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Three Perceptions of the Fall of Communism: American, Russian, and East European, and Their Possible Role in Future Conflicts*

Henry Kissinger recently wrote that two distinctly different processes are now taking place in Russia and eastern Europe. The first is the abolition of communism and reintroduction of private property, and here both Russia and her neighbors are of one mind. The other is the unravelling of the 300-year-old Russian empire, and here Russia and her neighbors represent conflicting interests. While all of Russia's neighbors welcome the debacle of the empire, not all Russians who are anti-communists are also anti-imperialists (*Houston Chronicle* 26 March 1992; *International Herald Tribune* 6 July 1992). In a similar vein, Sovietologist Stephen Erlanger remarked: "The collapse of Communism is a great relief to many people; the collapse of the union, which was really the Russian empire, is less welcome."¹

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Erlanger and Kissinger touch upon an issue that is of crucial importance for the development of peaceful relations between Russia and her neighbors, and thus for the future of Europe. For all practical purposes, the identification of Russia with the Soviet Union existed not only in the minds of American Sovietologists but also in the minds of Russians. In a lecture given at the Kennan Institute on 14 May 1991, Evgenii Anisimov of the Leningrad Institute of History of the Soviet Academy of Sciences spoke about the merging in Russian history of imperial acquisitiveness and national identity. Anisimov admitted that for the Russians, "the USSR" has always meant "Russia." The problem was neatly summarized by Professor Uri Ra'anan of Boston University: "As the *Staatsvolk* [the nationality that dominates the state] of the USSR, Russians in general tend to identify not only with the RSFSR, but with the USSR as a whole. In other words, Russians have not only a national but also an 'imperial' identity."² Upon hearing of the name change of the Soviet Academy of Science, its vice-president, Evgenii Velikhov, said: "In its essence, it was always the Russian Academy of Science."³ This Russian perception is not unusual in regard to all Soviet institutions, from the army to art museums. The superpower status of the USSR has been for the Russians a source of pride. The fact that the official language of the country was Russian, that the central institutions were located on Russian soil, that the army generals spoke Russian provided sufficient indication as to who was the boss in the country. Anisimov and Ra'anan have warned that the disintegration of the Soviet Union has created an identity crisis for the Russians.

Accordingly, the breakup of the Soviet Union has generated mixed responses among Russians. Few if any prominent Russians are on record as praising the dissolution of the Russian empire and the ensuing independence of Ukraine, while the Zhirinovskii and the Rutskois and the Rasputins have all spoken against it.⁴ There have not been demonstrations in Kiev or Grodno against the appearance of the new independent states, but such demonstrations have been staged by Russian nationalist forces in Moscow.

The problem of the different perceptions of what actually happened between 1989 and 1992 in the lands of the former Soviet empire is both important and underresearched, it seems to me. Unless these different perceptions are confronted, and commented upon by Russian, eastern

European, and western scholars, the potential for conflicts in the post-Soviet world may well remain high. To quote Kissinger again:

The principal cause of European conflicts over the past 150 years has been the existence of a no man's land between the German and the Russian peoples. The Atlantic nations, in their understandable fascination with the Russian republic, must not resurrect that state of affairs. . . .
(*Houston Chronicle* 26 March 1992)

Our fascination with Russia has obscured the fact that the "no man's land" Kissinger is speaking about comprises populations more numerous than the population of Russia. While there are serious differences of opinion among these 200 million east Europeans concerning a range of issues and memories, in one respect they tend to agree: in their perception of Russian and Soviet imperialism, since all of them suffered from one or the other. Accordingly, it seems to me that the development among the Russian elites of an awareness of these foreign perceptions and the gradual acceptance of that awareness in Russian culture would help maintain peace in the region. The present paper is an attempt to sketch some of the problems in regard to which there is a great divergence of perceptions between Russia and her east European neighbors. An attempt is also made to relate these differing perceptions to the western assessments of developments in the post-Soviet world.

The first such difference has to do with the fall of communism. It can hardly be overemphasized that in that regard, Russians and east Europeans tend to assign credit to different actors. To complicate matters, western scholars offer interpretations that are only partially in accord with either the Russian or the east European views. Victory indeed tends to have many fathers.

To start with the east Europeans: the late 1980s were largely exhilarating to them. What for seven decades had been their impossible dream came to pass. The huge belt of nations between Germany and Russia was freed from foreign dictatorship, and Russia, with its population of 150 million people, was on the road to liberty and democracy. The east European perspective on the fatherhood of the newly acquired freedom was formulated by Roman Laba thus:

The Soviet leaders miscalculated the viability of reform communists like themselves in East Europe, but their miscalculation was forced by Solidarity and it led to the union's electoral victory in 1989 and the rapid collapse of neo-Stalinists and reformers in the rest of East Central Europe. In this broadest sense the workers of the Baltic Coast opened a prison door that all the peoples of the East have come crowding through. (182)

The pressure of the outlawed Solidarity labor movement in Poland was such that in January 1989, the Soviet-controlled Polish government agreed to talk to the movement's leaders (Goodwyn 341-2). The result was the June 1989 compromise in which the entire upper house of Parliament and one-third of the lower house were opened up to free elections. Solidarity won virtually all of these seats. Encouraged by the developments in Poland, Hungarians demanded, and won, similar concessions from their Soviet-controlled government. Then came the wave of the East Germans who fled to West Germany via Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary. In November 1989, the Berlin Wall came down, and East Germany was freed. The Czechs followed in the footsteps of the Germans, forcing their Soviet-sponsored government to resign. Then the ferment reached the Balkans, where in December 1989 the Ceausescu regime was overthrown and the dictator and his wife condemned to death in a hastily arranged trial. On Christmas Day, 1989, the Ceausescus were executed. On 20 August 1990, after the abortive coup in Moscow, events began to snowball in the Soviet territories. Instead of strengthening the hand of the military and the party apparatchiks, the coup seems to have weakened it. A new leader, Boris Yeltsin, emerged, and soon began to gather around himself the democrats of Russia. It was a tiny circle, but a circle nevertheless. Sixteen months later, again on the day western Christians celebrate Christmas, Mikhail Gorbachev resigned as President of the Soviet Union, acknowledging *ipso facto* Boris Yeltsin's ascension to power as President of the Russian Federation. In the meantime, the Baltic states left the Union and some republics, notably Ukraine, declared sovereignty. In 1991, even the Muslim states of Central Asia began to assert their separate identities. In January 1992, the Soviet Union was no more, its flag having been lowered from the Kremlin mast and replaced by the Russian flag. Nationalistic forces in the non-Russian Soviet republics began to gather momentum.

