

The Bear Looks Eastward

by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

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Still in its infancy in Russia, democracy may not survive into toddlerhood. The once-popular, reform-minded Boris Yeltsin, like his predecessor Mikhail Gorbachev, is better liked internationally than at home. A recent *U.S. News* poll (December 21, 1992, p. 69) showed only a 34 percent approval rating, paralleling the fading of the reform movement.

A new planning document published by the Russian government admits it needs to prop up state-owned businesses more than it needs to reform the economy. To Russia watchers, this sounds like a return to state control. "In our real conditions," the document states, "we cannot just have a transition to a regulated market as much as a regulated transition to the market. . . . [This means] a strengthening of state power, and the raising of efficiency."

Recently, Yeltsin removed his prime minister, Yegor Gaidan, a staunch reformer and a free-market supporter. Many see this move as a compromise with the conservative forces who wish to see Russia return to Communism. The *Economist* calls it "a dreadful setback" (December 19, 1992, p. 15).

Into the picture strides China. Yeltsin traveled to Beijing in mid-December, and he and the Chinese leadership signed two dozen agreements, ranging from trade pacts to weapons deals. They have both promised not to enter alliances with any nation that would harm the other's "sovereignty and national interests."

Yeltsin had high praise for the Chinese method of reform: a slow but accelerating free-market economy, tightly and sometimes brutally controlled by the government. A senior Asian diplomat commented, "[O]ne of the few things that Yeltsin and his domestic opponents seem to agree on is that Russia, to preserve its national identity, must reduce its links to Western Europe and the United States and reemphasize its role as a Eurasian power."

If indeed the Asian nations comprise the massive army sweeping out of the east to confront the Beast (Revelation 9:13-19), this show of accord between Russia and China, as well as Russia's faltering reform movement, may be fulfilled prophecy in the making.