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RUSSIA

BETWEEN

PAST AND

FUTURE

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**LILIA SHEVTSOVA**

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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# WHAT THESE ESSAYS ARE ABOUT

These essays are about modern Russia and the processes that are related to it. It is not another example of political microbiology, which scrutinizes specific events or parses President Putin's slightest move to uncover hidden meaning. Watching the never-ending news cycle of political hustle and bustle long ago lost its usefulness and appeal.

These essays are about the major trends of Russian reality, about its hot-button issues, as well as the challenges Russian society is facing. They are about the troubled time Russia has found itself in after the end of the political protests of 2011–2012. This time can be described as “time out of time,” a break between two eras. One era has already ended, while the other has not yet begun. Living during this time is hard, and it is also hard to reflect on it and to find any signs of renewal. This is a time of conservatism; in its Russian incarnation that conservatism has morphed into a gloomy, almost medieval archaism.

In these essays, I have tried to give the reader some sense of this time without a trajectory.

You are going to read my thoughts on how Russia is trying to define itself in the modern world. I also discuss Russia's perception of its new Constitution, its historical dates, and its problems. I look at the Kremlin's efforts to solve the problem of national identity and to find a way to deal with the North Caucasus, which has become a bomb planted beneath the Russian Federation. I reflect on the new Putin Doctrine, while also thinking about how the Obama presidency presented the old Russia with room for maneuvering.

Finally, I write about my impressions on Ukraine, which poses challenges to both Russia and Europe. I try to explain what the motivations are behind the Kremlin's incursion into Ukraine and what Putin's new expansionism means for the world.

In short, you are about to read a description of a time and place that I would not wish anyone to find themselves in.

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# 1

## LIFE IN THE INTERREGNUM: OR HOW THE WORLD GOT LOST

As of now—at the start of 2014—there is no reason to believe that this year will be any different from the previous one. Social and political trends tend to be extremely inertial. It takes a confluence of several factors unexpectedly exploding to shift momentum in a new direction.

Then again, who expected the unexpected in 2013? Among the surprises were the dashed hopes for democratization in Egypt and the growth of Al Qaeda's strain of international terrorism. The Kremlin, too, had some surprising international successes: in Syria, the United States accepted Putin's proposal to reduce the crisis to the technical issue of eliminating chemical weapons, and in the battle over Ukraine, the European Union was left scratching its collective head in befuddlement. Finally, who expected Obama's domestic and global influence to plummet? So let us not get ahead of ourselves trying to predict what will happen in 2014. I merely want to record the trends and moods that prevailed at the start of the year.

The famous Polish political philosopher and sociologist Zygmunt Bauman reintroduced into our political lexicon the term "interregnum," once

used by the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci to describe the early 1930s. The term means “a time without a trajectory,” or “a time outside of time,” when the old is dying off and the new has not yet been born or is too faint to notice. It is a treacherous time for interpretations: is it just before dawn, or just after dusk? No wonder that “interregnum” has once again seeped into global discourse. It’s not just Bauman who is using Gramsci’s term, but a wide array of analytical thinkers.

And they’re not wrong to use that word. “Interregnum” very accurately describes the times in which the world finds itself now: a time when the current forms of societal organization have stopped working. This breakdown has changed the world order, old forms of statehood, the liberal democracy model, and political and international relations concepts. Meanwhile, new challenges have emerged, and neither the world at large nor the West—the most progressive of civilizations—has been able to respond to them.

I would argue that the understanding that the world now finds itself in an interregnum is the key legacy of 2013. Intellectuals, and even the political community, have begun to focus on the enormous challenges the world is facing, as well as their own inability to face or to answer them. I would use another one of Bauman’s metaphors for our time: not only is no one flying the airplane, we don’t even know if our destination airport has been built yet.

The interregnum manifests itself in the tide of protests in countries ranging from Brazil and Turkey to Bulgaria and Ukraine. The protestors are fed up with the existing political order, but they’re also frustrated by the lack of alternatives. The emergence of weak political leaders—men or women whose rule is based on largely vain efforts to preserve the status quo—is another feature of our “time outside of time.” America is retrenching, the European Union is paralyzed, and the leading democracies are trying to solve strategic problems reactively or by ignoring them—as in Syria. All of these things are signs of our times.

No wonder that the geopolitical and civilizational vacuum is being filled by a new authoritarian tandem: Putin’s Russia and China. The absurdity of the situation is that these two new sources of power and might are both political phantoms, in a way. The first is in an advanced state of decay, and the second is rapidly exhausting its stores of resilience.

For me, the dramatic fate of Ukraine perfectly illustrates these times. This one country has demonstrated each of the triad of elements that characterize the interregnum: society's quest for dignity, the inability of the West, and above all Europe, to understand this quest and help it along, and the return of traditional Russia, which is pulling Ukraine back into its orbit and guaranteeing its leader's political survival in exchange for his country's independence. We should not be completely surprised if the Putin-Yanukovych trade-off is silently endorsed by the portion of the Western political community that says it isn't ready to take on the "Ukrainian headache," and that justifies delay with the argument that "Ukrainians are not ready for reform."

One might also say that there are two more signs that we live in an interregnum: the return of Putin's Russia as a key player on the global scene, and China's uncanny ability to remain the target of many countries' "pivoting" actions. But in truth, all these signs show is that appearances can be deceiving (at least in the case of Russia). That Western leaders have avoided Putin's Olympic games in 2014 like the plague, and that hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians have taken to the streets to protest the Kremlin's suffocating embrace could hardly be viewed as manifestations of the triumph of Putin's Russia.

Meanwhile, liberal civilization has not only failed to solve its domestic problems; it has also failed to formulate a coherent foreign policy—much less prove that it still cares about the principles it claims to embody. The question is to what extent the West understands its own abysmal failures, and whether it is ready to search for a means of overcoming its paralysis. True, the West succeeded twice in using crises as a spur for renewal and progress: in the 1930s and 1970s. However, one cannot exclude the possibility that today's malaise will have to deepen before it becomes an impetus for change.

The trends that will complicate the world's future transformation—both in the West and in the authoritarian societies—are visible to us today. In the West, we are witnessing the rise of left- and right-wing populist movements that will make it harder to implement changes. In authoritarian societies, the decaying regimes have co-opted and corrupted the political and intellectual elite, complicating the odds of a transformation from the top by means of a pact between pragmatic reformers and

the opposition. Such pacts made the great democratic transformations of the past century possible. Today, system pragmatists are unlikely partners in the struggle for reform because of their involvement in the workings of the autocratic system. At the same time, authoritarian regimes are preventing the formation of constructive oppositions by eliminating them in their early phases.

What might come of the autocrats' frustration of reform? The possibility of a destructive wave of hatred and wrath that would bring forth another messianic leader? If the trends of the recent past continue further, this is a very real possibility for Russia.

"Isn't there any good news? Isn't there anything on the political landscape that we can view as an accomplishment?" you ask. Well, the fact that "interregnum" has become a buzzword in the political establishment is already an achievement. It means that at least we know that the airplane has no pilot. Now we only need to grab the stick and throttle and look for a place to land...

# 2

## RUSSIA WAITING FOR GODOT

I wrote this comment at the beginning of 2014, when the spirits of the liberal community were low. Gone were the initial joy and excitement of 2011–2012, which had been born from the sudden tide of street protests and the apparent readiness of the demonstrators to resist the rot and dread they saw all around them. Since those heady days, the state machine has done a pretty effective job not only in mowing the grass but also in paving over the field so that nothing will grow again. I hope the mood of frustration and resignation on display below will pass, along with hopes for a new Leader who will have to save the nation. What follows is merely a mental and psychological snapshot of a moment in time.

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In his analysis of the rise and fall of global civilizations, the great historian Arnold Toynbee developed what he called Challenge-and-Response theory. This theory holds civilizations rise as a result of successful re-

sponses to challenges (both internal and external) and fall when they fail to respond creatively to them.

Toynbee's theory always occurs to me when I observe the mounting challenges Russia faces today. These challenges range from the physical—the deteriorating Soviet infrastructure on which Russia depends for its survival—to the social—the decimation of the human capital bound up in people's physical, moral, and mental faculties. The regime acts as if it does not notice these challenges. In some cases, it does try to respond to them, but does so only in a way that creates new challenges or that undermines its ability to deal with them. For instance, in 2013 Putin offered a conservative Doctrine as a response to Russia's challenges. Containing internal and external enemies (we all knew who he was talking about) is the major element of this Doctrine. In turn, militarization and a new arms race are essential elements of this containment. As Toynbee clearly demonstrated, militarization and search for an enemy are a clear indication that a civilization is in decline and is on the road to self-destruction. If Toynbee was in fact right, then the Kremlin has already embarked on a course of "suicidal statecraft."

The Russian intellectual and political community does not need to read Toynbee to understand that the Russian system of autocratic rule has been exhausted. The problem is that society became so fixated on lamenting and diagnosing the malady that it failed to come up with possible cures.

Time is of the essence. Should the system and society continue to degenerate, the process of decay may become irreversible, and society will no longer be willing or able to change. It is quite possible that this process has already become irreversible in Russia, but in case it has not, a full-blown undeniable crisis is its only salvation. Such a crisis will reveal both the system's impotence and the extent to which the society is ready to fight for change and resist the degradation.

So far, many factors have helped to temporarily keep the situation from getting worse. Among them are inertial forces, the regime's ability to pay for public obedience, the trivial task of elite co-optation, the lack of an intellectual segment of society that is ready to resist, social demoralization, and the absence of political alternatives. But it is impossible to predict whether the process of social and political decay will become

permanent or whether it will result in an explosion. There are no instruments that can gauge the temperature of the processes that occur inside the social fabric.

Unless there is a crisis that mobilizes Russian society, one should expect neither an elite split nor the emergence of leaders capable of living under new rules. The degenerative processes at work, moreover, have touched the elite so deeply that there may be no one left who could accept a new civilizational model or, more importantly, struggle for its attainment. Again, only a crisis and a protest wave will reveal whether it is indeed the case. But will there be a protest wave, and if so, when? Also, what forces will it bring to the fore? These questions have not been answered yet.

