

The Post-Soviet Zone Twenty Years Later: An Empire Under Reconstruction

By Paweł Piotr Styrna

BACKGROUND

The territories of the former Soviet bloc are a much different place in 2011 than in 1991, the year of the USSR's dissolution. In general, the Communist Party's official monopoly on power was revoked and many political parties (quite often claiming direct descent from pre-communist political organizations) entered the arena. Central planning was scrapped in favor of market economics, though not necessarily *laissez faire* capitalism. The former subjects of totalitarian regimes were now guaranteed Western-style civic rights, at least in theory. Admittedly, these general tendencies affected some post-Soviet states to a far greater degree than others. Even so, the changes which occurred during the past twenty years in this part of the world have prompted some to even question the validity of the concept of "former Soviet Union."¹ Nevertheless, Russia's post-communist transformation continues to be plagued by intransigent continuities and resurgent pathologies inherited from the *ancien regime*. Some, such as the "mother of 'Solidarity'" – the late Anna Walentynowicz – argued that "communism hasn't collapsed; it has camouflaged itself." Two interrelated policies in Putinist Russia – the rehabilitation of many elements of the Soviet past, and attempts to reassemble the empire – demonstrate that such assessments are by no means groundless.

WHY THE SOVIET EMPIRE COLLAPSED

Two decades ago the Soviet Union imploded under the enormous strain of the communist system's defining features. The factors leading to the final collapse of the Moscow-run Bolshevik empire were numerous and interrelated. This paper shall be limited to the most significant ones.

First, wholesale murder and mass terror – concentrated primarily, though by no means exclusively,

Key Talking Points

- ▶ The Russian Federation, with its 143 million people, is the most populous Soviet successor state and geographically remains the largest country in the world.
- ▶ Vladimir Putin has dubbed the implosion of the Soviet Union "the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the [twentieth] century" and has restored elements of the Soviet legacy.
- ▶ In the ex-USSR, de-communization efforts were most successful where former KGB officials were fired, a non-Soviet legal system instituted and free-market reforms implemented.
- ▶ Post-Soviet Russia continues to view the West and NATO in adversarial terms, with the United States as the "main target."
- ▶ Approximately 70 percent of post-Soviet Russia's political elite hail from the KGB, GRU, FSB and the special forces.
- ▶ Having plundered state and Party property, the Communist old guard established itself as the new capitalists. These oligarchs managed to gain control over strategic sectors of the Russian economy.
- ▶ Initially accommodating the West to shore up his strength, Vladimir Putin recognizes the necessity of obtaining Western technology and investment to modernize Russia.
- ▶ The theories of Aleksandr Dugin closely parallel the actual practice of Putinist grand strategy. As documented in his 1997 book, *The Foundations of Geopolitics*, which serves as a textbook at the Russian military's General Staff Academy, Dugin, the current leader of the Russian "Eurasianist" movement, envisions a "vast and diverse internationalist anti-American coalition" intended to achieve "strategic control of the USA."
- ▶ The Obama administration's "reset" policy has failed to arrest the Kremlin's offensive to reassert its power on the world stage. Recent Russian political successes within the former Soviet Empire, an area Russia continues to view as its sphere of dominance, suggest that the "reset" has, in fact, emboldened Moscow.

during the Leninist and Stalinist periods (1917-1953) – constituted a devastating demographic blow and brutally shattered the Soviet population’s moral spine. Estimates of the death toll claimed by the Bolshevik regime vary. The meticulous R.J. Rummel, in his famous *Death by Government*, estimated that the Soviets might have murdered as many as 62 million human beings.² To this number we must add many more who were never born as a result of democidal Bolshevik policies. The surviving population of the Gulag Empire remained traumatized and terrorized victims.

Second, totalitarian communism’s suppression of all liberty – religious, political, and economic – created an undercurrent of seething resentment. The Soviet regime’s ruthless and robust terror apparatus may have succeeded in cowering the population for decades, but Gorbachevian attempts to strengthen the system through reforms created channels for these long-suppressed grievances to exploit.

Third, the Soviet Union inherited through conquest the multi-ethnic, multi-confessional empire of the tsars.³ Ironically, while Karl Marx, the founder of communism, dubbed the Romanov Empire a “prison of nations,” it would be under the yoke of his disciples that the admittedly repressive tsarist prison would become transformed into a concentration camp of unprecedented proportions.

The non-Russian ethnicities, which constituted approximately half of the Soviet Empire’s population, resented as Marxist “foreigners” from the Moscow center those who murdered and deported their brethren, while brutally forcing an alien way of life upon them, amounting to *de facto* ethno-cultural genocide. For these nationalities Russification, Sovietization, and atheization were often indistinguishable. Yet, even ethnic Russians felt disaffected. As some saw it, including the great Russian writer Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, Russia’s traditional Muscovite-Orthodox culture was being destroyed and submerged in a shallow Marxist-Leninist *kulturersatz* (substitute “culture”).⁴ Moreover, according to this interpretation, the Russian core was forced to shoulder the weight of an internationalist Soviet imperial project, which was Russian in a geographic and linguistic sense only.

