well as SARS and the bird flu epidemics in China, Romania, and a number of other transitional and developed economies.

At the same time, the aforementioned sociocultural and political changes and resource constraints loosen security and safety policies, weaken protective standards, and weaken an institutional framework and personnel training that are critical to efficient disaster management. Not surprisingly, this also precipitates inferior levels of preparedness and response to the kinds of disasters and crises that existed in old regimes, too. Those include, for instance, floods and earthquakes in China, the Czech Republic, Romania, and Russia, and technological accidents (a collapsed platform in Latvia and the explosion of a submarine in Russia). Added to this could be criminal justice and police management crises (robbery of weapons and the tragedy of peacekeepers in Estonia, a "police werewolves" scandal in Russia, the kidnapping of journalist and high level officials in the Ukraine and Byelorussia), and the failure of the public infrastructure in many places.

The implications of all this are that crisis and disaster vulnerability management is further exacerbated by the persistence of an authoritarian reflex typical in transitional societies. This is particularly strong in the Asian economies such as Turkmenia and Uzbekistan, and to lesser extent in China. Undoubtedly, the very exigencies of disasters and crises often call for quick and authoritative decisions and strong leadership, which often are not consistent with democratic values of openness, transparency, and public participation in the political process. Therefore, a certain degree of authoritarian reaction to disaster or crisis conditions can be found in many established democracies, for example, in provisions for declaring states of emergency and martial law, which curtail citizens' rights and concentrate power in the hands of crisis managers. But in the United States, as the latest hurricanes Katrina and Rita showed, there was a very strong reluctance to institute such severe measures, and almost none were ever implemented.

Similarly, in the new democracies, the citizenry (and political elitists) who have only recently succeeded in redistributing political power in a more democratic fashion and in securing civil and political rights in normal circumstances are very skeptical about relinquishing those rights in disaster situations. Nevertheless, during disasters and crises in transitional in contrast to established democracies, political and bureaucratic actors are more likely to resort to top-down models within hierarchical and centralized systems of emergency response ('t Hart, Rosenthal, & Kouzmin, 1993).

In this context, it is interesting to make a special note of the possible use of martial law, one of the most tangible and vivid manifestations of authoritarian reaction to crises. In Russia, this was not applied during the first (1994–1999) and the second (from 1999 and current) regional armed conflicts in Chechnya. Nor was martial law used in the catastrophic floods in Poland in 1997 and in Romania in 2005. However, the Chechnya case shows that the absence of martial law does not preclude very tough counterterrorist measures from being widely used.

These specific experiences show that a transitional crisis and disaster management policy does not necessarily imply an authoritarian reaction, and when it manifests itself in preparedness and/or response to disasters it looks controversial rather than unequivocally negative. What is more important is that such a reaction does not preclude learning from crises that sometimes could result even in reconsideration of the strategy that should be used.

In this respect, the case of China is of particular interest. The outbreak of the SARS epidemic in 2003 was considered by both local and international experts as a watershed in the developmental history of China. This crisis revealed institutional and policy constraints and loopholes precipitated by the vulnerability of local communities to novel kinds of crises and disasters. In turn, this could jeopardize if not suspend the dynamics of future economic growth.

The understanding of and concern about the epidemic by the national government resulted in a reconsideration of the existing socioeconomic policy. In fact, this policy was replaced by a more comprehensive and balanced long-term (*syaokan*) strategy for 2003–2025. This assumes reducing imbalances between humans and nature, economy and society, urban and rural areas, between the various regions in the country, and between domestic development and openness to the international community. Such an approach should provide for better preparedness and adaptation to major natural hazards and modern technology, and to reduce the risk of national systemic crises and threats to national security. (For more details see Mikheev, 2005, pp. 565–574).

The Changing Role of the Mass Media in Crisis Management and Disaster Policy

Even in many Western countries, the last few decades have been characterized by what some believe has been a qualitatively significant increase in the vigilance and power of the mass media in the political process (Blumer & Gurevitch, 1995; Edelman, 1988). This seems to be also occurring in the new democracies. In the past, old guard politicians in socialist countries could count on a docile and supportive mass media, but public officials in the new democracies are increasingly confronted with an aggressive, commercially oriented, and critical media, which takes its "watchdog" role very seriously. Strategies such as "covering up" errors or mistakes, which might have been effective under the old regime, have the potential to backfire dramatically if journalists manage to discover embarrassing information.