As Russia creeps forward through the early months of 2014, there are no overt signs that the system's potential energy has been totally exhausted, nor are there signs that the systemic crisis has entered the critical stage, when the processes brewing inside the social organism reveal themselves on the outside. True, the rot and degradation of the system is still proceeding apace, but there is no evidence that the disparate instances of rot are about to combine into an unmistakable trend leading inevitably toward collapse. Most importantly, there are no convincing signs that the most active segments of the population are ready to rise up against the current rules of the game as their Ukrainian counterparts did in 2013. Or if there are signs, they are still weak and confusing. So many times in the recent past we have thought: *Aha! Here's the crisis. Society can't go on like this. It just can't tolerate this corruption and rot anymore!* One of the most brilliant Russian analysts has repeatedly declared that Putin is leaving this year, or next year, or soon... Putin, meanwhile, continues to defy these predictions and enjoy his time in the Kremlin.

Gradually the intellectual and political class has begun to return to its familiar feeling of helplessness. As before, this feeling of helplessness is breeding a desire to wait for change to come from the top. *The authorities can't rule like this anymore. They have to feel that everything is disintegrating. They will start to look for an exit solution.* These are the familiar lyrics sung by this group, even as its members audition for a spot on the Kremlin choir, whose director, they hope, will hand down new songs to sing.

Or maybe he won't, but at least they'll have a nice, comfortable spot in the choir, right?

Thus the intellectual and political class in Russia has returned to its usual pastime: waiting for Godot, as per Samuel Beckett's play. The principal actors (read: intellectuals and politicians) don't know who Godot (read: a reformer, from above or below) is, and they can't decide what they should do while they wait. They have been sitting and waiting for quite awhile with no sign of Godot. Or someone like Putin comes along and tries to play the part, but plays it in a way that we didn't expect.

Who knows? Perhaps an actual crisis in 2014 could put an end to our long wait for a reformer from above. If potions and pills cannot cure our system, maybe a surgeon's tools will. Then again, we've already been waiting for a surgeon to come and use those tools, and we all know what came of that.

# 3

## THE RUSSIAN CONSTITUTION AS A FOUNDATION OF PERSONALIZED POWER

Every year, on December 12, Russia celebrates the anniversary of its Constitution. Every year, then, Russians have an opportunity to deliberate about what their Constitution means to them. This is an opportunity not only to look back on the situation in which it was adopted but also to examine the kind of system and kind of relations between government and society that it enshrines. Unfortunately, neither Russian elites nor Russian society dwells on these constitutional questions at the moment. But if they do not think about these questions, there is no reason that we should not do so here.

The Russian Constitution was approved after the executive authorities headed by Boris Yeltsin used force to crush the opposition rallied around the Supreme Soviet on October 3–4, 1993. This set of circumstances naturally tempted the victors to create a Constitution that would affirm their own monopoly on power. I do not dispute that this Constitution does indeed give the public broad rights and freedoms. But at the same time, it all but removes the possibility of political pluralism and a system

of checks and balances. In itself, this fact makes it difficult, if not impossible, to guarantee declared rights and freedoms.

Yeltsin's team drafted the Constitution in the fall of 1993 after its victory over its opponents in the Supreme Soviet. Yeltsin himself went through the draft, too. In the section that sets out the organization of the Russian government, the Yeltsin team concentrated all resources in the president's hands and guaranteed his monopoly on power. The Constitution thus places the president above the society. The president is subordinate to no one and is answerable to none. It is practically impossible to remove the president from office.

Furthermore, the Russian president's status makes it possible for him to constantly expand his powers. A study carried out by Mikhail Krasnov, one of Russia's best (probably *the* best) constitutional law specialists, showed that the three Russian presidents in office since the Constitution was adopted (Yeltsin, Putin, and Medvedev) bestowed their own office with 502 (!) new prerogatives. What's more, the majority of these new prerogatives do not accord with the Constitution itself. The system that the Constitution enshrines leans toward state control over society and toward a reproduction of personalized power. Vladimir Putin and Dmitry Medvedev demonstrated this tendency during their terms by repeatedly expanding the presidential monopoly on power and restricting constitutional rights that are supposed to guarantee citizens' freedoms.

The Constitution is thus both the main guarantor and main instrument for keeping Russia's authoritarian system in place. For various reasons, not only does the old Yeltsin team, which was responsible for adopting the Constitution, find it very hard to admit this fact; so too do many liberals, who hope that the next leader could resume the reform process with the constitutional monopoly on power still in place. These liberals try to show that the problem is not the Constitution itself but violations inherent in the way it is enforced. This is the source of frequent disagreements I have with the defenders of the Yeltsin Constitution. I argue that these "violations" and the constant effort to strengthen the Kremlin boss's personal power arise naturally in a situation in which the Constitution gives one group or person a monopoly on power and total control over a society's resources and politics, both internal and external. In such a context, the ruling group can simply ignore rights

and freedoms enshrined in other articles of the Constitution. And this is exactly what Russia's presidents have been doing.

Thus appeals for honest elections and for a change of leadership will come to naught as long as the Yeltsin Constitution remains in place. There is no guarantee that honest politicians working in a system that offers them total control over the state's resources, sans parliamentary controls, will suddenly choose to let free competition proceed apace, thus threatening their own absolute hold on power. Have you ever seen this kind of altruism in politics?

Regrettably, the Russian opposition has thus far ignored the need to think about how Yeltsin's Constitution has been an obstacle to reform. Its members prefer to deliberate on the power transfers and honest elections rather than the need to eliminate the framework that creates absolutist power in the first place.

Russia's reformers need to make constitutional reform a strategic objective and to give the public honest information about the constitutional trap in which Russia finds itself. Constitutional reform that will guarantee political competition should become the foundation for political reform in general and for opening up Russia's system of government.

Thus the Constitution is one of Russia's biggest problems, even if not everyone wants to acknowledge it as such. Attitudes toward the Constitution set the political dividing lines. Those who want to keep its autocratic and authoritarian elements in place support personalized power, even if they don't intend to do so. Those who want to change the constitutional principles that undergird the organization of government are the true reformers.

The time will come when these dividing lines will be clarified. When this happens, political renewal will begin again, and society will start to think not just about changing the government but also about changing the rules of the game. This will in turn lead people to the Constitution, and to questions about reforming the provisions that endorse absolutist power.

Today, however, things appear to be headed in the opposite direction. Members of the ruling United Russia party have prepared constitutional changes that undermine the rights and freedoms of citizens. Among these possible changes are: removing the provision that forbids state ideology;

doing away with the international law priority for Russian law, and making Orthodoxy the “basis” of the Russian identity. These proposals are all signs that the Kremlin is testing the waters, trying to figure out whether it can continue its drive toward the creation of a totalitarian state. Even if the president doesn’t approve these constitutional changes anytime soon, they give us a sense of the authorities’ agenda.

Here’s some helpful advice for Western observers: if you want to understand what the various political forces in Russia stand for—if you want to see the dividing lines, and to understand who is in favor of real transformation—you should ask everyone about their take on the Constitution. Those who support the Yeltsin Constitution are comfortable with absolute power and don’t want to change the rules of the game. Those who support constitutional reform are in favor of real transformation of the Russia authoritarian system.

# 4

## RUSSIA: THE TURNING POINTS THAT SHAPE A COUNTRY'S TRAJECTORY

Every country's history has turning points that mark the end of one period and the beginning of another. In recent Russian history, there were three events that stand out as turning points in the country's post-communist development.

The first turning point was the shelling of the Russian parliament in October 1993, which led to the establishment of the personalized power system, reflected in the adoption of a Constitution that legitimized top down rule. In fact, Putin's one-man regime was born not when Yeltsin gave him power but in October 1993, when the grounds for political struggle and political pluralism were liquidated.

The second turning point came in the autumn of 2003 with the arrest and imprisonment of Mikhail Khodorkovsky. This event signaled Russia's turn toward state capitalism and the merger of government and ownership rules, this time under the security agencies' control.

Finally, in May 2012, the arrest of ordinary demonstrators who took part in the peaceful Bolotnaya Square protest, and the subsequent riot

charges pursued against them, signaled the authorities' shift to a new stage. Observers underestimated the importance of this event: it signaled the reemergence in Russia of the phenomenon of political prisoners. It was also a benchmark signaling the shift from a soft authoritarianism that tolerated limited dissent to a much more repressive style of government with a tendency to grow even more repressive over time.

In the "Bolotnaya" case, the authorities grabbed a handful of people out of the crowd, or apprehended them afterward, and have been holding them in prison for nearly a year and a half without succeeding in proving any case against them. The public investigation of their cases, initiated by the opposition Party RPR-PARNAS with the participation of civil society organizations, proved that the prisoners are innocent and that they neither provoked a riot nor took part in clashes with the police. In fact, the independent investigation proved that there were not riots at all, but brutal attacks by the police on demonstrators. The majority of the arrestees in fact received severe beatings at the hands of the riot police. In the end, even the police refused to support charges against the prisoners. None of this, however, had any influence on the court's decision to keep the accused in detention.

The authorities have made it clear that these people are their hostages and will stay in prison, as if doing so were a way to tell the public that "any of you could be in their place." The case is further confirmation of the Russian court system's degradation, as well as proof that the courts, together with the Investigative Committee, have become a key tool of repression in the state's hands. By taking ordinary people (not even political activists) hostage, the authorities have shown that they are ready to use state terror against their own people in order to keep their grip on power secure.

Over the past twenty years, Russia has gone from being a country thinking about democracy and law to a country in which the government puts people in prison for attempting to assert their constitutional rights.

Russian society understands the fact that, twenty years after collapse of communism, there are once again political prisoners in Russia. In October 2013, 45 percent of Russians polled agreed that there are political prisoners. Only 28 percent refused to admit their existence. To be sure, while society recognizes the problem of political prisoners, it is not ready to demand their release—yet.

The low level of public protest against the reemergence of political prisoners in Russia has led the authorities to conclude that this tactic works. No doubt, they will continue down this road. Once a regime begins to follow the Law of Repression, it can't stop. The hope that Putin's regime might change course and pursue an open society is a chimera. Why should it, if society does not protest?

What the authorities did after the Bolotnaya case proved that there are no limits to the degree of repression to which they will subject society, if necessary, and that no one should feel absolutely safe. The court system and law enforcement organs could distort the formal rules any way they wish, so there are in effect no rules at all. This has in turn created a new atmosphere in Russia. The authorities' refusal to acknowledge even the basic rule of law has taught society to follow the same logic and to use aggression unchecked by any legal or moral limits. The authorities are teaching society the law of the jungle—that one must use force to survive.

True, after imprisoning innocents from the summer of 2012 through December 2013, the authorities let some (but only some!) of the political prisoners out of jail under an amnesty declared by Putin. The Kremlin, apparently, decided that Russians had learned their lesson, and that even angry people would think twice before taking to the streets in future. Society returned to its previous passivity.