As these events unfolded, some disturbing signals (from the east European standpoint) were sent to eastern Europe from Russia. Shortly after the coup, President Boris Yeltsin arranged a meeting on the Polish border between Russian, Ukrainian and Belarus representatives. A union of three republics was hastily created in undisclosed circumstances, later to be joined by eight other republics. The location of the meeting was perceived in eastern Europe as a none-too-subtle threat to the region's sovereignty. The Brest-Litovsk meeting indicated that communism as a state ideology was dead, but the Russian empire was perhaps being resuscitated. If Yeltsin wanted to send a hostile signal to Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary by arbitrarily selecting for the meeting a city with a negative symbolic value, he succeeded in doing so.

Similar fears have been aroused in the Baltic states by the Russian unwillingness to set a date by which all Russian troops would be withdrawn from Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. During the Bush-Yeltsin summit in Washington in June 1992, the question of Russian withdrawal from the Baltics was not discussed in spite of pressure from the U.S. Baltic community. The Baltic states fear that "Russia hopes to restore imperial rule there after rebuilding its army". According to Estonian sources, Moscow refuses in its negotiations with Estonia even to discuss repatriation of Russian civilians, and it avoids setting a date for troop departure. "How can the world integrate Russia into the international system when Russia has not yet found its own identity or settled on its own borders?" asks Estonian writer Lenart Meri (Hoagland).

The western and Russian commentators have ignored the east European fears. They also unfolded their own versions of what happened and who deserves credit for the debacle of communism. The Solidarity labor movement and Lech Walesa have played virtually no role in these interpretations. Former General Secretary of the Soviet Communist Party, Mikhail Gorbachev, was catapulted into the position of a great reformer by many American Sovietologists and was given the lion's share of the credit for what has happened.⁵ The error of that perception was brought home during Gorbachev's speech in Fulton, Missouri, on 6 May 1992 when the former First Secretary accused the West of starting the Cold War. As A. M. Rosenthal wrote, "the destruction of Communism" was "a goal [Gorbachev] never intended and fought to the end."⁶

Gorbachev is viewed precisely in these terms in eastern Europe. There, he is considered to be a man who lost in the game of chicken.⁷ While it is to Gorbachev's credit that in 1988-89, or perhaps earlier, he was able to understand the economic figures and foresaw the shape that Russia would be in, he responded by inaction rather than by vigorous reforms (unless pleading for western help can be called action). He deserves recognition for his skilful foreign diplomacy and for his Russian patriotism, but he can hardly be credited with engineering the crash of communism.

Pope John Paul II is sometimes designated, and not only by Catholics, as a major contributor to the fall of communism. In the winter 1992 issue of *Policy Review*, John Paul II was featured as the *spiritus movens*, a man who "awakened the East" (52-3). Crediting the Pope is also common in eastern Europe, but it is extremely rare in Russia. I have yet to see a major Russian scholar or journalist seriously addressing himself or herself to the question of the role of the Pope, or of Catholicism in general, in the waning of communism. This stems from Russians' unwillingness, it seems to me, to abandon a Russocentric perspective on the 1980s, and to let go of their fear of Catholicism as a religion allegedly bent on depriving them of their cultural and spiritual identity. Lest the Pope be overpraised, however, it should be pointed out that revolutions are not made by inspiration only but also by perspiration. The idea that the abolition of communism was due to large crowds gathering in public places and carrying anti-communist placards is a journalistic fantasy, says Professor Lawrence Goodwyn, author of *Breaking the Barrier: The Rise of Solidarity in Poland* (1991). The Pope's influence may account for the timing of the revolution but not for its preparation and execution.

Ronald Reagan's placing of Pershing missiles in Germany in the mid 1980s undoubtedly played a role, although he has received credit only from the American right (*Policy Review* 53-4). In 1989, with the missiles in sight, Gorbachev not only came to understand the Soviet economic indicators but also the possible consequences of invading Poland. At that time, given the critical situation of the Soviet economy, an attempt to reassert the Soviet presence in east central Europe might have ended Soviet imperialism not on a note of scarcity, as is the case now, but of tragedy. The missiles indicated that the West was serious in its contain-

ment doctrine. While some understanding of this issue can be perceived in eastern European scholarship, I have yet to see in Russian scholarship or the Russian press an acknowledgment of President Reagan's positive role.

While Gorbachev, the Pope and Reagan played key roles in the events that unfolded in 1989-1992, their action or inaction still does not *explain* what happened. For political events to take place, large numbers of organized people have to be willing to take tremendous risks. A mass movement has to be generated and, as the specialists in mass movements tell us, true mass movements are extremely rare in history. To counter absolute political power takes organization and willingness to sacrifice on the part of hundreds and thousands of anonymous people willing to endure physical pain who are gathered together in some form of structure. Such a structure existed in only one country, or rather, in one corner of one country: on the Baltic coast near Gdansk, Poland. A compelling argument along these lines has recently been presented by Goodwyn (442-54).

His study of the social systems of eastern Europe convinced him that the debacle of the communist edifice was due neither to Gorbachev nor to the Pope nor to Ronald Reagan, nor indeed to the Poles. According to his tightly argued book, the corner was turned owing to those Polish workers who ever since their first clashes with the Soviet-controlled regime in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s had continued to organize, invent and fine-tune the structures of resistance appropriate to the conditions of communism. Among these structures Goodwyn counts the sit-down strike and the elaborate system of couriers who assured inter-factory communication even when telephone lines were cut off. In their negotiations with the government officials, the workers of Gdansk refused to abandon their demand for free and independent trade unions, even though the Warsaw intellectuals, acting as advisors, urged them to do so. While the intellectuals could not at first conceive that it was possible to confront directly the communist colossus, the workers knew that such a confrontation was crucial if substantial changes were to occur. It was the genius of Walesa and his working comrades, rather than the advice coming from the Committee for the Defense of Workers, that accounts for Solidarity's victory, claims Goodwyn. While the Committee was obviously a welcome

addition and it helped publicize the plight of workers, it lacked the political vision necessary to combat communism effectively.

