

IN THIS ISSUE

Those of us who study current international affairs need periodic reminders of the limits of our assessments. Fortunately, we can usually count on the month of August to provide this service, and this year was no exception. No sooner had the US-Soviet Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty been signed in Moscow than Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev was ousted in a military coup, an event that many Soviet studies experts had avowed never would happen. But the coup failed (for some, another surprise), and Gorbachev returned to office -- only to preside over the apparent rapid disintegration of the Union, and to see the party that had dominated Soviet life for 74 years being consigned to "the dustbin of history." The only thing we may be certain of (as this goes to press) is that the last act in this drama has yet to be played out.

The events in Moscow this August have implications that relate to at least two of the articles in this issue. Scot Saltstone examines the problems Canada has experienced for lack of a clear definition of national security in its laws. In the absence of a "Soviet threat" or even a Soviet Union itself, the problem of defining national security, and what constitutes challenges to it, probably will become even more difficult. Glenn Hastedt's article explores the possibilities and limits of comparative studies of intelligence services. He points to limits on data as one constraining factor, although not a prohibitive one. The changes to the KGB that seem likely to flow from the changes in the Soviet Union as a whole may add a new dimension to comparative studies of intelligence, if more data on the activities of the KGB and its predecessors is released.

While attention has been focussed on Moscow, it is worth recalling that various forms of low intensity conflict continue elsewhere, in Yugoslavia, for example, and in Northern Ireland. With respect to the latter, Michael McKinley examines the international contacts of the Provisional IRA and concludes that its indigenous political/cultural roots have proved a much stronger influence than that of any external or foreign group. Even the Marxist views of Sinn Fein leader Gerry Adams have had to be presented in a traditional framework that will appeal to the Catholic nationalist political culture. Clearly, if the Soviet Union had any influence in this conflict -- and McKinley suggests it was minimal -- the events of August 1991 seem likely to remove it from the equation altogether.

The opinions expressed in the articles, reviews and other contributions are those of the authors alone, and do not necessarily represent those of the Centre for Conflict Studies or the University of New Brunswick.