Thus Putin restored control over the country without having to escalate the degree of coercion, at least for the moment. The whip was placed in a corner—until it's needed next time. The Soviet Kremlin would also declare amnesties and free people from prison, but these moves never signaled a change in the nature of the Soviet regime.

For this reason, one should not be deceived by the Kremlin's tactics, which include imitation of a political "softening." The system of personalized power can't stop the Law of Repression. To do so would cause it to be perceived as weak, and the "weak are beaten," as President Putin likes to remind everyone.

Besides the Law of Repression, we may soon see another law at work: the Law of Vicious Circles. Violence from the top may be answered with violence from the bottom. Russia is entering a period when the authorities themselves are pushing the country toward a much more aggressive,

confrontational style of behavior—not just on the part of the authorities but also within society. The authorities succeeded in turning many of the cultivated and intelligent young people at Bolotnaya into prisoners. But will they also succeed in dealing with the angry mob that is the inevitable result of the way of life and survival strategy they are cultivating in Russia? Unjustified repression always creates a desire for revenge; this vicious circle is a long-standing Russian political tradition, and it continues today. That is why the Kremlin is trying to restrain this repressive machine, but the machine may acquire a logic of its own...

# 5

## HOW TO BLOW OFF STEAM?

There is an axiom well known to all authoritarian rulers: When it becomes increasingly difficult to keep your country under control, you should start to look for ways to neutralize discontent or to channel it in a safe direction or, usually, both. There are myriad ways: you can find an enemy and turn him into an object of popular hatred; you can focus on placating critical segments of the population; or you can co-opt the opposition. The Kremlin is using every trick in the book from Soviet and pre-Soviet times. Thanks to Russian history, and to Vladimir Putin's mentality and former career in the KGB, the fabrication of an enemy of the people is a particularly popular strategy in the Kremlin. The enemies of choice are usually the United States, the West as a whole, and the Russian liberals (this trick never fails!). These days, however, circumstances have bestowed the Kremlin with a new choice for the role of official enemy: migrants.

The Kremlin hadn't actually planned on migrants playing this part. In Russia today, migrants are key to maintaining a cheap labor force

in various economic areas. They are also a key corruption resource for the siloviki and the local authorities, thus providing an important means for the system's survival. The Kremlin fears the rise of nationalism; today nationalist sentiment is anti-migrant, but it could just as easily turn against the authorities at a moment's notice. And in addition to all these reasons, the mass anti-migrant campaign may hurt Putin's plans to create a new Soviet Union under the rubric of the Eurasian Union. Nevertheless, as other means to blow off steam have been played out, and as social dissatisfaction and anger escalate beyond the regime's ability to control them, migrants have become convenient objects of public hatred. The West and America are a long way away, and Russian liberals present such a marginalized segment of the society that they barely register anymore. Thus, migrants, whose appearance and behavior are different from the majority and who are increasingly visible in Russian society, are becoming convenient objects for public animosity.

I repeat: anti-migrant hatred was not initially the Kremlin's plan—far from it! But the rising tide of ethnic clashes between Slavs and representatives of other nationalities (not always migrants) in the regions and in Moscow forced the authorities to think, first, about how to neutralize the tide and, second, about how to use it to their advantage. I would like to remind my readers that citizens of Slavic descent clashed mostly not with migrants but with Russian citizens from the Northern Caucasus: Chechens, Dagestani, and others. As Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyanin admitted in an interview in 2013, “When the Russian citizens demand to solve the problem with migration, they have in mind not the foreigners, but our own citizens from the southern Russian republics [the Northern Caucasus].” The Kremlin has attempted to shift the focus to Central Asians and Azerbaijan natives as enemies. But why migrants from Azerbaijan and Central Asia? Their demonization in the Russian media and political rhetoric are supposed to serve one clear purpose: shifting the focus away from the North Caucasus Russians.

The palpable tension between local populations in the Russian cities and *kavkaztsy* (Caucasus natives) is a result of the two brutal wars that Moscow fought in the North Caucasus. The Kremlin's pacification policy in that region has caused nothing but hatred toward Russia among the population of the Caucasus, especially the younger

generation. Russia has essentially lost the Caucasus—or, more precisely, it has lost its people.

The Kremlin still has not conceded this defeat. (Indeed it couldn't possibly do that, since the second Chechen war catapulted Putin into power and legitimized his rule). So it is now trying to hold on to the Caucasus by letting the local sultans run it. The imperial claims supported through the Kremlin's payoffs to these sultanistic regimes has nursed among the Caucasus natives (again, especially among the younger generations) a sense of permissiveness and a desire for revenge against the Slavs. Here, then, is the problem: rising ethnic hostility in Russian cities is in many ways a reaction to the behavior of the Caucasus natives, which in turn is a product of the Kremlin's policies regarding the Northern Caucasus.

The Kremlin, however, has no desire to admit the true reasons for the rising ethnic and racial hostilities. It does not want to acknowledge the absurdity of Russia's having become a hostage of the ruthless and corrupt regimes of the Caucasus. Instead it has searched for a safe outlet for ethnic hatred, singling out submissive migrants from Central Asia, Vietnam, or Azerbaijan as suitable replacements. Any pressure on or attempts to apprehend the natives from the Northern Caucasus would only increase the tensions in that region, or it would provoke a terrorist response. That is why the Russian authorities have tried to avoid coercive measures against the North Caucasus natives, even when they commit criminal acts.

I have a feeling that the Kremlin authorities are ready to allow Russian nationalist gangs to harass migrants, thus channeling the aggression that is daily growing within society. Even pogroms, I surmise, will be tolerated and used to achieve the Kremlin's tactical goals. The authorities will do everything in their power, however, to prevent the Russian nationalist movement from organizing itself and becoming a political force. The Kremlin wants to guarantee that it alone retains the right to play the nationalist card.

Moreover, the regime apparently believes it loses nothing by making enemies out of the various migrants from Central Asia and other regions. Any anti-migrant campaign will result in the deportation of a few hundred Central Asian citizens; others will take their place as even more

submissive slaves. Their governments do not care how their citizens are treated in Russia. The Kremlin apparently hopes that it can regulate the process of stoking ethnic hatred in a way that will not undermine its imperial agenda and will not make the nationalist tide harder to control.

Unfortunately, provoking ethnic hatred is an expedient device for political consolidation. It is currently being utilized by a wide variety of political forces, even including those who consider themselves part of the opposition. But those who are, for instance, calling for the introduction of a visa regime for Central Asians are merely playing the Kremlin's game. True, Russia will have to introduce a visa regime and create meaningful borders with all of the newly independent states at some point, but it makes no sense to do it now, under the auspices of the current corrupt Russian state. If visa regimes are in fact introduced, they will do little more than provide another opportunity for graft, with border guards and customs officials being foremost among the beneficiaries. Erecting fences between Russia and Central Asia will not eliminate the problem of ethnic hatred, since its main source is the growing alienation of the North Caucasus from Russia. These problems won't be solved with visas and border closings; rather, there needs to be a transformation of the entire Russian state, a regime change, and a resolution of the problem of the North Caucasus.

Meanwhile, the Russian authorities have demonstrated that they have no clue how to deal with the growing interethnic and racial hatreds. The Kremlin decided to hand over all responsibility for interethnic relations to local and regional authorities, threatening to fire those who fail to prevent the ethnic conflicts. The effect of this "remedy" is clear: local authorities will turn to the means they know: violence and corruption.

In short, the mechanism that the Kremlin views as a tool for blowing off steam will instead produce another effect: that of a boiling kettle with its lid on. And in all likelihood the Russian kettle is already boiling...

Let us now see what the polls are telling us about what Russians of Slavic origin are thinking about migrants and the *kavkaztsy*. According to Levada polls in the fall of 2013, when the interethnic clashes reached Moscow, 30 percent of the respondents felt "animosity" toward representatives of the North Caucasus; 25 percent were annoyed by them, and only 3 percent felt respect toward them. Only 19 percent rejected

the slogan “Russia for Russians!” And about 71 percent supported the slogan “Stop Feeding the Caucasus!,” while 62 percent expected bloody interethnic clashes in their regions. Finally, 54 percent demanded a limit to the number of Northern Caucasus natives allowed to migrate outside of their region, while 45 percent made a similar demand regarding citizens of Central Asian countries (that is, actual migrants).

These polls warn us that Russian society has undergone a serious mood change. Interethnic hatred is becoming one of the key explosive factors in today’s Russia. At the moment, the Kremlin is able to keep the rising tide under control. But the genie is out of the bottle...



# 6

## HOW PUTIN IS SOLVING THE RUSSIAN NATIONAL IDENTITY PROBLEM

When a country begins a debate on national identity, one can be sure that *something* is wrong. Either society is unhappy with how it is ruled, or the elite doesn't know how to lead, or both. A national identity crisis is not just a feature of transitional societies or of societies lost in transition. Look at Europe: you will hardly find a nation today that is not thinking about its identity, trying to sort it out in times of globalization, disappointment in the ruling governments, and massive migration that sweeps over the continent.

Russia is an example of a nation that has dwelled on its national identity for centuries, to the point that it has become an elite hobby. Putin returned to the national identity issue in 2012 and again at the Valdai Forum in September 2013—which just goes to show that every time Russian society faces a problem, the Kremlin embarks on a new campaign in search of a national identity.

The logic behind this move is transparent: it's less threatening to the regime, the authorities apparently believe, if society becomes consumed

with a new discussion about “Who are we?” instead of criticizing the authorities for corruption and feckless governance.

Unfortunately, the new “national identity” that Putin is offering Russia is devastating for the country. The national identity concept and the mechanisms that ought to strengthen it in normal societies are usually aimed at consolidating the nation, increasing feelings of “togetherness” among the people, and deepening horizontal social networks. Vladimir Putin’s vision instead offers Russia a return to the “traditional values” that, in his view, have been cemented in Russian civilization over the centuries.

So what exactly are these “traditional values”? In short, they are “values” that justify the absolute dominion of the state and state authorities and the absolute subordination of the individual to the state. This, then, is the Russian tradition. All notions of freedoms, rights, and privacy are alien to this tradition. For centuries the Orthodox Church has been a tool for promoting the idea of the individual’s subordination to the state and those who symbolize it. It is natural, therefore, that official Orthodox doctrine has now become a “traditional value” as well. Regarding the institution of the family, the Russian tradition never really supported it, and one can understand why: family, a traditional value in Western conservatism, means respect for the private life of the home. In this view the family is an institution that functions independent of state influence and control. Thus the Russian state has never really tried to strengthen the concept of privacy. One can see how Western conservatism and the Western understanding of traditional values differ from the Russian versions. The Russian tradition tries to undermine any attempts to promote horizontal communication and consolidation, and it seeks to block the creation of cells or entities that operate outside of state influence.