Recent disasters and crises experience in transitional societies show that despite the roadblocks to mass media operations that are much more serious than in established democracies, many officials and decision makers in the former have great awareness of how the contemporary Western media operates. In particular, they tend to use a more proactive, open communication strategy and more rigorous accountability measures. These, along with a set of sophisticated tools of media manipulation (invented or first introduced in the West, e.g., purchasing of newspaper companies), have been replacing the tough stance toward the press of the old regime. However ambiguous, such tendencies favor enhanced public communication skills on the part of officials involved in the management of various kinds of crises. In turn, this helps to avoid or reduce the risks of crises escalating into major disasters.

In addition to the helpful implication for disaster policy associated with mass media operations, however constrained in transitional societies, one more aspect should not be overlooked. This involves the "flip side" of the aforementioned institutional rigidity. Along with resource constraints this is a typical characteristic of transitional crisis policy significantly reducing its efficiency. However, in a certain respect, institutional rigidity could also be seen as a "healthy conservatism" preserving some of the legacy of old authoritarian regimes at the partial expense of democracy. At the same time, however, it could help to avoid some devastating effects of a major disaster. One could cite as an example the tough measures against hijacking of aircraft introduced in the times of the former Soviet Union by the special antiterrorist service. The latter are still present in Russia today, even though many believed they involved "anti-democratic policing" or were "excessive" in their operations. However, as the tragic events of September 11 in the United States and the bombing of two aircraft in Russia in 2004 showed, such rigid control seems reasonable not only for the new but also for established democracies. Contrary to some beliefs (see, e.g., Hansén & Stern, 2000, p. 351), established democracies are no less crisis prone than transitional societies.

These observations have two important ramifications for transitional disaster and crisis management. From a researcher (or scholarly) perspective these indicate that transitional polities, especially "crisis abundant" Russia, could be valuable social laboratories for studying real-time crises and crisis managing. From a practitioner's viewpoint these suggest keeping the institutional innovations within such a policy in pace not only with reforming national development strategies, but also with current world trends, which contribute to the vulnerability of communities and societies.

CONCLUDING REMARKS: PRELIMINARY FINDINGS AND A FUTURE RESEARCH AGENDA

Some of the key findings discussed in this chapter along with the results of ongoing research studies suggest a number of common characteristics in the crisis development and crisis management that exist in transitional societies. The most important political, institutional, and sociocultural features of transitional societies are uneven/unstable regulation and institutionalization, the shadow of authoritarianism, and discrepancies and conflicts between public values and norms that reflect the emerging status of a civil society in these countries. These are accompanied by intra- and intercommunity strain (including ethnic and regional tensions), changing mass media cultures and mass media structuring of and politicization of both disasters and crises, and disaster and crisis management policies. The most crucial economic characteristics involve resource constraints and/or inefficient allocation, and infrastructural decay that critically affect the transitional societies' vulnerability to disasters.

However important they may be, these findings require further investigation and testing. This calls for more in-depth social science research in the following areas or directions:

There is a need for studies of the social and economic changes precipitated by globalization and its implication for the vulnerabilities of transnational societies to crises and disasters.

Research needs to be conducted on how earlier and ongoing political and economic transformations and reforms impact the resilience of transitional nations to crises and disasters. Particular effort should be made to study permutations in disaster policies and the implication of those transformation and permutations for the coping capabilities of these countries.

There is also a need for studies of the two key issues associated with emerging and new kinds of hazards. These include first ascertaining the implications of global threats, that is, those that could originate anywhere in the world and affect communities in any transitional economy and its disaster and crisis policy efficiency (e.g., cyberterrorism, etc.). Second, what are the implications of the risks and hazards endemic to or primarily associated with transitional societies (e.g., dissolution of political regimes, mass and increasing obsoleteness of hazardous facilities, etc.). It might be worthwhile to study these possibilities with regard to the security of global and industrially developed communities.

Research is necessary on the specific experiences of particular groups or specific nations in transition with respect to disaster preparedness and response. This implies conducting a series of both case studies of recent and current crises, as well as comparative research. The latter should contrast the management and policy practices for different kinds of crises and disasters in transitional societies, as well as between those and industrially developed and developing economies.