The historian Yuri Slezkine has described the ethnic arrangement of the Bolshevik state as a “communal apartment” in which the non-Russian ethnicities received their own little rooms (their quality notwithstanding) while ethnic Russians controlled the corridor, kitchen, and

bathroom.⁵ Clearly, such a setup was bound to generate conflict, and this was exactly what its Bolshevik architects intended. The Soviet regime intentionally exacerbated old interethnic tensions inherited from the Tsarist Empire and fomented new ones, ruling the empire according to one of the oldest principles of government: *divide et impera*. For instance, the KGB helped found the anti-Semitic group “Pamyat” (Memory) during the 1980s as a response to Poland’s “Solidarity” movement. The goal was to minimize Solidarity’s appeal in the USSR by labeling the Polish trade union a mere tool of the Jews. During the post-Soviet period many Russian neo-Nazi, fascist, and racist movements benefit from FSB connections, if not inspiration.⁶ The goal of the Kremlin’s nationality policy was to neutralize ethnic-based resistance to Soviet rule. Ultimately, this Machiavellian scheme failed to stem the disintegration of the empire along its national seams.

Nevertheless, the Kremlin’s nationality policy eventually avenged itself on the newly-liberated republics through conflicts, such as the 1988-1994 Armenian-Azeri war over Artsakh/Nagorno-Karabakh. In spite of its Armenian majority, the province was incorporated in 1921, as an enclave, into the Azerbaijani SSR by Joseph Stalin, then the Commissar of Nationalities. As the USSR disintegrated, Artsakh’s Armenian population voted in a 1991 referendum to join the Republic of Armenia. The Azeris chose to suppress the demand through armed force, but were eventually repulsed by the Armenians. A Russian-brokered ceasefire ended the hot war over Artsakh. Yet, a cold war between a Russian-supported Armenia/Artsakh and a Western-supported Azerbaijan continues to this day, destabilizing the Caucasus region and creating plenty of opportunities for Russian intrigues.

Fourth, the Soviet Union’s centrally-planned socialist economy – one of the chief pillars of Marxism-Leninism – had reached the end of its tether by the late 1980s. The Soviet population had been forced to endure seven decades of abject squalor and intense privations, and sometimes even mass famines resulting in the deaths of millions, such as the grain-requisitioning-induced Tambov Famine of 1921 or the intentionally-engineered Ukrainian Terror-Famine (*Glodomor*) of 1932-1933.

The extreme callousness characterizing the Soviet leadership’s attitude towards the suffering of the people – a product of, *primero*, Marxist dialectics, and, *segundo*, of the political culture imposed on Rus’ by the Mongols – sent a clear and consistent message to the citizenry that they were nothing more than expendable slaves.⁷ Besides, in the words of Jerzy Urban, the Jaruzelski junta’s

spokesman during the martial law period in communist Poland during the 1980s, and a current “shock-jock” publisher of an anti-Catholic tabloid: “The regime will manage to feed itself.”⁸ Even so, the Soviet regime’s goal was not only to maintain their own privileges, but also to support and spread communism throughout the world.

More sophisticated elements within the Soviet power structure – particularly those exposed to the West via espionage activities and influence operations – recognized that the communist economic system killed initiative and discouraged innovation, thereby jeopardizing the Soviet bloc’s ability to compete with the West militarily in an era increasingly driven by information technology. Hence, the conviction that the system must be “reformed” to survive. Nevertheless, a large share of the Party “elite” (*nomenklatura*) – comfortable with its privileged position within the *status quo* – resisted such considerations, fearing that any attempts to reform would rapidly open a Pandora’s Box. Ultimately, the Soviet population certainly seized the opportunity presented by Gorbachev’s policy of *Glasnost* (“openness”) – designed as a safety valve/public relations ploy – to vent their long-suppressed frustration. Their anger was driven by a plethora of grievances, including economic ones inflamed by the shortages and rationing defining the Gorbachev years.

And finally, imperial overreach on a global scale contributed greatly to the USSR’s economic collapse. To employ Marxist language, the military-security superstructure had vastly outgrown a shrinking and obsolete economic base forced to support it. Maintaining a colossal military machine coupled with a powerful terror-security apparatus at home and the Central European satellites, in addition to supporting allies throughout the world (particularly in the Third World) and influencing the West via agentural penetration, required large amounts of resources to maintain. In the end, the Soviet economy proved unable to produce sufficient amounts of fuel to power the international communist project, in spite of the colonial exploitation of the satellite states.

Of course, Moscow’s designs were significantly frustrated by external factors as well, especially the rise of such solidly anti-communist figures as Ronald Reagan, Margaret Thatcher, and the Polish Pope, John Paul II. The latter played a particularly important role by inspiring the rise of the anti-regime Solidarity movement in his native Poland which, in turn, influenced developments in other Soviet bloc countries.