There is an irony here in that the Soviet Union allowed the existence of at least some of the former Russian intellectual traditions, such as the continuity of Russian spiritual and intellectual life reflected in literature. True, it was distorted by Soviet norms. But Soviet society still read Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky at school. The Soviet Kremlin tried to co-opt the legacy of the great Russian writers and philosophers as an endorsement of their efforts to create a “better” communist future and a justification of the October revolution of 1917. Putin’s Kremlin,

however, doesn't have any use for the Russian spiritual legacy; it needs mental vacuousness, as well as historical and cultural amnesia. This is exactly what the Russian educational system cultivates: the creation of an illiterate nation that doesn't even remember its own great writers.

The Russian authorities are trying to turn a nation into an artificial substance composed of individuals who have lost both the ability and the desire to create social ties and communicate with each other. If the Soviet nation was glued together by the longing to reach the future communist paradise, then the nation that Putin's Kremlin is constructing is "a sand society"—a society of atomized individuals who lack even the basic human longing for family as an institution and form of life.

In this context, Putin's ideal society is the opposite of the ideal Asian society. As Francis Fukuyama wrote in his brilliant essay "The Primacy of Culture," the Asian society has succeeded in preserving "a deeply engrained moral code that is the basis for strong social structures and community life."<sup>1</sup> If Fukuyama is right, in Asia traditional authoritarian regimes could be relatively easily jettisoned and replaced "with a variety of political institutional forms without causing the society to lose its essential coherence."

This is not the case in Russia, which, during the Soviet period, lost social coherence. What Putin's elite has tried to offer Russia today is not "traditional" values, then, but their imitations—semblances of the real thing that can only serve to discredit the values of freedom, solidarity, and mutual assistance that have begun to take root among some segments of the Russian population. Putin's "Russian national identity" has a clear agenda: to undermine the process of transforming individuals into citizens, and to return the nation toward total submissiveness and the status of "poddanye"—that is, state slaves. The Russian authorities try to prevent any popular consolidation on the horizontal level that could turn against the regime. We are dealing here with a concerted effort to grind down the nation into even further degradation. The Kremlin team evidently believes that it would be easier to rule over a demoralized

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1 Francis Fukuyama, "The Primacy of Culture," *Journal of Democracy* 6, no. 1 (January 1995).

society—an “amoral society” even, as the Russian sociologist Lev Gudkov called it. But the Kremlin has forgotten a simple truth: a society without norms and taboos inevitably turns into a Hobbesian society that follows predatory instincts. The authorities can just as easily become victims of these instincts as anyone else. The October 12–13, 2013, rioting in Moscow against corrupt police, local authorities, and migrants under banners of nationalistic slogans was a demonstration of how the Kremlin variety of “national identity” works in practice.

There is a glimpse of optimism and light at the end of this tunnel. The protest tide in Russia in 2011 and 2012 has proved that at least a part of the Russian population is ready to build its own civil identity by opposing the state. But developing a new identity “code” from below when the authorities at the top are busily trying to undermine all social cohesiveness is a difficult process, indeed. Asian society could have an easier fate.

# 7

## THINKING HISTORY: THE IMPORTANCE OF 1991

Every time the anniversary of the 1991 August coup and the defeat of the communist putsch rolls around, the event provokes a kind of consternation in Russian society. The Russian elite does its best to ignore it entirely, because when it is forced to comment, it always stirs controversy.

The August 1991 coup and its defeat is an ambiguous date in Russian history, and this perception is shared by both the public and the ruling class. There is no question that this series of events marked the moment when civic engagement and democratic spirit reached a peak among hundreds of thousands of people (albeit mostly in Moscow). These people came out to defend the Russian White House, the building that housed the Russian Federation's parliament, which they considered the legitimate authority. They rose up against the communist nomenklatura's attempts to drag the country back into the past. This was mass resistance against the old system. In fact, it was a Russian Revolution against communism.

But also coloring people's perceptions today is how this historical episode ended. Out of the "August revolution" of 1991, a new government

emerged, based once again on personalized power, headed by Boris Yeltsin. The regime reproduced the old model, only this time without the communist rhetoric and on a smaller geographic scale. The Soviet Union's collapse was the price paid for keeping Russian authoritarianism in place.

Thus with every remembrance of the August 1991 anniversary, people are reminded that Russia has fallen into the old trap of the personalized leadership model. Back then people took to the streets to demand dignity and freedom, but in the end they handed over the responsibility for achieving these things to a leader, Boris Yeltsin, who betrayed them, as so many Russian leaders have done throughout Russian history.

If you want to understand how perceptions of August 1991 have changed, consider this: today, as many as 10 percent of Russians polled register their support for the communists' putsch, and only 11 percent support Yeltsin. The rest fall somewhere along an ambivalent spectrum. These figures show us how disoriented Russian society feels when it looks at its own recent history and at the roots of the current state. The fact that so few people support Yeltsin, the undisputed winner in that conflict and an early symbol of freedom, is quite revealing of the evolution of perceptions in Russia over time. Society thinks that the August revolution, with its slogans of freedom and democracy, brought them a corrupted state and a new system of personalized rule, and it pains them to be reminded of this historical failure and their own crushed hopes.

This reluctance to face up to the truth about August 1991 extends to the Russian elite as well. This is understandable. After all, it was a popular revolt against a hated government. We can hardly expect Putin's regime to approve of such an attitude toward the authorities. Moreover, the Kremlin nowadays sees the August 1991 collapse as a disaster and looks back to the Soviet past in an effort to build continuity. Even Putin, who received his power directly from Yeltsin's hands, doesn't think of him as a hero.

Like most Russians, Putin apparently views his "Godfather" with mixed feelings. On the one hand, he surely must be grateful to him for handing over such a wonderful present. He shows his gratitude by safeguarding Yeltsin's family interests and security. On the other, Putin has taken pains during his rule to reject any continuity with the Yelt-

sin regime. He has attempted to forge his legacy by presenting himself as the opposite of everything Yeltsin symbolized: weakness, reliance on the oligarchs, and inability to cope with opposition or build top-down rule. Yeltsin is inextricably associated with the wild 1990s and Russia's rapid decline.

This explains why August 1991 in Russia is an anniversary that everyone would rather just forget. The time will come when the Kremlin will create its own myth about August 1991. But not yet: too many people remember what it was and how it ended...

Russia hasn't yet learned how to distinguish the noble surge of civic spirit that the people showed in 1991 from the way the authorities used that surge. The fact that the political class exploited the events of August 1991 in order to take power for themselves does not in any way lessen the achievements and heroism of those who ventured out into the streets.

In commemorating this anniversary, Russians should also seek to understand the lesson it teaches: namely, that revolution ends in victory for the people if the people take to the streets to defend their interests—but not if they just hand them over to an ambitious leader seeking personal power.



# 8

## 1993: RUSSIA'S “SMALL” CIVIL WAR

If you believe that 1991, the year of the collapse of the Soviet Union, was the key date in the history of post-communist Russia, you are wrong! Indeed, Russia, as a new state was born in late 1991 when the Soviet Union went down. But the Russian system of governance, the way Russia is ruled, and the relationship between the state and the society were built two years later—in 1993. We Russians still try to skip over that year rather than deliberate on the dramatic developments that preceded the emergence of the current Russian political order. I guess that we intentionally chose 1991 as the benchmark in our modern, post-communist history simply because it was a less ambivalent marker for understanding. After all, 1991 was the year that marked the real end of the Cold War and the bilateral international system based on the confrontation between the Soviet Union and the West. Such an easy date for understanding! It doesn't provoke any headaches, and it's accepted by the West and, indeed, universally.

But reality is more complicated, and sometimes avoiding headaches means avoiding thinking. The collapse of the Soviet Union led to the

emergence of a new state, Russia, but it did not lead immediately to the creation of a new *system* in Russia. True, for two years the political struggle in 1991 to 1993 allowed us to draw the conclusion (or rather gave us the illusion) that a new political reality was emerging in Russia, and that Russian society was choosing its new trajectory. But the struggle soon ended, and it gradually became apparent that Russia had returned to the old path—to the old system of personalized power.

It's easy to understand why we try to forget 1993. We don't want to dwell on violent struggle, on the shelling of the parliament, and on the bloodshed of October 1993, especially when we still have not decided who was wrong and who was right in those turbulent times. But until we decide what happened in those days, why they happened, and what they mean for Russia today, we cannot build a new Russian identity and we cannot consolidate society. Spain became a modern nation when Spaniards arrived at a shared truth about their civil war.

Russia still has to acknowledge that in October 1993 civil war broke out in Russia. Yes, it was a "small" civil war confined to one city, Moscow, but it was nonetheless a civil war that determined the current Russian landscape.

The confrontation between the Supreme Soviet, the Russian legislature, and the executive power (President Yeltsin) was preceded by a two-year-long story of political deadlock. Some still believe that this deadlock was the result of the mutual animosity between Yeltsin and Ruslan Khasbulatov, the head of the Supreme Soviet. Then why would these two people from the same team that fought together with the Soviet Center suddenly become enemies? There should be a reason for their antipathy.

If you think that October 1993 was a confrontation between reformers and traditionalists, you don't understand the whole truth. While Yeltsin's team included liberals and technocrats, it included apparatchiks and traditionalists, too. And the Supreme Soviet, which had become the headquarters of populist forces, also included democrats and people who had their own ideas about how to reform Russia. Moreover, it was the soon-to-be dismantled Supreme Soviet itself that had approved Yeltsin's emergency powers and economic reform plan.

The confrontation between the two branches of Russian government had structural roots that made conflict inevitable. Just consider:

the Supreme Soviet was an institution left over from the Soviet Union, and it had one more bizarre feature—the nearly thousand-person-strong Congress of People’s Deputies. According to the old Constitution, the legislature was the key power center. When Yeltsin was elected and in November 1991 given (by the Congress) emergency powers for one year, the confrontation between the two branches became inevitable. Both branches wanted to have a monopoly on the levers of power. Thus mutual hostility was strengthened by the mindsets of both sides of the Russian political class. Both teams were striving to guarantee for themselves absolute control over state resources. Neither team was ready to sit down and talk, or to look for compromises; they were ready to fight for power to the bitter end, and with every means at their disposal. There was an economic motivation for the fight, too: the privatization issue and the attempts of both branches to obtain or control the crown jewels, state-owned properties.