It might be added that the Catholic upbringing of those workers made them unwilling to compromise the Catholic values which communism challenged, and in this sense, the workers' victory was also a victory for the Catholic Church. The dozens and hundreds of dedicated couriers who made the Interfactory Strike Committee possible and who in many cases paid with suffering and death for their actions, were largely, if not exclusively, practising Catholics. Thus the major contribution of the Catholic Church was not to provide inspiration, advice or material support while the fight was going on, but rather to instil in its members the belief in absolute values which make people willing to put their lives on the line. In no other communist country was there such an organized and large group of workers, says Goodwyn; indeed, in Poland itself it was the Gdansk workers, rather than the workers in general, who should be credited with devising the strategy that in due course toppled communism.

This view of 1989 and beyond is slowly gaining currency among American and east European scholars who so far have tended to overemphasize the role of the intellectuals in KOR (Committee for the Defense of Workers), the role of the Pope and that of President Reagan. Goodwyn argues that the intellectuals were the Johnny-come-latelys, and that the movement had already congealed before they appeared on the scene. One hopes that the momentum of American scholarship will eventually bring Goodwyn's arguments into larger view. As to eastern Europe, it will probably take longer to persuade its intellectuals that they cut smaller figures than they thought they did; but given free access to the evidence, a change in perceptions is likely to occur there also. I am not entirely sure that in Russian intellectual life conditions for such a change exist, or indeed for a discussion of matters other than the shades of Russian contribution to current events. To judge from the books and articles that have so far appeared there, the perception in Russia of what happened bears no resemblance to Goodwyn's, and more importantly, it casually dismisses "the power of the powerless" in east central Europe.

Consider for instance Anatoly Sobchak's recently published autobiography. In a section entitled "Chronology" Sobchak suggests the following sequence of events as leading to the fall of communism. In

1988 at the 19th Conference of the Communist Party, Secretary General Mikhail Gorbachev proposed a major reorganization of the Soviet government; in March 1989, elections to the new Congress of People's Deputies began throughout the Soviet Union, and Anatoly Sobchak was elected Deputy. In May, the Congress began to deliberate and elected the Supreme Soviet; in June, the Supreme Soviet began to deliberate, forcing the resignation of the then-Soviet Prime Minister, Nikolai Ryzhkov. In September, the Supreme Soviet continued to deliberate; and in November, the Warsaw Pact was dissolved and the Berlin Wall came down (Sobchak xii-xiv). The Solidarity labor union is not mentioned even once in this version of recent events articulated by one of the most prominent representatives of democratic Russia. Not a word about the tense "round table" negotiations between the Communist Party and Solidarity in Poland in the spring of 1989, which led to a historical first: the yielding of some power to non-communist forces by a communist government. The only reference to the events in eastern Europe is contained in these words: "[In February 1990], following their counterparts in Eastern Europe, one-half million people protest in Moscow on the eve of the plenary session of the Communist Party Central Committee . . ." (xiii). One would like to ask, what counterparts is Sobchak talking about? And what false analogy is he trying to create? As Goodwyn might say, revolutions are not made by people demonstrating but by people organizing and steeling themselves up for a protracted struggle. In all of eastern Europe, there was only one country in which anti-communist forces were well organized. This country was Poland. The Czech Charter 77 and the Civic Forum, and the Slovak Public against Violence comprised a small group of intellectuals and bore no similarity to the Solidarity Union. In countries such as Romania or East Germany, even that organizational nucleus was missing. And in the Soviet Union there was no attempt to create organized opposition, intellectual or otherwise. The workers in the Kuzbass mines, who at one point seemed determined to organize, gave up after Yeltsin came to power. They began to grumble again in June 1992, but as of this writing, they are still far away from following the 1980 scenario of their Polish counterparts.

Other books written by prominent participants in the power struggle in Russia are similar to Sobchak's in this regard. For all his charm, novelty and fierce patriotism, Mikhail Gorbachev in *The August Coup*:

the Truth and the Lessons presents a desiccated version of events in which the fate of communism seems to depend entirely on the good guys who sided with Gorbachev and the bad guys who sided with his deputy Gennadii Ianaev. In defense of Gorbachev, it might be said that someone as close to the hub of power as he could hardly be expected to be either impartial or candid. But the same cannot be said about a recent biography of Boris Yeltsin written by two Russian writers and former émigrés who in the past produced books on Andropov and the Kremlin: Vladimir Solovyov and Elena Klepikova. Their *Boris Yeltsin: A Political Biography* deals with the United States and Canada, it invokes Napoleon and Robespierre, World War I and Serbia, but it entirely by-passes Solidarity, Lech Walesa, Pope John Paul II and other east European and Catholic contributions to the development of events in Russia. If one is to believe Solovyov and Klepikova, Yeltsin had no comprehension, indeed no knowledge, of the Solidarity movement and its role in the weakening of communist resolve and the decision of communist leaders to radically overhaul the structures of the communist system of government.

These views are typical of the dramatic differences in historical perception in Russia, eastern Europe and the West. They suggest huge misinterpretations and misjudgments by writers and scholars with regard to what happened and why it happened. Such differences tend to congeal into attitudes, and they breed resentment and hostility decades later.