GORBACHEV’S ATTEMPT TO SAVE THE SOVIET UNION

Gorbachev and his supporters within the Soviet inner circle recognized that “we can’t go on like this.” Upon assuming the post of First Secretary of the CPSU in 1985, Gorbachev began to implement his conviction that reforms – however risky – were inevitable to save the Soviet Union.

The communist system may be viewed as a prime example of the parasite-host model. Since the parasite depends on the host for continued survival, it is essential to release a bit once the host appears exhausted. The host must then be allowed to regain its strength – but only partly, otherwise it becomes sufficiently vigorous to rid itself of the parasite. Such was the situation in the Soviet bloc during the late 1980s.

The Gorbachevians, both within the USSR and among the satellites, decided that the communist parasite must let up. This solution was by no means incompatible with Marxist dialectics. A version of it was, in fact, utilized by Lenin in 1921 to diffuse mass unrest and rescue the Bolshevik regime after the devastating wars sparked by the communist coup of 1917. Known as the “New Economic Policy” (NEP), Lenin’s plan consisted of concessions for the peasantry and small entrepreneurs in addition to incentives for foreign investors. Yet, the state retained control of the “strategic heights” of the economy and the secret police was beefed up. Once the Soviet economy had been rebuilt through limited free-market incentives, Lenin’s successor, Stalin, scrapped the NEP and reinstated central planning, complete with forced industrialization and coerced collectivization.

Apparently, the Gorbachevian faction envisioned the *perestroika* “reforms” as a neo-NEP of its own. The regime needed large amounts of Western money to overhaul an inefficient and collapsing economy. The Kremlin was also hard pressed to placate popular unrest throughout the vast empire without making too many meaningful concessions. The secession movements in the national republics presented a particularly difficult problem. The claim that Gorbachev lacked the stomach to squash anti-regime resistance appears somewhat naïve. After all, upon hearing of the massacre of 3,000 protestors by the Chinese Communists on Tiananmen Square (October 1989), the Soviet leader remarked during a Politburo meeting: “We must be realists. They have to defend themselves, and so do we. Three-thousand people, so what?”⁹

In fact, Soviet forces had drawn blood while suppressing protests in Lithuania, Georgia, and Azerbaijan. Therefore, it appears that breaking the backbone of popular protests would have required nothing short of a ruthless crackdown, but a mass bloodbath would have likely met with a very negative reception in the West and frustrated plans to obtain large-scale financial assistance. In addition, it is also possible that Gorbachev's rivals might have easily utilized such a scenario to unseat him. In the end, the Yanayev Putsch, an unsuccessful attempt by hardliners to seize power and reverse the disintegration of the Soviet Union in August 1991, accelerated its final dissolution.

FROM COMMUNISM TO "POST-COMMUNISM"

Yet, the implosion of the USSR did not signify the "end of history."¹⁰ Rather, communism was succeeded by a phenomenon known as post-communism. Not only were decades of havoc wrought by communist policies extremely challenging to overcome, but the communist old guard and its allies (sometimes former oppositionists, particularly of the liberal or leftist provenance) doggedly sabotaged the efforts throughout. In numerous post-communist countries, the former Communist Party elite emerged as the "winners" of the "transformation" period, while their former victims often – especially ones who refused to embrace their not so distant oppressors – became the "losers."

Having plundered state and Party property, the old guard established itself as the new capitalists. Oligarchs, often individuals with communist secret police connections, made impressive fortunes overnight. Generally, the ex-communist "soft landing" entailed control over such strategic sectors as energy, arms, broadcasting, academia/education, publishing, and banking. Former secret policemen and intelligence and counter-intelligence officers also fought zealously to maintain and strengthen their influence in post-communist successor agencies. The lack of de-communization sent an utterly demoralizing message to post-communist societies.¹¹

Such was the general pattern throughout the post-Soviet bloc countries, although deviations certainly occurred. In the ex-satellite states, the Czech Republic and East Germany were most successful in their de-communization efforts. In the former USSR, Estonia achieved the greatest breakthrough, having simply reinstated the pre-Soviet legal *status quo ante* of 1940.

The country's Prime Minister Mart Laar implemented daring free-market reforms. The Estonians also fired all former KGB officials and refused to hire them.¹² The Baltic states were generally the most successful of the former Soviet republics. Belarus under Aleksandr Lukashenka, on the other hand, clung tenaciously to such relics of Sovietism as collective farming and never bothered to rename the local KGB. The Muslim Central Asian republics, such as Turkmenistan or Uzbekistan, witnessed the transformation of former Communist Party bosses into reinvented native despots. Ukraine drifted for many years under the leadership of the post-communist Leonid Kuchma, refusing to initiate a clean and definite break with the Soviet past. The Orange Revolution of 2004, and the rise of the pro-Western Viktor Yushchenko and Yulia Tymoshenko, saw efforts in this direction, which when the pendulum swung back towards the post-communists in 2010 culminated in the election of the pro-Russian candidate Viktor Yanukovich, as president.