Could there have been a peaceful exit from this deadlock? Theoretically, yes. I have in mind a “zero solution,” which would have meant coming to agreement on a new constitution. That constitution would have become the basis of a new state and would have distributed the functions of government, thus forestalling any clashes. The parliament would have voluntarily dissolved, and the president would have stepped down, followed by new elections at the end of 1993. Indeed, this “zero option” was discussed in Moscow. No one could agree to it, however; neither side was ready to share power. It’s worth mentioning here one additional fact: it was Yeltsin who had been desperately trying to liquidate the Supreme Soviet and had even made an unsuccessful attempt to do so in the spring of 1993. It was also Yeltsin who, in the end, decided to use military means to achieve this goal.

After failing to disband the Supreme Soviet in the spring of 1993, Yeltsin made a new attempt to break the deadlock in September of that year by issuing Decree (Ukaz) No. 1400, which dissolved the parliament in favor of presidential rule. The Supreme Soviet decided to resist, with well-known results: Yeltsin ordered the shelling of the Russian White House, the home of the parliament. Even today, however, we don’t know exactly how many people were killed on October 2–4 in the violence on Moscow’s streets and during the shelling of the Russian White House.

According to official sources, 147 were killed and 372 were injured, but eyewitnesses speak of hundreds and thousands killed and injured. It's unlikely we'll know the truth of this anytime soon: too many people wish to keep the truth of the matter in the dark.

This tragedy ended with the adoption of a new Constitution that Yeltsin himself edited. This Constitution became the foundation of the new state and system. In it, the president was to remain well above the fray, unaccountable to anyone, with every means of power concentrated in his hands, and in fear of no opponent or rival. Even Russian czars would envy the power of the new Russian monarch. "We need such a strong executive to proceed with the reforms," Yeltsin's allies used to say. Yet after the adoption of the new Constitution, reforms in Russia stalled.

Looking back at these events, I'm less inclined to view them with any ambivalence: in September–October 1993, Boris Yeltsin and his team performed a coup d'état that resulted in Russia's return to an authoritarian system of governance.

True, during Yeltsin's tenure Russia exhibited some elements of political pluralism and political struggle. However, these elements were not the result of Yeltsin's democratic longings but rather natural consequences of his losing public support and of the weakness of his rule. He didn't have the strength to install a really strong rule. "Yeltsin respected free media and political pluralism," his fans would say. I would retort that he hardly exhibited respect for freedoms and rights; whatever apparent respect he showed to these values was due more to his inability to build authoritarian rule on his own. Yeltsin nevertheless had created a potentially repressive political machine, one that his successor put to much more effective use.

If 1991 opened a variety of options for Russia, including a path toward a rule of law state and an open society, then 1993 closed all options except one. The sole remaining option was a new system of personalized power with no checks, no balances, and no counterweight to the person sitting on the throne in the Kremlin. This outcome was a direct result of the tragic days of October 1993.

How do Russians view these events today? A plurality (about 30 percent) try to avoid thinking about who was right, who was wrong, and who was responsible for bloodshed; instead they explain the confron-

tation as a legacy of the past. “The past,” in their view, is the collapse of the Soviet Union and Gorbachev’s guilt! How Gorbachev could be considered responsible for the drama that took place three years after he left the Kremlin...this absurdity does not register with those who prefer to leave the past dead and buried.

What about the rest? 19 percent say that it was Yeltsin who provoked confrontation; 7 percent say it was the “communist forces and extremists,” and 10 percent blame the leaders of the Supreme Soviet rebellion: Vice President Alexander Rutskoi and head of the Supreme Soviet Khasbulatov. Lastly, 35 percent today think that both forces were responsible for the confrontation.

There is one positive legacy of these events: a majority of Russians (54 percent) think that Yeltsin’s use of force was not justified. Only 15 percent believe that it was necessary.

It would be wrong to conclude that the current Russian political regime was built in 1999, when Yeltsin offered Russia to Putin; nor was it built in 2004, when Putin started to increase his control; nor in 2012, when the Kremlin manipulated the outcome of the elections. Putin’s regime was built in 1993, when, after shelling the Supreme Soviet, Yeltsin installed the new rules of the game and concentrated all resources of the state where they have always been—in the Kremlin. The years 1993–1999 were the period when all those rules lay in wait for a new czar to use them.



# 9

## COULD LAVROV BE RIGHT ABOUT SPENGLER?

In one of his essays, Russian Foreign Affairs Minister Sergey Lavrov, a very talented interpreter of Putin's thoughts and phobias, invoked German historian Oswald Spengler's idea of decay. Spengler lamented that the Western community at the beginning of the twentieth century was losing its moral stance and its desire to defend the human set of values. There is no doubt whose decay Lavrov had in mind by bringing up Spengler. He has specifically told us that he was pointing to the decay of contemporary Western civilization, which, he says, has reached the extent of its lifespan!

Usually I do not find Lavrov convincing, although he is sometimes entertaining and sometimes helps one formulate one's thoughts, if only to oppose him. But this time he may be right. Syria offers a stark demonstration of how the Western community, including the "ideological" states (the states that declare themselves to be the defenders and proponents of normative values), have tried to forget their self-proclaimed mission. By using chemical weapons against his own citizens, Assad has effectively helped the West divert international focus from his predatory regime—that is, from the root

cause of the Syrian tragedy. Rather than deal with the civilizational and political issues that created this situation, the West has chosen instead to treat it as a security problem and a credibility problem (meaning that the Western community needed to perform triage on its battered public image).

“We can’t prevent Assad from his killing his own people,” the advocates of the global P.R. approach would respond. “Just Google ‘Iraq’ and see what happens if the West tries to intervene,” they advise. Western leaders should give thanks indeed to George W. Bush, for giving them an all-purpose, ready-made justification for doing nothing about any particular human slaughter. But is such a “see no evil, hear no evil” approach really helping the West restore its reputation?

Meanwhile, the next chapter in the West’s manual on “Straddling the Fence” should be devoted to Vladimir Putin, who deserves a special place in contemporary history for helping Western leaders save face. For two years, Putin torpedoed Security Council resolutions on joint actions to stop Assad. The Western powers publicly expressed frustration and even outrage over Putin’s spoiler role, but you didn’t have to dig too deeply to discover that privately they were glad they had a pretext not to be dragged into a Syrian trap.

Suddenly (or was it really all that sudden?), Putin presented the West, and Obama personally, with a way out: a plan for putting Assad’s chemical weapons stockpiles under international control. Everybody understood that this solution presents many technical challenges (assuming it’s feasible at all). Everyone also understood that this agreement also does nothing to end Syria’s humanitarian catastrophe. But no matter; everyone was happy! Putin’s initiative has saved political reputations in the Western capitals—at least for now.

Who could have guessed a few years ago that Putin, a leader who uses anti-Western sentiment in his own country, would become the Guarantor of Peace who saved the West from disgrace and internal dissention! President Obama really should give him his Nobel Prize. Viva Putin, Savior of the West!

Does anyone ever ask themselves how many Syrians will be killed while international inspectors are searching for Assad’s declared and undeclared chemical weapons? Has anyone considered how the West’s inability to defend the values it declares will undermine them globally?

In the end, Lavrov’s invocation of Spengler may be absolutely justified.

# 10

## THE NORTH CAUCASUS: THE BOMB UNDER THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION

Imagine if Algeria were a province of France. Now imagine that that province is totally subsidized by the French budget. At the same time, imagine that it is ruled by a local sultan whose praetorians are hostile to the French military. Moreover, these praetorians have a headquarters in Paris from which they kill their enemies and operate a criminal racket. Absurdity! Yet this very scenario exists in Russia. I am talking, of course, about the North Caucasus, a region that hosts a number of sultanistic regimes, at least one of which, Ramzan Kadyrov's regime, is openly defiant toward Moscow.

The existence of the North Caucasus "sultanates" exemplifies the complexities of modern Russia. The country is a half-frozen, half-disintegrated empire made up of vastly different civilizational segments. And the North Caucasus grows increasingly alien to Russia with each passing year.

Russia is desperately trying to figure out how to continue to survive as the Russian Federation. All political forces, not just the Kremlin, view

with fear and dread the ongoing interethnic hatreds and civil and military confrontation that are unraveling the North Caucasus. Logic and historical experience suggest that Russia must move toward the nation state model. Doing this, however, would require further disintegration and territorial contractions, neither of which Russians are ready to accept or even to think about. But while the shrinking of an empire is painful to contemplate, it may be less painful than contemplating the likely end of a half-frozen state with imperialistic longings.

And here we are: the Kremlin is paying a heavy price to pacify, accommodate, and appease the North Caucasus, which is evidence of the Russian state's fragility. The Kremlin's willingness to let local sultans establish despotic rules is a sign that the process of state atrophy is underway. Ramzan Kadyrov's ruthless rule in Chechnya is an invitation for other North Caucasus republics to follow suit. Chechen rule, in fact, amounts to a form of Kremlin-sanctioned anti-constitutional coup because of one thing: the Chechen leader, playing by his own "rules of the game," ignores or rejects the Russian Constitution. It is hard to believe that the Russian Federation, with such anti-constitutional implants, can survive for long. Many observers fear that its disintegration is inevitable. And what comes next?

At the end of 2013 the Russian Duma approved a law that criminalizes attempts to undermine Russian territorial integrity. Prohibited are any actions, including speech(!), that is "directed at undermining the territorial integrity of the Russian Federation." Those convicted of these crimes could be jailed for as long as three years. What this law shows is that the authorities are fearful of current trends and helpless to react to them.

Meanwhile, we may see dramatic developments, the nature of which one hesitates to even consider. One could imagine several truly worrying scenarios, including Kadyrov's praetorians taking part in the struggle for power not only in the region but in Moscow.

There is another problem too, and it is no less dramatic: the North Caucasus terrorism hotbed has morphed into an international network. North Caucasus terrorists can strike in any Russian city. Indeed the unprecedented emergency situation regime that the Russian authorities were forced to adopt during the Sochi Olympics in February 2014 is proof of the terrorists' strength. The majority of those who tuned

in to watch the Winter Games hardly knew that one of the most powerful terrorist gangs, the one led by Doku Umarov from the Northern Caucasus, launched 2,200 terrorist attacks inside and outside the region that killed 1,800 police officers and 450 ordinary citizens from 2007 to 2012 (thousands more were wounded). This is a real war that terrorists are waging in Russia, but it doesn't get all that much attention in the mainstream media.

The North Caucasus is already becoming an international issue. Fighters from the region have shown up in Syria, and terrorists from all across the globe have also come to the Caucasus. The North Caucasus is not just a Russian problem; it is the world's problem.