I have monitored the Russian and east European periodicals from 1989 to 1992, and have encountered major differences concerning the description of and commentary on what was actually happening in the Soviet-dominated lands at that time. In the Russian press, I have seen no attempt to acquaint the Russian people with what Goodwyn describes as the organizational process which led to the fall of communism. This omission eventually will be repeated in school textbooks and will congeal into the canonized version of Russian history. It may well breed Russian irredentism in the future. For if it was indeed the Congress of People's Deputies or Gorbachev's and Yeltsin's wise policies that handed us the freedom from communism, then the newly created states of eastern Europe, the Caucasus and central Asia are ungrateful mooches who sailed to independence on the back of the hard working Russian people's deputies in the Congress, while the east central Europeans used the occasion to turn against Russia in a mood of traditional hostility. Would

it not be justified then for the Russians to think of regaining these territories and punishing the ungrateful neighbors?

If Czechs, Slovaks, Hungarians, Poles, Ukrainians or Estonians have hardly any doubts that they won their own freedom while Russians believe that all the reforms were generated by the judicious actions of the Congress of People's Deputies at a time when Russia's neighbors were acting in an anti-Russian way, then these differences of perception may well escalate into ethnic hatred and hostilities in the future. This is why I consider it important to engage Russian intellectuals in a debate about their perceptions of what happened in the 1980s and the reasons for these happenings. I still believe that a rational approach to available documentation can produce an approximate view of truth.

It may be argued that the Russocentric perspective is both inevitable and justifiable in a country as huge and important as Russia. According to this view, the great powers are entitled to their own version of history. But such a view amounts to abandoning of the idea of liberty and peaceful co-existence of nation-states, which I for one am not prepared to do. Peaceful co-existence between Russia and her neighbors requires a give-and-take of views. The Russocentric point of view has to enter into competition with others to create a common space between Russia and her neighbors where issues could be discussed and where disagreements could be registered without further escalation. It seems to me that Russian scholars and intellectuals have not yet begun to concern themselves with such space, while western writers do the Russians no favor by invoking the name of Gorbachev, his collaborators, and the Congress of People's Deputies whenever the debacle of communism is mentioned, and by relegating to prehistory the role of eastern Europe in that process. If the way out of the communist *and* imperial period is for the Russians to gradually acquire the habits of liberty and democracy, then what the Russian educated classes need most desperately is exposure to the points of view that are not Russophilic. Yet the Russian *prominenti* perpetuate the view that it all began and ended in Russia.⁸

The attitude of prominent Russians toward Catholicism is another instance of a radical difference in perception between the east European and Russian intellectuals regarding the recent events. The conspicuous silence of people like Dmitrii Likhachev or Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn regarding the positive role of both John Paul II and the Catholic Church

in Ukraine, Lithuania, Poland and Belarus is probably not a result of oversight but a continuation of the nineteenth-century attitude of Russian Orthodoxy toward Catholicism (or more broadly, of the Orthodox Churches' resentment of Catholicism). I have yet to see a less-than-hostile account in a Russian periodical of the struggle of western Ukrainians and eastern rite Catholic Belarusses to regain the churches which the Russian Orthodox took over after Stalin annexed western Belarus and western Ukraine to the USSR. While it is understandable that the Russians put their own interests first and tend to downplay the claims of Ukrainians and Belarusses, the absence of even a small intellectual minority defending the rights of the non-Russian minorities is disturbing (the Rev. Aleksandr Men', a Russian Orthodox cleric who did not toe the line in that regard, was murdered in 1990, according to rumor, by an order from the KGB-infiltrated faction of the Russian Orthodox Church). Representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church were invited to the December 1991 Synod of the Catholic Bishops in Rome, but they refused to go. By way of explanation, the Moscow Patriarch Aleksei II accused the Catholic Church of appointing bishops in the former Soviet territories without prior consultation with him. He apparently referred to Bishop Tadeusz Kondrusiewicz of Moscow and to Bishop Joseph Werth, the Apostolic Vicar of Siberia. But during the years of Stalin-Hitler friendship (1939-41) and later, between one and two million Catholics were deported to the Soviet Union, and the survivors' descendants inhabit Russia. According to recent interviews with Kondrusiewicz and Werth, Moscow presently has 50,000 Catholics, and Siberia, half a million.⁹ Before the October Revolution, when the empire's population was one-third to one-half of the Soviet population in 1989, there were half a million registered Catholics, 150 Catholic churches and three Catholic seminaries in Moscow, Petersburg and Saratov. Moscow alone had 27 Catholic schools, and Petersburg, 72. To engender among Russian intellectuals and among the Russian clergy an awareness of the implications of the freedom of religion is a task worth pursuing, it seems to me.

Related to this is the perception, very strong in eastern Europe, somewhat prominent in the West, and ambivalent in Russia, that Russian clerics massively collaborated with the communist regime, and that this fact discredits them considerably. In a recent article, a Russian priest writing under the pen name of Aleksandr Neznyi stated that the Holy

Synod functioned virtually like the Politburo of the Communist Party, and virtually all Russian clerics who were allowed trips to the West were KGB agents.¹⁰ In an attempt to defend the collaborators, Sergei Beschastnyi, Secretary General of the Russian Orthodox Youth Movement in Moscow, said that in the Soviet Union, the assault on religion was so strong that for the Orthodox priests it was the choice between collaboration and death. Many chose collaboration, and rightly so, in the view of Father Beschastnyi.¹¹ One of the most prominent collaborators, Patriarch Pitirim of Volokolamsk, does not consider his collaboration to be a grievous matter, according to Beschastnyi. The perception of Father Beschastnyi that in Pitirim's case collaboration was admissible and perhaps laudable (for it allowed the Church to survive), is fundamentally different from the Catholic perception which in such cases does not permit compromise. This difference of views replays the old dispute between Orthodoxy and Catholicism that took place when the Muslim Turks conquered the Balkans in the fourteenth century, and when the Orthodox were permitted fake conversions to Islam (thus giving birth to the "Muslim Slavs" of present day Bosnia and Hercegovina), while Catholics were not. In defending the Orthodox collaborators, Patriarch Aleksei and Father Beschastnyi also seem unaware of the theological roots of the problem, preferring instead to reduce it to the problems of survival. Again, the differences of interpretation between the Orthodox and the Catholics may become a source of future conflicts.