In general, a successful transition away from communism-proper was somewhat easier in countries which experienced only about five decades of communism, such as the Baltic states and the ex-satellites, than in ex-Soviet republics, which endured over seventy years of Bolshevism.

RUSSIA: FROM DISINTEGRATION UNDER YELTSIN TO REINTEGRATION UNDER PUTIN

The Russian Federation – the largest and most populous post-Soviet republic and the core of the old Soviet Union – eventually saw a partial re-Sovietization, to a significant degree the result of Boris Yeltsin's presidency (1991-1999). In the minds of many, if not most, Russians, the Yeltsin years became synonymous with the country's disintegration and anarchization. As industrial production and the population's already low living standard plummeted, a few well-connected (both to the Kremlin and the ex-KGB network) oligarchs plundered Russia's wealth and indulged in brazen public displays of immense riches acquired overnight. Crime and corruption proliferated. Alcoholism, drug abuse, and venereal diseases – pathologies severely exacerbated as a result of communist rule – cannibalized the national substance.

Moreover, many Russians viewed the period following the collapse of the Soviet Union as one of national humiliation. As a result, they resented the newly-independent republics and satellites as allegedly ungrateful for the supposed "blessings" of Soviet rule.

Ethnic Russian diasporas – particularly in Kazakhstan, Ukraine, and the Baltic states – proved an additional source of irredentism and aggravation. Furthermore, ethnic groups within the Russian Federation – which, in spite of the implosion of the USSR, the world’s largest state and the greatest surviving contiguous colonial empire – took advantage of the weakening of central power to advance claims for greater autonomy. This prompted many Russians to fear the dissolution of the state as a result of centrifugal forces. The first war over the Muslim-majority Caucasian republic of Chechnya (1994-1996), culminating in a Russian defeat at the hands of the Chechen autonomist forces, seemed to confirm this doomsday scenario. Moreover, the sinking of the nuclear submarine “Kursk” in August 2000 served to demonstrate the level of decay affecting the Russian military during the 1990s.

Although Yeltsin, himself a former apparatchik, put the Communist Party on trial, Russia witnessed no significant de-communization. In fact, the CP’s leader, Gennadyi Ziuganov, threatened to wrest the presidency from Yeltsin in the 1996 election. Only the assistance of the oligarch-controlled media empire enabled Yeltsin to win a second term. In spite of this victory, the aging president’s popularity again plummeted, particularly as a result of the August 1998 economic crisis.

During the Yeltsin years many Russians began to associate such terms as freedom, democracy, and capitalism with anarchy, license, and cronyism. Much of the population longed for a strong hand, if not an outright reimposition of at least some features of the Soviet system. Such sentiments certainly found fertile ground in Russia’s autocratic political culture. Thus, the stage was set for the rapid rise of Vladimir Putin.

The former KGB colonel, Soviet rezident in East Germany during the late 1980s, and head of the FSB (the KGB’s main successor) in 1998-1999, was appointed Prime Minister by Yeltsin in August 1999. Soon, upon Yeltsin’s sudden resignation, the departing head of state also anointed Putin as his successor. The ex-KGB officer triumphed in the presidential elections of 2000 and 2004, and was succeeded by his hand-picked successor, Dmitry Medvedev. Putin himself assumed the office of Prime Minister, yet quite a few believed that he continued to wield the real power in Russia.

As president of the Russian Federation, Putin immediately embarked on a course to deal with that which he, and undoubtedly many Russians, viewed as the pathologies of the Yeltsin era. The new leader crushed the

rebellious Chechens, thereby halting centrifugal forces. The power of the centralized state was greatly bolstered, at the expense of local self-government and civic liberties. For instance, elective provincial governors were now once again appointed by Moscow. The despised oligarchs were dealt a decisive blow. Economic reforms, including a 13 percent flat tax, coupled with increased oil and natural gas revenues, reversed the country’s economic decline and fueled growth. Putin’s aggressive foreign policy – which large segments of the Russian population perceived as prestige regained on the international stage – also contributed to his high popularity.

Yet, as the expectations of ordinary Russians continue to grow, the popularity of the pro-Kremlin “United Russia” Party has recently dropped. Medvedev’s September 24, 2011 announcement – made at a United Russia Party congress in Moscow – enabling Putin to run for a third, six-year term in 2012 serves to confirm this view. The situation seems to have emboldened Mikhail Gorbachev to criticize the Putinist leadership in light of the approaching March elections. The last Soviet leader called for an “update” of Russia’s “senior leadership” and castigated the “United Russia” Party as a “worse version of the Soviet Communist party.”¹³