# 11

## JUNE 12: INDEPENDENCE FROM ITSELF?

Imagine that the United Kingdom chose to celebrate the day it lost the American colonies, or the day it gave up Ireland or India. Or what if Turkey decided to celebrate the breakup of the Ottoman Empire, or France decided to celebrate the decolonization of Algeria? Bizarre? Schizophrenic? Absolutely.

This is why it's so strange that on June 12 Russia tries to celebrate its sovereignty without raising the uncomfortable question: sovereignty from whom? From the Soviet Union? But the Soviet Union was Russia, albeit under a different name. From its former colonies (the Baltics, Central Asia, the South Caucasus states, and Ukraine)? The oddity with this anniversary in Russia is that, despite its celebrating Russian independence from the rest of the Soviet Union, the Kremlin today is trying to re-embrace the "leftovers." This makes the Russian Independence celebration a truly singular event.

You might object. You might say, "Come on! There are hundreds of historical paradoxes, inconsistencies, and historical myths." And you

would be right. But the problem with Russia's Independence Day celebration is that it has become the first link in a chain of mystifications that have tied up Russia in one big Gordian knot! Let me mention only a few of these chain links.

Russia's declaration of independence and the dissolution of the Soviet Union in reality helped the Russian system of personalized power to survive in a new incarnation, with Yeltsin as its embodiment. Usually the collapse of an old state aids in the process of establishing both a new regime and a new rule. In the Russian case, it went the other way.

As for the declaration of sovereignty, that was mainly intended by the Russian political elite as a means of getting rid of Gorbachev and taking over control of the Soviet resources and instruments of power.

Here's another link in the chain. Russian independence helped to freeze the leftovers of the Soviet empire into the new form of the Russian Federation. The current Russian state is not a nation state, nor is it a true empire. Rather it is something vague and amorphous—a swamp of old habits, obsolete moods, and a mentality stuck in an interstitial civilizational space. This ungainly construct can only survive by constantly returning to the past. This is what Putin is now doing by turning to repression in order to prolong the Russian Matrix—that is, personalized power, a mix of power with property, and superpower ambition. I wouldn't put all responsibility for this on Putin; he, too, is a hostage of the system that he created.

Disguising the continuity between the Soviet past and the new regime as a revolution gave birth to the treacherous “new” Russia—a place where liberals serve the personalized ruler, where “reforms” help to monopolize power and property, where “democracy” camouflages authoritarianism, and where cooperation with the West alternates with an anti-Western consolidation of the society, as circumstances dictate.

Let's look at how Russian society views its Independence Day. According to polls, about 50 percent of respondents don't even know what June 12 in Russia commemorates. But nearly half of the population has a vague idea of what the day means. True, over the past decade Russians have begun to approve of Russian independence. That means that they closed a chapter on the Soviet Union and have started to view the new Russia as their state. In 1998 only 28 percent of respondents

considered the “independence” of Russia as a “positive” achievement, whereas 57 percent viewed it as negative. In 2013 we see the opposite trend: 53 percent look at Russian independence as a positive, and only 22 percent as a negative. But this doesn’t mean that Russian society has begun to debate its recent past or think about what the past means to them.

In order to start thinking on how to transform the Russian “swamp,” we Russians must, for starters, come to an understanding of what the beginning of the story really was.



# 12

## THE EURASIAN UNION: BACK TO THE USSR, OR THE UNION OF BLACKMAILERS?

Many perceive the Eurasian Union as a threat—Putin’s attempt to revive the Soviet Union and the Cold War. Others say it’s not so great. So which is it? A myth or real integration project? If the latter is true, then what is the purpose of this project?

Quite a few integration initiatives have been launched in the post-Soviet space. The list includes the CSTO (Collective Security Treaty Organization), the Eurasian Economic Community, the Common Economic Space of Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan, the Union State of Russia and Belarus, and lastly the Customs Union. In all cases, the integration projects were initiated by the *Troika*: Moscow–Astana–Minsk. But each attempt was crushed under the weight of a new and unwieldy bureaucracy.

Credit for the Eurasian Union idea goes to Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev, but Vladimir Putin made the idea of Eurasian integration his mission when he returned to the Russian presidency in 2012. Perhaps Putin wants to go down in history as the unifier of the post-Soviet space, unlike his predecessor, Yeltsin, who is credited with helping

to destroy the Soviet Union. But Putin must also have a more prosaic goal in mind: as the Kremlin's internal power reserves diminish, Putin must fall back on the external reserves of Russian authoritarianism. One of the main power sources is the new imperial idea, which is a popular notion for some in Russia.

At a December 24, 2013, Customs Union summit in Moscow attended by representatives from Armenia, Kyrgyzstan, and Ukraine, the *Troika* announced that in 2015 the Customs Union would become the Eurasian Economic Union. The creators of this new integration project claimed that this union would be like an EU for the post-Soviet space and would serve as a bridge between Europe and Asia.

Things aren't that simple, of course. As of this writing, the *Troika* members have not agreed to a model for integration. Moscow is calling for the creation of supranational political bodies, which would result in member states losing some of their sovereignty. Apparently fearing Russian control, Kazakhstan's Nazarbayev argues that economic integration will suffice. "State sovereignty is an axiom," Nazarbayev says. Another *Troika* member, Belarus President Alexander Lukashenko, has suddenly turned into a critic of the sovereignty concept, saying that it "is not an idol to be worshipped."

Astana also believes that participation in the Eurasian Union should not preclude participation in other integration models. That is what Nazarbayev, who dreams of creating a Central Asian Union, insists on. Lukashenko sees the Eurasian Union as "part of European integration." Meanwhile, Moscow is sticking to cautious statements suggesting that there would be "cooperation with the EU." But the recent Moscow-Brussels battle for Ukraine indicates that the Kremlin considers the Eurasian project to be an alternative to the EU. This is understandable: the idea of Russian Eurasianism, as it dates back to the early twentieth century, has always been directed against Europe and the West. Today the Russian elite view the Eurasian idea as a justification for restoring the Soviet space under a Russian leadership (albeit in a limited form).

It is true that the creation of the Customs Union has brought economic benefits to its members. In the first six months of its existence, for instance, the trade flow between the three member countries increased by one third. But there is no reason to believe that closer

integration would facilitate economic modernization of the member states. After all, their current authoritarian regimes aren't interested in transparency or the rule of law, which are both essential elements of economic modernization.

The ability to coordinate policies between authoritarian states is another serious issue. Ordinarily, democratic states adopt integration models that build relations around agreement on mutually beneficial compromises. Relationships between authoritarian regimes, however, are based on oppression and subordination. Therefore, Moscow would have to compensate other members for their participation in the Eurasian Union, lest their authoritarian leaders use it to advance interests contrary to Russia's. In short, the Eurasian integration model means support for the Kremlin's great power aspirations in exchange for financial, economic, and military payoffs to fellow Eurasian Union members. Such is the nature of Russian relations with Belarus and Armenia, for instance. Indeed threatening to withdraw from the integration project has become Lukashenko's most important resource for maintaining power. According to some analysts, the Lukashenko regime costs Russia \$7-12 billion dollars annually. (Moscow recently promised Lukashenko \$2 billion in low-interest loans.) What is more, accepting money from the Kremlin doesn't mean that the Belarusian leader has to make any concessions to Moscow. Kyrgyz President Almazbek Atambayev has also demonstrated deft blackmailing skills, demanding a \$200 million loan from Moscow, in addition to trade and economic preferences. When he didn't get what he wanted, Kyrgyzstan postponed joining the Eurasian Union. Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich's marriage with Russia has already cost Moscow \$15 billion, as well as discounted gas prices.

The Eurasian Union that Putin is trying to build can be pictured as a galaxy, with Russia at the center and the member states in different orbits corresponding to their varying degrees of dependence. This galaxy is unlikely to hold together, for several reasons. First, Russia's emaciated budget will not be able to continuously support Putin's dream of being a "unifier." Second, as the cases of Belarus and Ukraine demonstrate, national consciousness tends to form faster when a state is dependent on Russia. People in these states seek to free themselves from this dependence, personified both by their own states' regimes and by

the regimes' foreign sponsors. Third, Russians may soon tire of paying to satisfy their elites' imperial complexes.

For evidence of this, I will refer to the study conducted by the European University in St. Petersburg. In a December 2, 2013, *Vedomosti* article, "The Customs Union: the Selfless Union," Professor Yulia Vymyatina, author of the study in question, conclusively demonstrated that Kazakhstan is being harmed by joining the Customs Union (at least for now!). The country was forced to raise tariffs on imported goods, so local consumers had to start buying the more expensive and poorer quality Russian goods instead of the cheaper Chinese ones. Belarus, on the other hand, stands to benefit handsomely from the Customs Union in the short term, but the assistance Moscow provides to Belarus has held it back from initiating economic reforms, thus worsening its overall decay. As for Russia, the Union only produces economic losses. According to Professor Vymyatina, "Russia derives no economic benefits from the creation of the Customs Union, and none are in sight. In fact, there are only costs. Russia loses money directly—by supporting the Customs Union's bureaucratic apparatus—and indirectly—by providing various concessions and credits for the current and potential Customs Union members. The Customs Union caters to the realization of Russia's imperial ambitions—as usual, at the people's expense. As usual, no one asked them." I would add that transforming the Customs Union into a Eurasian economic, and subsequently political, union cannot possibly change the substance of the arrangement while the trends behind its formation remain the same.

Yet, we can see that, as the Kremlin comes closer to its goal of creating the Eurasian Union, it is increasingly employing its propaganda machine to demonstrate to the public the project's great and noble purpose. Unfortunately, some serious political analysts have joined this propaganda campaign. And since they cannot frankly admit that the Kremlin's plan is to resuscitate its imperial aspirations at the Russian taxpayers' expense and to make its neighbors dependent on Russia, they resort to all sorts of rhetorical tricks. They try to persuade us that Russia is not trying to restore the Soviet Union—not at all! There is nothing inappropriate about this project. It is wrong to think otherwise. The Eurasian project, they insist, is actually an attempt by Russia to promote its "cultural,

civilizational, and historical area.” But wait a minute! If what they are saying is true, then what is stated in the official materials of the Eurasian Economic Community is false! In reality, it is not about economics, but rather about promoting a “civilizational area.” But “civilizational area” for Russia translates into imperial ambition and the submission of the individual to the state. In other words, it is all about recreating the Soviet value system in another guise.