Contrary to the perceptions of many western commentators who view eastern Europe as homogeneous, the nation-states arising out of the communist debris entered freedom with fairly well defined identities. Poland and Hungary came in burdened by foreign debt but supported in Poland in particular by a well organized opposition. Czechoslovakia came in with virtually no debt and no organized opposition (Charter 77 had some 1,300 members; the Czech Civic Forum, and the Slovak Public Against Violence, were elite movements that did not involve workers or farmers). Romania and Bulgaria did not have elites strong enough to prevent the "reformed" communists from snatching the fruits of the 1989 revolution, thus delaying crucial economic reforms; and Albania was dead last in every respect. All these problems and more appeared also in the newly liberated belt of countries between Poland and Russia: Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova. From the perspective

of 1992, eastern Europe consists of three distinct regions: east central Europe with its traditional ties to western Europe through religion and cultural aspirations (Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary); the Balkans, with their history of ethnic animosities and mixed cultural traditions: Bulgaria, Romania, Albania, and the republics emerging out of the debris of Yugoslavia (with the exception of Slovenia); and the former Soviet republics to the west of Russia. This last group is the most diverse, with the three Baltic republics looking toward Scandinavia, Moldova leaning toward Romania, and Belarus and Ukraine in search of a national identity.

History has not been kind to this vast region between the nearly-always-victorious Germans and the tirelessly expansionist Russians. During the cold war, it received little succor from the free West, being treated as a pawn in the superpower game. Its status as a Soviet colony has not been acknowledged by western scholars, who until recently have been producing volumes arguing that eastern Europe profited from its association with Soviet Russia (in contrast, it is widely acknowledged that western colonialism created deadly "dependence patterns" in countries of Asia and Africa). The condemnation of western colonialism has not influenced the treatment of the Soviet Union and its satellites by western scholars. American intellectuals in particular have displayed studious inattention to the fact that the multinational Soviet state not only lied to the West about the Gulag but it also discriminated against many national groups even in conditions created by that great equalizer, the communist ideology. The east Europeans knew that while all nationalities were equal under communism, some of them were more equal than others. This fact has not aroused the ire of first world intellectuals who by and large have been serious opponents of colonialism and proponents of nation-states in Africa and southeast Asia. Central Asia has been under Russia's harsh rule for a century and the Caucasus for a century and a half, yet I do not know of many works of fiction or scholarship in America that attempt to bring this fact to the attention of the American public. Compare this to the entire libraries written about South Africa. That peculiar accounting system called socialist economics has apparently convinced western scholars that colonialism had nothing to do with the maintenance of a Russian-speaking and Moscow-controlled bureaucracy over territories that are not Russian and in many cases not even Slavic.¹² As to the Russians,

they are even less likely to see a parallel between western colonialism and Russian expansionism.

East European scholars point out that misjudgments in this area are due partly to the fact that events in the communist world tended to be seen through the eyes of western commentators and scholars sharing a Russocentric point of view (Motyl 83-88). As seen from Moscow or Leningrad, the non-Russian peoples of the Soviet empire were junior partners in the great undertaking of communism. Nationalism on either side was suppressed. The revival of non-Russian nationalisms was viewed as a potential tragedy for the region as it spelled destabilization, anti-Semitism and possibly fascism. Such was the view of representative western scholars (Ulam 138). During his visit to Kiev in the summer of 1991, President Bush concurred, by delivering a sermonette against Ukrainian nationalism.

Yet a resurgence of nationalism throughout the former Soviet empire in the 1990s has produced results different from those expected. In spite of the large minority of Hungarians in Transylvania, the Hungarian government has not demanded the return of this territory from Romania, and it has not fostered anti-Romanian sentiments. The Czechs and the Slovaks engage in verbal skirmishes but neither side is about to start fighting. The Poles are not about to reclaim Lviv and Vilnius (Lwow and Wilno in Polish). Ukraine and Poland declared that they have no territorial claims against each other. Ironically, it is Russia, with its vast and underpopulated territory, that has made demands on Ukraine's Crimea and issued statements about Russians in non-Russian lands that could be interpreted as hostile by Russia's neighbors. It is because of such claims that the jury is still out concerning Russian expansionism. Some western and east European writers claim that the Russian nation, being the largest and most involved in erecting the Potemkin village of communism, also has ample traditions of waging aggressive wars against its neighbors and fostering instability around its borders. As a recipient of the lion's share of western aid, it is also in a position to strengthen itself economically and resume an aggressive posture vis-a-vis its weaker neighbors (Zarycky 25-27, Gielzynski, Solcanyk).

It has been argued that Russian nationalism, fostered for centuries by the tsars, never died under the commissars, that it grew surreptitiously, nourished by the unhealthy food of rumors and whispered exaggerations.

East Europeans fear that future significant conflicts within the former Soviet sphere of influence might have less to do with the pitiful squabbles among the disempowered non-Russian republics and more with resentments that are likely to arise over the thwarted Russian nationalist ambitions, should the empire finally disintegrate (*Uncaptive Minds* I.3: 20-24; III.5: 9-11).

The east Europeans look at things this way: while all nationalities suffered the onslaught of sovietism, only one of them profited from Soviet might. That privileged nationality was the Russians. Russian language, Russian studies, Russocentric developments in research and industry were promoted. Economic deals favoring the Russians were commonplace. The perception in eastern European countries is that university graduates in Russian studies received preferential treatment in jobs, apartments and other perks over which the state held absolute power. Graduating from a Russian university in any field was even more advantageous. A sure way to find a publisher was to translate from the Russian or write on Russian subjects.¹³

In contrast, the Russians maintain that they have been the hardest hit by communism; that population losses and damage to the national identity are far greater in Russia than elsewhere. In a recent conversation with a prominent Russian intellectual, I was told that when she was getting her doctorate, she was passed over in job promotion for a Central Asian colleague who was much less able than she. He got the coveted job even though he was a Tajik and she a Russian. In her view, the Russians were the most oppressed nation of the Soviet Union. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn is perhaps the best known representative of such views.

The West takes little interest in these differences of perception. As pointed out earlier, in the West the narrative about the Soviet and post-Soviet world has Russia as its centrepiece, and it tends to be Russocentric in many disputed areas.