WHITEWASHING THE SOVIET UNION UNDER PUTIN

The Putin years witnessed attempts to rehabilitate the Soviet past and to reconstruct the empire. While allowing the return of the body of the famous anti-Bolshevik Civil War commander, Gen. Anton Denikin, to Russia in 2005, Putin’s regime also restored the red banner as the official flag of the Russian armed forces and reinstated a slightly modified version of the Stalinist Soviet anthem. Russian historical policy during the Putin-era effectively whitewashed the genocidal dictator, Joseph Stalin, by ignoring his crimes and portraying Stalin as a strong leader of a mighty state. Stalin’s foreign policy decisions, such as the signing of the Nazi-Soviet (Ribbentrop-Molotov) Pact of August 1939, which partitioned Poland and enabled Hitler to spark the Second World War, was defended as a necessary move to secure the USSR’s national interests. The Soviet occupation of East-Central Europe following the collapse of the Third Reich continues to be depicted as a “liberation.” The Soviet genocide of over 22,000 Polish officers at Katyn in 1940 is relativized. In essence, the Soviet-era was superficially purged of its communist character and reintegrated into Russian history as a legitimate element of national memory.¹⁴

The Chekist's¹⁵ nostalgia for the Soviet Empire is not surprising given Putin's blunt 2005 claim that the collapse of the Soviet Union was "the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century." His grand strategy involved reasserting Moscow's power on the world stage, in general, and her dominance in the former Soviet bloc, in particular. This neo-imperial doctrine led logically to a new Cold War with the West, with special emphasis on the United States and its allies among former Soviet republics and satellites. Yet, Putin's strategy entailed a gradual transition from apparent accommodation to ill-disguised hostility toward the Atlanticist System.¹⁶

PUTIN'S GRAND STRATEGY: REBUILDING THE EMPIRE

Putin's tactics were succinctly described by STRATFOR analyst Lauren Goodrich. According to Goodrich, Putin recognizes a tension between the alleged indispensability of autocratic rule in Russia and the necessity of obtaining Western technology to modernize the country. He skillfully resolved this tension by, initially, accommodating the West in a period necessary to shore up his strength. Hence, such overtures towards the West as the post-9/11 offer to cooperate on the anti-terrorist front. Following a period of internal political, economic, and military consolidation, however, Putinist Russia gradually adopted a more aggressive and hostile stance from 2005 onward.¹⁷

Admittedly, the pro-Western color revolutions in post-Soviet successor states like Georgia (2003), Ukraine (2004), and Kyrgyzstan (2005) constituted a setback from the Kremlin's point of view, but only a temporary one. Soon, however, Moscow recovered lost ground. In August of 2008, utilizing ethnic separatism, Russian forces invaded Georgia and *de facto* annexed two Georgian provinces, Abkhazia and South Ossetia. In February 2010, the pro-Western Ukrainian president Viktor Yushchenko lost an election to a pro-Russian Viktor Yanukovich. Soon thereafter, in April 2010, the ousting of a pro-American leader in the Central Asian republic of Kyrgyzstan ushered in a pro-Russian Roza Otunbayeva. Meanwhile, within days, the pro-U.S. Polish President, Lech Kaczyński, perished, along with his entire entourage, in a suspicious plane crash near the Russian city of Smolensk. In the wake of the air disaster, Warsaw's foreign policy rapidly evolved in a pro-Moscow direction.¹⁸ Russia also continues to remain a hegemon in such post-Soviet states as Belarus, Armenia, Kazakhstan, and Tajikistan. Then, the September 17, 2011 parliamentary elections in Latvia witnessed the victory of the left-wing, pro-Russian

"Harmony Center" Party. At all events, the chronology of post-Soviet Russian resurgence is well-known. Therefore, this paper shall devote more attention to its justifying ideology and driving mechanisms.

ALEKSANDR DUGIN: THE BLUNT IDEOLOGUE OF POST-SOVIET NEO-IMPERIALISM

The theories of Aleksandr Dugin – the troubadour of Russian "Eurasianism" – closely parallel the actual practice of Putinist grand strategy. A staunch anti-American and one of the main founders of the National Bolshevik Party, and the current leader of the Russian "Eurasianist" movement, Dugin is a self-admitted fascist (albeit, he claims to reject Nazism) and styles himself as a deeply Orthodox "conservative revolutionary." His views, in fact, constitute a clear example of the totalitarian compatibility of fascism and bolshevism, a disturbing phenomenon quite common in post-Soviet Russia. The scion of a long line of Soviet intelligence officers, Dugin also gazes with nostalgia upon the old Soviet Empire and its institutions. By no means a marginal figure, he is an influential ideologue who is well-connected to the Kremlin and Russia's security-military apparatus. His hefty 1997 *magnum opus*, *The Foundations of Geopolitics (Osnovy Geopolitiki)*, serves as a textbook at the Russian military's General Staff Academy. As of yet, it remains to be translated into English.

The main thrust of Dugin's neo-imperialism boils down to a global offensive to reduce the influence of "Euro-Atlanticist" powers, i.e. the United States, Great Britain, and their allies. A "Eurasian Empire" – centered around its Russian core – is envisioned as the engine driving this vast and diverse international anti-American coalition. To quote Dugin's main work: "In principle, Eurasia and our space, the heartland of Russia, remain the staging area of a new anti-bourgeois, anti-American revolution. (...) The new Eurasian empire will be constructed on the principle of the common enemy: the rejection of Atlanticism, the strategic control of the USA, and the refusal to allow liberal values to dominate us."¹⁹

Dugin's great anti-Atlanticist coalition involves three major strategic alignments, including the Middle East, East-South Asia and Europe.