Thus, the Eurasian project is nothing but a chimera. It is a post-Soviet authoritarian leaders’ Internationale of sorts, in which autocrats use each other to preserve their rules. The Kremlin plays its neo-imperial role in this project. For the sake of maintaining its great power image, it is willing to pay for the two-faced loyalty of its integration partners even as they shop around for a new sponsor. The Eurasian bubble will burst sooner or later. Meanwhile, the integration myth still works, sustaining the power of corrupt regimes. As the chimera lives on, the twilight overshadowing the post-Soviet space lasts longer.



# 13

## THE PUTIN DOCTRINE FOR *URBI ET ORBI*

What a weird world we are living in. America was hiding behind Russia's back while looking for a solution to the Syrian crisis and is now trying not to irritate Moscow to keep it from hindering Washington's efforts to solve the Iranian nuclear problem. It is the deal with Iran that is supposed to save Obama's reputation at home and abroad.

Things are just as strange in Europe. Having become the main player in Europe, Germany is trying to prove that it is merely a regional state, acting the part of a political dwarf. France and Great Britain, meanwhile, have fled the world stage altogether. True, Paris attempted to take the initiative on the Syrian issue, and it was even prepared to go to war against Assad. But Washington quickly brought it to its senses. As for London, its silence is deafening. It appears that, after Tony Blair, Great Britain has decided not to pursue an active foreign policy.

Just as the other leading players were fleeing the world stage, Putin decided it was his moment to shine. Some mistakenly believe the Kremlin will be satisfied with savoring its short-lived principal role

in the Syrian plan. Nothing could be further from the truth! By the end of 2013 Vladimir Putin had announced that he had entered the world stage for the long haul, and that he intends to change the world. The Russian president made this announcement at the time when the West was paralyzed politically and ideologically, when it had lost its strategic vector and sense of mission, and when Western capitals were filled with pragmatic leaders interested in preserving the status quo and avoiding any global responsibility. All of these factors certainly affected Putin's behavior.

Of course, the favorable international climate was not the only factor enabling Putin to aspire to a global leadership role. There is a domestic component that forces the Kremlin to actively assert itself on the world stage. Although I have written about it numerous times, let me once again remind you of the survival logic of the Russian Matrix. While other leaders focus on internal matters, trying to solve escalating domestic problems (as President Obama has done), the Russian personalized regime has adopted a different model of survival. As a rule, the Kremlin begins its search for a way to distract people from hardship at home by becoming more active in the international arena. That is exactly how Vladimir Putin is acting today. He is trying to consolidate his power externally because the internal resources for such a consolidation (economic, financial, administrative, and social) have begun to shrink. This external focus is facilitated by the fact that popular support for the Kremlin's actions abroad is still strong. (It has always been stronger than the support for the Kremlin's domestic policies.) Thus, Putin's turn outward was predetermined by internal factors. Nevertheless, its success definitely resulted from the West's loss of drive and initiative.

Let us now examine major milestones on the way to formulating a Putin Doctrine for *Urbi et Orbi*. (The Kremlin didn't articulate it all in one go.) I would argue that its origins can be traced back to 2004, the year of Ukraine's Orange Revolution. That was when the Kremlin first expressed its concerns and irritation with the West, as well as its suspicion of Western sabotage in the post-Soviet space. But only a few years later, at the Munich Security Conference in 2007, Putin openly confessed some aspects of his future doctrine, particularly when he unexpectedly (that is, unexpectedly for the Western and American audiences) attacked

American expansionism and accused the United States of violating the rules of the game.

The reset period during Medvedev's interim presidency gave rise to illusions of the Kremlin's commitment to cooperation. In reality, the Russian administration continued to pursue the approach Putin laid out in Munich, although it was not as obvious. After all, it is no coincidence that Putin made sure to distance himself from the reset policy. As one can see clearly now in hindsight, the Kremlin's participation in the "reset" was dictated by its tactical agenda and, first of all, its expectation of "deliverables" that in the Kremlin's view have never been delivered by the U.S. side. President Medvedev's soft appearance and amiable looks deceived quite a few people!

The revision of the Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation, made public in February 2013, was the next step in the Kremlin's calibration of its external outlook and foreign policy objectives. The Concept reflected the "reinvented priorities" previously articulated in large part by Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov. Lavrov elaborated on Putin's Munich course, adding a practical dimension to it. The Concept formulated the Kremlin's new outlook on the modern world. First, the Concept alludes to the continued global financial and economic crisis and the diminished ability of the West to dominate the world economy and international politics—all signs the West's terminal decline, in the Kremlin's view. Then, it mentions the creation of "a polycentric system of international relations." It also talks about global competition that "takes place on a civilizational level, whereby various values and models of development based on the universal principles of democracy and market economy start to clash and compete against each other." In addition, the Concept emphasizes "unlawful use of human rights concepts to exert political pressure on sovereign states, interfere in their internal affairs . . ." Finally, it names "further strengthening of the CIS" as being one of Russia's priorities. This is how the main elements of the international strategy of Putin's Russia were formulated.

Sergey Lavrov set out to elaborate on these elements. In his article, "Russia's Foreign Policy Philosophy" (*International Affairs*, Issue 3, 2013), Lavrov fleshed out Russia's main priorities and presented the Kremlin's take on its own opportunities and the opportunities set

out before the rest of the world. Here is what he had to say: “Having been freed from ideological blinders of the past, we, most probably, understand better than others... the realities of the XXI century.” He is clearly talking about the liberal Western ideology and its representatives. Lavrov maintains that the Western world is doomed, since it has rejected “traditional values” and has tried to “absolutize individual rights and liberties,” which is “a recipe for losing any landmarks both in domestic and foreign policy.” In other words, the Kremlin made it clear that Western democracies are bound to end up dead and buried in a political graveyard.

The president’s September 2013 Valdai speech and December 2013 Address to the Federal Assembly further elaborated the Putin Doctrine. At the annual Valdai International Club meeting, which attracts international experts and mostly retired politicians, Putin added a few final touches and alleviated the suffering of those who had been dizzied by the Kremlin’s constant zigzagging. Is Russia with the West or against it? Is Putin turning to repression or again opening a window for the opposition? Hopefully, those who thought that the Kremlin would keep zigzagging and pursuing its tactical goals will no longer think so. Putin has made matters abundantly clear, thus calling to a close the period of Russian history beginning in 1991—a period that includes part of his own tenure in office, known as Putin-lite. This period had been marked by Russia’s agonizing search for ways to integrate into Europe and forms of partnership with the West. Now Putin has abandoned this “Let’s Pretend!” game and openly turned Russia in the opposite direction. Putin has effectively invoked the doctrine of containment of the West as a civilization. He presented the Kremlin with a version of Churchill’s Fulton speech and Kennan’s “Long Telegram” along with this containment concept. In fact, Putin’s version of containment goes well beyond that of his predecessors in this field. He attempted to legitimate his doctrine by appealing to God. He tried to come up with his own interpretation of universal Christian values and to critique the degree to which the Euro-Atlantic community does or does not follow them. Putin’s Doctrine not only echoes the refrain “in the name of God,” much cherished by Mussolini and Peron; it also sounds like Ayatollah Khomeini’s refrain, “in the name of Allah, the Most Merciful and Compassionate.”

The mere reference to God in support of his arguments leaves us with no doubt as to the path chosen by the Russian regime.

Here are the main premises of the Putin Doctrine. First, he announced the creation of a special “state-civilization” in Russia based on a return to “traditional values” and “sealed” by traditional religions. This is where the Iranian experience might come in handy. What is at the core of this civilization? Of course, it is personalized power: the individual’s submission to the state. (True, the submission isn’t total, since an individual is still allowed significant freedom in realizing his reproductive function.) In short, we are talking about the return to an archaic, militant, fundamentalist autocracy, which now clearly sets itself against the liberal democracies.

Second, Putin was humble enough to declare that Russia is becoming the chief defender of Christianity and faith in God. Putin claims that “Euro-Atlantic countries are effectively embarking on a path of renouncing their roots, including Christian values, which underlie Western civilization.” I wonder if the Kremlin is actually going to coordinate its Christianity protection campaign with Pope Francis, or if it is planning to organize a crusade to promote “traditionalism.” Perhaps we shouldn’t laugh at this notion; President Putin made a strange surprise visit to the Vatican in late 2013, which definitely testifies to the seriousness of his search for partners for a rid-the-world-of-filth campaign. Interestingly enough, back in the day, the Soviet Union was also keen on spreading its ideology around the world. The Kremlin, however, intends to do more: it will try to offer the world its vision of moral values.

Third, the Kremlin announced the creation of its own galaxy in the guise of the Eurasian Union, a collective intended to unify the post-Soviet space and become an “independent center of global development.” The Kremlin’s struggle for Ukraine fully demonstrates its seriousness in pursuit of this goal.

Never before has Putin chastised the West, its ideology, its mentality, and its way of life so blatantly or emotionally. Apparently, he genuinely believes that the West poses a threat to Russia—both on the state level (that is, Russia’s external interests) and on the social level (that is, the Russian way of life). Putin said that the Euro-Atlantic countries are “renouncing their roots” and “negating moral principles.” He spoke

of the West's attempts "to somehow revive a standardized model of a unipolar world." (Was he really trying to make us believe he was talking about Obama, who is trying to hide from the outside world?) The "Euro-Atlantic countries," he continued to press home, are undermining the foundations of "human society"!

It is important to note that Putin didn't stop with critiquing Western civilization. He stated that Russia is becoming the antithesis to the West: the Anti-West, the counterbalance and opposing force to the liberal democracies. True, Putin's set of ideas is not very aesthetically pleasing. It resembles a stew cooked with whatever the chef could get hold of: Sovietism, nationalism, imperialism, and Russian Orthodox fundamentalism. But one can nevertheless see that the essence of the Putin Doctrine lies not only in rejecting the West but also in containing it—both in terms of thwarting liberal and democratic norms within Russia and in thwarting Western political interests in the wider world. We can accuse the doctrine's author of inconsistencies when it comes to his recipes for Russia's state structure. But he is very clear and consistent in what he rejects. He rejects the West as a system, as a way of thinking, and as a way of life.

In his December 12, 2013, Address to the Federal Assembly, Putin further developed the basic principles of this new Russian "conservatism." It has become obvious that the Kremlin is going to assert Russia's uniqueness as the defender of moral values from the "decaying influence" of liberal democracies. In fact, it is not only Russia and its neighbors that the Kremlin is trying to "save" from demoralization by the West, but the entire world, including the West (!). Again, he hurled a stern accusation at liberal democracies:

"Today, many nations [There is no doubt whom he has in mind — *L. Sh.*] are revising their moral values and ethical norms, eroding ethnic traditions and differences between peoples and cultures. Society is now required not only to recognize everyone's right to the freedom of conscience, political views, and privacy, but also to accept without question the equality of good and evil . . ."