There is also another way in which the Russians profited from communism, the east Europeans say. During the communist period, the power and prestige of their country increased worldwide. Before the October Revolution, Russia was a powerful country, but it was not a superpower. Japan took it on single-handedly in 1904, and won. In the early twentieth century, Russia's influence in Africa and Latin America was nil. After World War II, hardly any country would dare to engage

Russia in an all-out war. With power comes respect, and Russian elites have benefited from it in more ways than one. The management of an empire has offered opportunities for these elites that members of the smaller nationalities could only dream about (Thompson 155-160).

After World War II and for the first time in their history, Russian cultural identity gained international respect and popularity. Before the October Revolution, only émigrés and a few eccentrics spoke the language of the tsars, while now dozens of schools and colleges have Russian teachers, and the concurrent interest in things Russian is high. After an impecunious Russian émigré, Vladimir Nabokov, landed in the United States in 1940, he was able to support himself by teaching Russian. Such opportunities did not exist for, say, Ukrainians or Czechs or Hungarians. Thus the communist empire paid interest even to those Russians who, like Nabokov, were its enemies. The empowerment of the Russian elites by communism continues today as tens of thousands of Russians benefit from western largesse and visit every imaginable American institution as part of "exchange" programs, and Russian spokespersons appear on American TV with some regularity.

While the east Europeans stored these facts in their historical memory, western scholars have paid no attention to them, and the Russians have studiously ignored them (Bonner 19-23).¹⁴ Yet these diverse readings of history are a potential source of future conflicts.

Finally, the economic developments of 1989-92 may enter the national memories of post-Soviet states in dramatically different forms. By and large, eastern Europe and the non-Russian republics of the former Soviet Union consider themselves to be economic victims of the Russians, whereas Russians perceive themselves as economic benefactors who dispensed largesse to other nationalities at the expense of Russian well-being. Western scholars tend to side with the Russians in that regard, a position not unrelated to the Russocentric information sources on which they have based their opinions over the years. Is there a way to reconcile these perceptions? They have to do with the rewriting of property titles that has been going on in Moscow's secret corridors of power over the last several years. In that period of time, the Russians have appropriated a good part of the former Soviet Union's wealth (gold and foreign currency reserves, banks, military hardware, the space program, art works, mining enterprises, foreign property and other institutions) while calling

on the non-Russian republics to participate in the repayment of Soviet debt. These transfers have not yet entered the consciousness of western economists because they occurred in a country possessed of no individual property rights and thus they could hardly be quantified. The Kremlin's ability to appropriate property has been virtually limitless, and a bookkeeping system recording these appropriations has never been created. From the Intourist to the Soviet Academy of Science, those *Soviet* institutions which had their headquarters in Moscow or in other Russian cities became *Russian* institutions, and other republics were left holding the bucket as it were.

Until 1991, Soviet wealth was ostensibly owned by all of the country's nationalities. Article Six of the Soviet Constitution states that ". . . rail, water and air transport facilities, the banks, means of communication . . . are state property, that is, belong to the whole people." In the years 1989-92, this joint ownership ended. While the details of this process have not been disclosed, some information is already available. On 16 December 1991, Moscow's Interfax agency reported that the Russian parliament had approved a resolution placing all Soviet parliamentary property—real estate, bank accounts, movable goods—under Russian jurisdiction (*NYT* 17 Dec. 1991). On 18 December 1991, the Presidium of the Russian Congress of People's Deputies took over all the buildings and other property of the Council of People's Deputies of the former USSR, including its housing, medical facilities, and financial resources in rubles and foreign currency. The Speaker of that Council, A. Alimzhanov, declared the move to be "the final act of lawlessness . . . insulting" to the non-Russian republics (*NYT* 20 Dec. 1991). On 27 December 1991, when the Soviet Council of People's Deputies passed the resolution acknowledging the demise of the Soviet Union, the Russians took the keys to the central bank, appropriated all Soviet embassies and began to destroy the security files in the KGB headquarters in Moscow (*NYT* 27 Dec. 1991). On 26 July 1992, the UPI wire reported that Soviet flags were lowered from Soviet navy ships (excluding the Black Sea fleet watched carefully by Ukraine) and replaced by Russian emblems. "The navy's identity still seems a bit murky, since technically it is a joint commonwealth fleet," said the unsigned article.

These events have been only casually noted in the western press, but they have aroused much anguish in Ukraine, the second most powerful

post-Soviet state and one that would gain most from an equitable distribution of property. The Ukrainians found it disturbing that during the March 1992 meeting of the commonwealth nations in Kiev, President Yeltsin refused to discuss the matter of the Russian appropriation of Soviet state property, while insisting that Ukraine and other non-Russian republics assume a share of the Soviet external debt (Schmemmann, *NYT* 21 March 1992). (To add insult to injury, Yeltsin also refused to display the Ukrainian flag on top of his car, a diplomatic courtesy usually accorded to independent states by visiting heads of state.) A distinctly pro-Russian position was taken by the then Soviet economic planner, Grigory Yavlinsky, during a meeting of the Group of Seven industrial nations in Bangkok in mid-October 1991. He said that "it must be made clear" to the non-Russian republics that they have to pay their assigned share of the Soviet foreign debt.

But when in early April 1992 Ukrainian President Leonid Kravchuk announced the takeover by Ukraine of the Soviet Black Sea Fleet, Russian officials reacted angrily (*Houston Chronicle* 7 Apr. 1992). Yet at that point, Kravchuk did what the Russian officials have been doing: he appropriated that part of the USSR property that happened to be located on Ukrainian territory. While on 10 April 1992 it was announced that a joint Ukrainian-Russian commission would be set up to examine the issue of the fleet, the matter seems far from closed, and it certainly indicates that resentments over the division of Soviet spoils may boil over some time in the future.