In the Middle East, the Moscow-run Eurasian Empire should build alliances with Muslim states, including Arab regimes and Islamist Iran (already an informal Russian ally). Interestingly, Dugin calls for the

handing of a truncated Christian Georgia to Islamist Iran as war booty, which points to a rabid hatred of the small but Caucasian nation which dared to embrace a course independent of Moscow's. It also indicates that the outwardly Christian (Orthodox) exterior of Duginism is an insincere façade.²⁰

In East and South Asia, Dugin advises Russia to cultivate alliances with India and Japan (torn away from the U.S. orbit, of course) to counter China, which he considers a major threat and a powerful rival.

Europe, in turn, is to be purged of American influence through an alliance between the Russo-Eurasian empire and a nascent European federation led by Germany and France. Pro-American Central European ex-satellite states are to be crushed by the pincers of an already existing Russo-German "strategic partnership." Here Dugin probably envisions a new division of spheres of influence, such as the infamous Nazi-Soviet Pact of 1939.

Of course, the post-Soviet ideologue's geopolitical vision assumes a reincorporation of such former Soviet republics as Ukraine and the Baltic states into the "new Eurasian empire." Yet, Dugin emphasizes the reassembled empire's Russian-dominated but nevertheless multi-ethnic and multi-religious character. He condemns Great Russian nationalism, based on Orthodoxy and nationality, as a constraining tool in the hands of American Atlanticism.²¹ After all, Russian nationalism *sensu stricto* may hamper imperial expansionism.

The tools to achieve the Eurasianist grand strategy are primarily political and economic, though military force is certainly not ruled out. Pipeline diplomacy, i.e. the strategic use of Russian natural gas and oil exports, is already a major weapon in the Putinist arsenal. In addition, Dugin urges the wide-scale employment of subversion, destabilization, and disinformation techniques in enemy territory. For instance, in the United States, he advises a Machiavellian strategy of *divide et impera*, including the provoking of "Afro-American racists" and introducing "geopolitical disorder into internal American activity, encouraging all kinds of separatism and ethnic, social, and racial conflicts, actively supporting all dissident movements – extremist, racist, and sectarian groups, thus destabilizing internal political processes in the US. It would also make sense simultaneously to support isolationist tendencies in American politics."²² Similarly, in the case of Poland, Dugin calls for the undermining of traditional Catholic and patriotic values and endorsing libertine and leftist tendencies.²³ Clearly, conflict and

demoralization in the enemy camp is the main objective.

Aleksandr Dugin's geopolitical advice bears a striking similarity to Soviet grand strategy during the Cold War. And indeed, his "new Eurasian Empire" is merely a reinvented version of the old Soviet Empire, albeit pragmatically stripped of its Marxist-Leninist ideological garb, if only superficially. While Dugin is certainly neither the leader nor the sole *spritus movens* behind post-Soviet Russia's foreign policy, a juxtaposition of his recommendations and Putin's policies will reveal sufficient compatibility to warrant the attention devoted here to Dugin's theories.

FOREIGN ESPIONAGE: THE U.S. IS THE "MAIN TARGET"

Throughout the entire span of its existence, the Soviet Union devoted vast resources to spying on the non-communist world. During the Cold War, the prime target of Soviet bloc espionage activities was, of course, the "main enemy" – the United States. Pete Earley's 2007 book, *Comrade J*, demonstrates that the USSR's implosion has not altered Moscow's strategy of aggressive agentural penetration of the West and that the Kremlin continues to perceive America as an enemy. In fact, Moscow did not significantly curtail its activities against the U.S., now reclassified as the "main target," even during the lean and chaotic Yeltsin years. The protagonist of Earley's work – the KGB/SVR spymaster Sergei Tretyakov – defected in October 2000, offering the FBI a goldmine of information about post-Soviet espionage in the U.S. Comrade J, according to the author's obituary, "rose quickly through the ranks to become the second-in-command of the KGB in New York City between 1995 to 2000. As such, he oversaw all Russian spy operations against the U.S. and its allies in New York City and within the United Nations."²⁴ It is quite possible that information supplied by Tretyakov eventually led to the arrest of eleven Russian illegals, also known as sleeper agents, on June 28, 2010.²⁵ The Soviet-Russian defector offered a blunt warning to Americans: "As a people, you are very naïve about Russia and its intentions. You believe because the Soviet Union no longer exists, Russia is now your friend. It isn't, and I can show you how the SVR is trying to destroy the U.S. even today and even more than the KGB did during the Cold War."²⁶

The death of Sergei Tretyakov at the age of 53 on June 13 was not made public until nearly a month later on July 9, 2010, when obituaries began appearing in the Western press.