In addition, as seen from eastern Europe, since 1989 the Russians have extracted substantial tribute from some of their former east European satellites. The Germans paid the most, with billions of DM committed, or about to be committed, to the improvement of Russia's economy. Arguably, this was the payment due for the unification of Germany. But in 1991, Czechs and Hungarians paid off their alleged debts to the USSR at the rate of one "transfer ruble" to the dollar, while the black market rate was many times that. This could hardly be considered a debt of gratitude. In 1992, after a preparatory press campaign including thousands of accounts and pictures of empty shops and long lines in Moscow and Petersburg (as if this were a new thing under communism), a new aid package to Russia totalling \$24 billion was announced by President Bush. Henry Kissinger commented on it, saying that the countries of eastern

Europe were in no less need than Russia but no one was talking about aid to them. Yet they were the first victims of Soviet aggression. So these countries now see that the United States helps the aggressor while allowing the victims to slowly twist in the wind.¹⁵ And Richard Portes remarked: "Russia's need is no greater than that of other ex-Soviet republics, not to mention Bulgaria, Romania and Albania. In eastern Europe, our aid could really make a difference. Our preoccupation with Russia has unfortunately turned attention from the others" (Portes, *NYT* 2 Apr. 1992).

In Russia, the issue of help to the non-Russian republics (as well as to east central Europe and the Balkans) is a non-issue. As mentioned before, the Russians see themselves as the principal victim, rather than the principal beneficiary, of communist state-building. For an imperial nation, this is an unprecedented and somewhat worrisome perception. It is worrisome in view of the fact that Russian cultural history has not produced any blueprints for a democratic society and for a non-nationalist view of the world. The Russians are a tremendously gifted nation, but their toughness and talents showed themselves in war and in art rather than in social and philosophical thought. The Russian cultural memory contains no John Locke or Thomas Jefferson or Edmund Burke, no *Federalist Papers* and no records of *bona fide* parliamentary debates. Russia has given the world some of its greatest writers but no societal models of any practical value. Russian artists were magnificent, but they fed their nation dubious pabulum in matters political and social. The wrong-headed utopianism of Tolstoy, the divinization of the Russian nation by Dostoevsky (now imitated by Valentin Rasputin and others), Chekhov's melancholy refusal to suggest any answers, the futile ardor of nineteenth-century *narodniks* who wanted to remake peasants into revolutionaries, are attractive to contemplate from abroad but deadly as the basic intellectual diet. Solzhenitsyn's recent proposal of soldering together Ukraine, Russia and Belarus into a new Slavic nation is not a program but a nationalistic dream. The October Revolution was clearly wrong-headed and useless as a model in building a decent society. Frighteningly, Russia is still not far away from the situation described by that greatest of Russian patriots, Peter Chaadaev, in his *Philosophical Letters* (1829). It remains unclear whether the Russians as a nation are willing to sacrifice for the liberty of their citizens, or whether they still

hope to become powerful by the force of arms and diplomatic skills, the latter solution being a fateful illusion unworthy of a great nation.¹⁶

When Boris Yeltsin climbed the tank during the August 1991 coup and called on the people of Moscow (pop. 9 million) to defend the Russian parliament, some 15-20,000 Muscovites obliged. That amounts to 0.2% of Moscow's population. Even in Bulgaria, an allegedly rigged election produced a demonstration of 150,000 in Sofia (pop. 1 million) on 11 October 1991. The fate of the Soviet coup was decided by a split in the leadership and not by an organized movement within Russia. This remarkable unwillingness of Russians to rise against the state (as opposed to grumbling against the state) has been obscured by western press reports and hasty talk about "the Russian revolution" of 1991. Yet the above figures indicate that there was no revolution from below but only a struggle at the top. Only now, *when the government permits it*, do embryonic political groups begin to emerge.

"Umom Rossiu ne poniat'," *Literaturnaia Gazeta* echoed Tjutchev on April 5, 1990. Even in the democratically-minded journals, such as Vitalii Korocich's *Ogonek*, perceptions of international relations are advanced that have little to do with democracy.¹⁷ The fatal burden of tradition, coupled with the abundance of utopianism in the writings of Russian writers and a virtual lack of self-criticism and of an assessment of the nation's weaknesses by Russian politicians, make Russian nationalism a troublesome addition to the future political realities of eastern Europe and Asia. By comparison, east European nationalisms seem mild and open to correction both from inside and from outside. At the same time, for two generations now these east European nations have been deprived of the opportunity to develop their own political elites. Will they succeed in maturing fast in that regard, and will they learn how to co-exist with the eastern giant? President Walesa's trip to Moscow and the signing of the Polish-Russian treaty on 23 May 1992 indicates that the east European elites are learning fast, but this knowledge is still too fragile to inspire full confidence in the future relations between Russia and her east European neighbors.

It seems to me that there is an urgent need for Russian intellectuals to address the issue of Russian self-perception, taking into account the views of Russia held by her neighbors and trying to understand them without undue rancor. For three centuries now, Russia's policy has not been made

among Russia's dispossessed masses, but by the educated layer of society. In other words, only Russian intellectuals and Russian politicians can save Russia from its imperialistic past and miserable present. Western subsidies, unaccompanied by western insistence that the Russians address the questions which worry their neighbors, can only prolong the status quo of a weakened and nervous imperial nation holding on to its military option, ready to foster instability in countries it has been forced to abandon, and remaining poised for reconquering them.

The east European fears of Russia should be viewed in the context of the problems outlined above. The east European perception of Russia is dramatically different from Russian self-perception, which in turn feeds heavily into the western image of Russia. Unless western scholars take into account these multiple perceptions, they will foster instability rather than stability in the region.

As Henry Kissinger said, during the last 150 years, major world conflicts originated in eastern Europe, and were spurred by the desire of both Germans and Russians to enlarge their respective empires. The Germans seem to have given up on the greater Reich policed by the men in uniforms, but have the Russians?

NOTES

1. See Erlanger. At the recently delivered lectures, Zbigniew Brzezinski and Soviet legislator Galina Starovoitova said similar things. Brzezinski remarked that for a Russian, the word "Russia" (*Rossia*) may mean a nation-state, such as France or Spain, but it may also mean empire. Also see Solchanyk.
2. See Ra'anani, x. This view is shared by many non-Russians in the former Soviet republics. See the section on the Baltic republics in *Uncaptive Minds*, especially the *UM* interview with Ivars Godmanis, 19-22.
3. *NYT*, 14 December 1991. This was confirmed in June 1992 when members of the Academy voted to admit new members, and their vote indicated serious prejudice against non-Russian minorities as well as against Jewish Russians. The Russian Vice-President Rutskoi's statements about the Crimea and Marshal Evgenii Shaposhnikov's comments about the Black Sea Fleet (see Solchanyk's article), summarize the attitudes of that part of Russian society which considers the fall of the Soviet empire to be a tragedy for Russia. Symbolically, the title page of *Nasha Rossiia*, No. 11/35 (1992), features the slogan "Rus' - Rossiia - SSSR - Nasha Velikaia Rodina."

4. See Zhirinovskii's speech to the Highest Council of the Liberal Democratic Party of which he is the leader, published in the Party organ, *The Liberal*. Also A. Ponomarev and V. Sinenko.
5. On 2 December 1991 on MacNeil-Lehrer News Hour, Professor Stephen Cohen said that he believed Russia would eventually reassert itself over the region it was forced to abandon, and that attempts by non-Russian nations to build nation-states were futile. This was said as a commentary after the 1 December 1991 Ukrainian vote for independence. Cohen then reasserted his opinion that Mikhail Gorbachev engineered the changes in Russia and eastern Europe. In a verbal skirmish with a representative of the Ukrainian-American community, Professor Roman Szporluk, Cohen suggested that the attempts of Ukrainians to break free of Russian domination were futile. See also Cohen, *Rethinking the Soviet Experience: Politics and History Since 1917*. See also the book edited by Taras, which erroneously assigns a major role in the fall of the communist system to the deliberations of intellectuals.
6. A. M. Rosenthal, "History for Fools," *NYT* 8 May 1992. Mr. Rosenthal further wrote: "[Gorbachev] could never break entirely from that system. He gazed upon the corpse of Communism and insisted that resurrection could be achieved. That weakness finished him at home—but not in the West, particularly in Washington and Bonn. There, politicians and bureaucrats who never wanted the Soviet Union to collapse hoped that Mr. Gorbachev would preserve it. . . . Lying about history can twist the future."
7. In July 1989, this author purchased a humorous portrait of Gorbachev in the Old Town Square in Warsaw. This portrait was later reproduced in *The Sarmatian Review*. The portrait imitates late Byzantine icons, with two angels whose facial features resemble Lenin and Marx in the background. Gorbachev wields in his hands a hammer and a sickle, both broken and tied up with string. The caption reads "Imperator Mikhail the Last."
8. See D. S. Likhachev's recent writings; Yevtushenko, *Fatal Half-Measures*. In Tatiana Putrenko's interview with Russian historian Iakov Gordin (*Literaturnaia Gazeta*, No. 20/5397 (13 May 1992), the recent changes are attributed to Russian suffering under the communist regime, rather than to specific actions of individuals or groups. This mythical explanation of the ongoing changes is likely to congeal into the canonical one. In Mikhail Ozerov's and Oleg Prudkov's article on a meeting with Britons representing the British Commonwealth, the suffering of Russians in non-Russian republics is listed as a major problem in need of a priority solution. In May 1992, I spoke to dozens of Russian intellectuals and intelligentsia members in Moscow representing similarly Russocentric views. I encountered no understanding of, or even empathy for, the role played by non-Russian nations in the abolition of communism and the return to normalcy in Russia. The Russocentrism of Russian intellectual life struck me as intellectually untenable and politically dangerous.
9. Aleksandr Zorin, An Interview with Archbishop Tadeusz Kondrusiewicz, *Nowy Swiat* [Warsaw], 30-31 May 1992; Dominik Morawski, An Interview with Bishop Joseph Werth, *Kultura* [Paris], No. 5/536 (May 1992). See also Gross, Thompson and Morawski.

10. See Nezhnyi. See also Kurajev. March 1990 issue of *30 Days* and May 1992 issue of *The Catholic World Report*; Bole. On the continuing identification of Church and Russia, see "O budushchem Rossii," *Pravoslavnaia Rus'*: *Tserkovno-Obschestvennyi Organ*, no. 9 (1438), 1/14 May 1991.
11. See Grosbart. See also Meyendorff's expressed belief that there are no major problems with the fidelity of Russian Christianity during the last 70 years.
12. Writing in *Le Monde* (3 November 1981) about the West's indifference to the suppression of the Solidarity labor movement in Poland, Jiri Pelikan remarked: ". . . one cannot escape the strange feeling that it is a handicap for this country [Poland] to be in Europe. If such a profound revolutionary transformation had taken place under such an external threat in a nation in the Americas, Africa or Asia, the western Left would not merely have adopted resolutions of solidarity; it would have organised street demonstrations, marches, sit-ins or even strikes. . . ." Quoted from Ash. For an example of scholarship bent on showing that eastern Europe profited from being dominated by Russia, see Marer.
13. See Toranska. On a number of occasions, I encountered hostility on the part of the Russian scholarly audiences when I tried to bring these problems to their attention. In October 1990, while lecturing at the University of Wisconsin-Madison on nationalism in Russian literature, I tried to engage in a discussion a Soviet Russian professor Iuri Shcheglov but encountered only anger. There were similar instances at other scholarly conferences.
14. Bonner's year-by-year autobiography, *Mothers and Daughters*, displays no awareness whatsoever of nationalist inequities within the Soviet Union, and it is conspicuously silent about the period of Soviet-Nazi friendship, 1939-41.
15. On Ted Koppel's *Nightline* in April 1992, Henry Kissinger repeated the tenets of his March 26 syndicated article on western priorities in eastern Europe and Russia.
16. In *Strategy and Power in Russia, 1600-1914* (1992), William C. Fuller, Jr. argues that Russia owed its unprecedented diplomatic and military successes to a very close yet secretive collaboration between its generals and its diplomats.
17. The lead article in *Ogonek*, 18-25 May 1991, advances the view that "freedom can be either bought or conquered by the force of arms."

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