CONCLUSION

How is the “Euro-Atlanticist” West, and particularly the United States, to respond to this challenge? Although supporters of President Obama’s “reset” policy claim that the new approach has secured greater Russian cooperation in the War on Terror, there is more convincing evidence that it has emboldened aggressive and expansionist tendencies in post-Soviet Russia.

In December 2010, the famous Soviet dissident, Vladimir Bukovsky, granted an interview to a Polish media outlet. He was advising the Poles to be firm with the government of post-Soviet Russia following the Smolensk Plane Crash. Yet, his words are just as applicable to the Russian policies of other Western countries, primarily President Obama’s “reset”:

“I do not understand how one can speak of improved relations with Russia. She is run by people who do not comprehend what such a word means. You may delude yourselves that you have good relations with them, but for them it means that they can pressure you even more, and demand even more. This pressure will last as long as you are under their control. They are especially interested in seeing you divided and quarrelling amongst yourselves. (...) They are the descendants of the Cheka and the KGB, and, as such, they have their own specific mentality. They do not understand what normal inter-state relations mean. For them any other country can [only] be either an enemy, or an agent. Besides these two criteria there is no room for partners or friends. These heirs of the Soviet services do not, because they cannot, have a Western mentality, which assumes that if two sides agree to something, they carry out their obligations. For Russia’s current rulers such a policy is unattractive. They believe that they must act aggressively. If you give them your finger, they will take your entire arm.”²⁷

In the near future, Bukovsky’s plea for realism is unlikely to find fertile ground in Washington, Paris, Rome, or Berlin, however. The current mainstream policy-making circles in the West appear irredeemably wedded to wishful thinking in relation to post-Soviet Russia. Yet, two decades following the fall of the Soviet Union, as Moscow continues to utilize Western appeasement and naivete to advance its neo-imperial, anti-Atlanticist agenda, its increasing brazenness might eventually awaken realist sentiments. These might suggest, at a minimum, greater Western cooperation when dealing with the Kremlin, and a coordinated policy, which might be termed “neo-containment.” In light of Vladimir Putin’s official return to the Russian presidency, a telling manifestation of post-communist continuity in the post-Soviet zone, firmness is much more likely to generate results than the Obama administration’s failed “reset” policy.

In spite of the West’s current policy of appeasement toward post-Soviet Russia, quite a few Westerners find themselves dismayed with the multiple pathologies and continuities carried over from Soviet times. These continue to plague post-Soviet Russia and exert a strong and negative impact on her relations with foreign states, and particularly the Atlanticist West. Quite illustrative of this is then-Secretary of Defense Robert Gates’ frank February 2009 admission, in a diplomatic cable since publicized by WikiLeaks, that “Russian democracy has disappeared and the government was an oligarchy run by the security services.”²⁸ Will such assessments translate into concrete revisions of policy vis-à-vis Moscow?

Paweł Piotr Styrna earned his M.A. in Modern European History from the University of Illinois at Chicago and is currently enrolled in the international relations program at the Institute of World Politics in Washington, DC.

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End Notes

¹ Brian Whitmore and Robert Coalson, "20 Years After the Big Breakup, Does the 'Former Soviet Union' Still Exist?" *RFE/RL*, August 18, 2011.

² R.J. Rummel, *Death by Government* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1994), 101.

³ Prior to the outbreak of the First World War in 1914, the Russian Empire contained over one hundred ethnicities, of which ethnic Russians constituted approximately 45 percent. The remainder included: Ukrainians, Belorussians, Poles, Lithuanians, Latvians, Estonians, Finns, Mordovians, Mari, Tatars, Georgians, Armenians, Azeris, Jews, Romanians, Kazakhs, Kirgiz, Turkmen, Uzbeks, Tajiks, and Mongols. In addition to the official Russian Orthodox Church, the Tsars' subjects embraced many other religions, including: Roman and Greek Catholicism, various autocephalous Orthodox churches (eg. the Georgian and Armenian churches), Lutheranism, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, and animism. See Andreas Kappeler, *The Russian Empire: A Multiethnic History* (Harlow, UK: Longman, 2001).

⁴ On the empire vs. nation tension in Russian history see Geoffrey Hosking, *Russia: People and Empire, 1552-1917* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998); Andrzej Nowak, *Od imperium do imperium. Spojrzenie na histori Europy Wschodniej (From Empire to Empire: A Look at the History of Eastern Europe)* (Kraków, ARCANA, 2004).

⁵ Yuri Slezkine, "The USSR as Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism," *Slavic Review* 53 (1994): 414-452.

⁶ Vadim Belotserkovskii, "Proizkhozhdenie organizovannogo fashizma v Rossii" ("The Origins of Organized Fascism in Russia"), *Civitas: Vestnik Grazhdanskogo Obshchestva*, March 29, 2011, <http://www.vestnikcivitas.ru/pbls/1354>, accessed on March 30, 2011.

⁷ Marxist dialectics boiled down to the consequentialist argument that "the ends justify the means," the antithesis of Western Judeo-Christian ethics. Vladimir Lenin claimed that no absolute standards of right and wrong existed. Rather, anything and everything that furthered the cause of the communist revolution was "good" and whatever frustrated it was undesirable. Such a philosophy allowed the communists to justify any actions, even ones apparently in stark contradiction with the system's official tenets. For instance, the Soviet regime utilized this tactic to defend the Nazi-Soviet Pact or its war of aggression against Finland.

⁸ Uttered at a regime press conference on January 9, 1982, in response to Ronald Reagan's sanctions against the communist government in Poland.

⁹ Christian Neef, "The Gorbachev Files: Secret Papers Reveal Truth About Soviet Collapse," *Der Spiegel*, August 11, 2011, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/0,1518,779277,00.html>.

¹⁰ The concept of the "end of history" is derived from Francis Fukuyama's *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992). In his famous work, the political scientist argued that "what we may be witnessing is not just the end of the Cold War (...) but the end of history as such: that is, the end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government." In light of multiple events contradicting his argument, Fukuyama has since admitted that his thesis was "incomplete."

¹¹ See Marek Jan Chodakiewicz, John Radziłowski, and Dariusz Tołczyk, eds., *Poland's Transformation: A Work in Progress* (Charlottesville, VA: Leopold Press, 2003).

¹² See Ilan Berman and J. Michael Waller, *Dismantling Tyranny: Transitioning Beyond Totalitarian Regimes* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2006).

¹³ Charles Clover, "Gorbachev calls for change of Russian leadership," *Financial Times*, August 17, 2011, <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/174a8322-c8e9-11e0-aed8-00144feabdc0.html#axzz1VbV4bqYw>.

¹⁴ See Aleksander Szczygło, Leszek Pietrzak, and Bartosz Cichocki, *Russian Historical Propaganda in 2004-2009* (Warsaw: National Security Bureau, September 16, 2009), 4. Available for download in English, Polish, and Russian at http://www.bbn.gov.pl/portal/pl/544/1841/Propaganda_historyczna_Rosji_w_latach_20042009.html?search=24640.

¹⁵ The Cheka, an abbreviation for the "All-Russian Commission for Combating Counter-Revolution and Sabotage," was created by Lenin's decree in December 1917, i.e. in the wake of the October Coup. Headed by the renegade Pole, Feliks Dzierżyński (Rus. Felix Derzhinskyi), the Cheka served as the Bolshevik regime's secret police and terror apparatus. During the Stalinist era, the Cheka underwent several name changes: beginning with the GPU, OGPU, and NKVD, and ending with the most-known abbreviation, the KGB, following the Second World War. After the Soviet implosion, the KGB was split up into several successor agencies, including the FSB (internal security) and the SVR (foreign intelligence). It is significant that Vladimir Putin and his *milieu* were molded by the worldview and *modus operandi* of the security apparatus.

¹⁶ See Janusz Bugajski, *Dismantling the West: Russia's Atlantic Agenda* (Washington, DC: Potomac Press, 2009).

¹⁷ Lauren Goodrich, "Russia's Evolving Leadership," STRATFOR, July 5, 2011.

¹⁸ See Paweł Piotr Styrna, "Case on the Smolensk Plane Crash Still Open Despite Polish Government Report," *SFPPR News & Analysis*, September 2, 2011, <http://www.sfppr.org>.

¹⁹ Aleksandr Dugin, *Osnovy geopolitiki: Geopoliticheskoe budushchee Rossii (The Foundations of Geopolitics: Russia's Geopolitical Future)* (Moscow: Arktogetia, 1997), 216. For succinct syntheses of Dugin's views in English see: John B. Dunlop, "Aleksandr Dugin's Foundations of Geopolitics," Princeton University, Lichtenstein Institute on Self-Determination *Working Paper*, August 2003, http://www.princeton.edu/~lisd/publications/wp_russiaseries_dunlop.pdf; John B. Dunlop, "Russia's New – and Frightening – 'Ism,'" *Hoover Digest* 3 (2004): <http://www.hoover.org/publications/hoover-digest/article/8074>.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 351.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 197, 213, 251-252.

²² *Ibid.*, 248, 367.

²³ „Czekam na Iwana Groźnego” (“I Am Waiting for Ivan the Terrible”), an interview with Aleksandr Dugin (in Polish), *Frona* 11-12 (1998): <http://niniwa2.cba.pl/rosja10.htm>.

²⁴ See <http://www.petearley.com/2010/07/09/sergei-tretyakov-comrade-j-has-died/>.

²⁵ See Pete Earley, *Comrade J: The Untold Secrets of Russia's Master Spy in America After the End of the Cold War* (London: Penguin Books, 2007).

²⁶ Quoted in *Ibid.*, 8.

²⁷ Vladimir Bukovsky, „Rosja rozgrywa polskie władze” (“Russia is Playing the Polish Government”), *Super Express*, December 9, 2010.

²⁸ “Gates: Russian Democracy Has Disappeared,” *Newsmax.com*, November 29, 2010, <http://www.newsmax.com/InsideCover/Gates-Russian-Democracy-Disappeared/2010/11/29/id/378261>.