At the same time, Putin was confident that "there are more and more people in the world who support our position on defending traditional values." The statement clearly harkens back to the Soviet practice of addressing the world community to create a global base for support of com-

munist values. This time the Kremlin wants to become a World Pillar of Morality!

You may laugh it all off by saying that stagnating and decaying Russia cannot really aspire to become a global actor, let alone the world's moral and political standard-bearer. I disagree. In the current atmosphere of disorientation, one may find quite a few individuals, even in developed democracies, who will say that Putin is right. On the one hand, Putin may be supported from the left—that is by those dissatisfied with capitalism. On the other, his homophobic ideas may appeal to the right, for instance, to Christian fundamentalist voters.

Some might dismiss Putin's statements as little more than empty rhetoric. One might point to the fact that the Kremlin is staffed by rational people who are not ready to commit suicide through confrontation with the West. This is true, as far as it goes. But the fact of the matter is that in the past two years a lot of this rhetoric has been translated into concrete political and legislative form and has been reflected in both Russia's domestic and foreign policy. What is even more important is lack of clarity and certainty as to the regime's intentions. Is it ready to lock the country down and confront the world? This state of uncertainty is far more dangerous than the solid rules of the game that come with an understanding of what the Kremlin regime is capable of. Confusion and uncertainty disorient the world and make the Kremlin's next lurch impossible to predict. Even the Kremlin rulers who deployed this logic appear to have become its hostages. Even they can't necessarily predict where it will drive them.

Besides, when the global order grows unstable, principles no longer matter, "red lines" get fuzzy, world leaders either lead from behind or just plain hide from behind, and windows of opportunity open up for a leader who can ignore rules and act as a spoiler. No one wants to irritate such a leader. Putin is just such a leader, and his time is now. I would bet good money that Beijing is carefully watching Putin's global claims experiment and is probably thinking of how it can write its own, more muscular, and less rhetorical version of the Putin Doctrine.

There are no guarantees that 2014 will be as successful for the Kremlin as the previous year was. It is impossible to imitate power, might, and right for long when one is playing with a weak hand. The ques-

tion is how the Kremlin will act when it will become clear that its offer to save the world has been rejected, when it is no longer treated as first among equals.

So, welcome to the new world! The Kremlin has started to experiment with the new doctrine in Ukraine, which has brought the unravelling of the post-Cold War settlement. The Kremlin has opened the door to the Hobbesian world. The challenge that the West is facing now could be more serious than many in the West are prepared to admit.

# 14

## OBAMA THE RETRENCHER AND WHAT IT MEANS FOR THE WORLD <sup>2</sup>

Barack Obama is the first American president in modern times to cast off American claims to global hegemony and a values-based policy agenda, thus closing off a chapter in the modern world history books. But if we're being absolutely fair, we would have to say that Obama simply added a few final touches to a process of erosion of U.S. leadership that started before he had any say in the matter. Facts on the ground make American hegemony exceedingly difficult to achieve today, if not unattainable. How can the United States aspire to be the world's leader when it is still reeling from an economic downturn? How can it assume the leading role when liberal civilization itself is in crisis? (American institutions "are decaying," as Francis Fukuyama says, while the European Union is stricken with paralysis.) Finally, how can the United States lead the world when the fabric

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2 Lilia Shevtsova, "Obama the Retrencher and What It Means for the World," To be published in *The American Interest*, (June 2014).

of the post-Cold War order, which America was instrumental in creating, has effectively come unraveled?

Admittedly, the world was already headed down a dead-end road on George W. Bush's watch. It was steered in this direction by Schröder and Chirac, with spineless Brussels lending a helping hand. Could Obama have stopped this drift? Perhaps, but only if he had been able to summon the strength of character of the likes of Roosevelt, Adenauer, De Gaulle, or other global titans. But Obama is no titan, so he opted to flee from the world stage. Flight is actually not the worst possible choice. It would have been much worse, for instance, if Obama got it into his head that he is omnipotent, and that the United States is still the global arbiter, without having any idea how to resolve the growing number of global crises.

President Obama's refusal to enforce the normative dimension of U.S. foreign policy will be one of the most prominent aspects of his legacy. The United States turned into a "non-ideological" power under his watch, meaning that the leading liberal democracy did not simply withdraw from its missionary role and democracy-promotion efforts but also showed itself to be unready to offer the world a civilizational alternative. It is precisely the normative policy dimension exhibited by liberal democracies that unites them even as it also separates them from states that limit themselves to geopolitical balance-of-power games. For the first time since the Second World War, the United States has stopped aspiring to be a normative role model. Obama has thus followed in the footsteps of the German leaders who turned pragmatism and transactionalism into a political ideology of convenience. When two leading liberal democracies reject the moral dimension as essential to their global outlook, we can start questioning the trajectory of Western society. In most cases, replacing ideology with a tit-for-tat ideology of convenience will only pay short-term dividends, leaving more serious, long-term problems in want of a solution.

Obama's policy on Russia and the post-Soviet states has clearly demonstrated what the non-ideological approach is all about, and what it leads to. The premise of the "reset" means that in order to achieve its foreign policy goals the Obama administration has decided to turn a blind eye to Russia's domestic developments, thus excusing itself from any need

to react to Russian authoritarianism. The reset did indeed bring some tactical gains, but at what price? The policy contributed to the international legitimation of Putin's rule and made it simpler for Russia to rekindle its great power ambitions. The Eurasian Union, Putin's pet project, partly serves the Kremlin's own needs, but it would have been impossible had the United States not removed itself from the post-Soviet space.

The Russian elite interpreted the reset as weakness on the part of the Obama administration and an invitation to be more assertive in the post-Soviet space and beyond. Here is how the Kremlin logic works: "Obama needs Russia more that it needs America; he can't get to a solution on the Iranian and Syrian questions that will salvage his reputation without our help." Moreover, the Russian ruling establishment may sincerely believe that the West, including its leading power, the United States, is in irreversible decay. Putin declares that "emphasis on rights and freedoms is the recipe for losing a sense of direction in internal and external policies." Russian Foreign Affairs Minister Sergey Lavrov tirelessly repeats his mantra about "ideology that does not answer the reality of the twenty-first century," and applies Oswald Spengler's early twentieth-century warning about European demise to the present-day West. When one constantly talks about Western decay and America's recession, one may even begin to believe in them! Besides, Obama's policy style, which seems premised on the idea of doing everything possible to avoid coming off as assertive, is a sure sign of impotence for the Kremlin crowd.

Anyway, as it happens, the reset did not guarantee cooperation between Russia and the United States. It failed to prevent a crisis last year, when in July 2013 President Obama was forced to cancel a summit with Putin at which he would have been humiliated, or at the very least made to feel uncomfortable.

Ironically, even as Washington has delinked domestic and foreign politics, the Kremlin has linked them. Its foreign policy has become a major instrument for advancing its domestic agenda, which is based on strengthening personalized power. In a broader context, the reset signaled Washington's (perhaps unwitting) legitimation of the post-post-Cold War order in Europe and Eurasia. This order rests on the informal tandem of Germany, the leading European actor, and Russia, which has

begun to reassert its control over the “gray zone” that comprises most of the post-Soviet space, as the West looks the other way. Europe’s and the Kremlin’s tug of war over Ukraine, in which the leading European powers have chosen to limit themselves to rhetoric, ended in Europe’s defeat (at least so far), illustrating for all that the post-post-Cold War order in the region has been established.

The Obama-Putin deal on Syria is yet another indication of America’s drift away from ideological precepts. Washington agreed to reduce the most calamitous humanitarian and political crisis of the day to a technical issue concerning the elimination of chemical weapons. By doing so, the United States relinquished its global responsibility and also implicitly accepted the concept of absolute sovereignty, which has always been promoted by authoritarian states. Thus Washington (!) contributed to the creation of a precedent that enables authoritarian regimes to preserve themselves by blackmailing the West.

The Faustian bargain that President Obama struck with Putin allowed the Russian leader to ride the global tide in 2013. In 1991, America celebrated victory in a confrontation of two nuclear superpowers, albeit as a result of the Soviet Union’s self-inflicted demise. In 2013, America suffered defeat when, in dealing with the world, it renounced the principles that define the West as a civilization. Of course, there is no reason to believe that the Authoritarian International (China, Russia, and Iran)—the “Central Powers,” as Walter Russell Mead calls them—will succeed in filling the void left by the United States. But even short-lived victories, coming as the result of efforts to chip away at “weak spots,” will cost the West dearly.

The reset hasn’t stopped the Kremlin from trying to turn Russia into the antithesis of the West, nor has it stopped it from trying to contain the United States. (Then again, why should the Kremlin have to contain the United States, when the American President is already doing it himself?) Putin has made “traditional values” an alternative to Western values, not only within Russia, but globally as well! Why do you think he rushed to see Pope Francis in Rome in November 2013? He wanted an ally in his global crusade to defend the “traditional values” that, he says, are being “ruined in many countries from the top.” The Kremlin has also revived expansionism by trying to create its own integration

project, the Eurasian Union (in a way, a smaller version of the Soviet Union, but without the communist accouterments). Skeptics call Putin's "We're Back!" project a fantasy, pointing to the advanced state of decay of the Putin regime and to the enormous budget problems Russia faces. Besides, how can Putin talk of containing the West when the Russian elite keep their money in Western banks? It's true that the current Russian political regime is losing ground, but it still controls the situation and Putin's 65 percent approval rating is a figure Western leaders can only dream of (even if it's liable to plummet at a moment's notice). True, the Eurasian Union is a chimera. But so was communism, and it took some time, along with a tremendous waste of human capital, before humanity came to this realization. Yes, Putin's budget is a bust, but he will not retreat from the global stage to take care of domestic problems as Obama did. In fact, the Russian authorities have always done the opposite. They have turned outward to the world as Russia's internal problems have mounted, trying to offset internal weaknesses with external strength. The worse things are at home, the more reckless the Kremlin will be in the international arena. Putin decided to "nationalize" the elite, implying that at any given time he can tell the elite to withdraw their funds from Western banks and sell off their Western properties, thus making his regime less vulnerable to external pressure.

So here is another axiom for your consideration: vacillation and indecision make one's adversary, however lightweight he might be, relatively stronger and more confident. Thus, to a large extent, Putin owes his cockiness and macho style to Obama's retrenchment and indifference to the world.

Some of my American colleagues tell me, "We should ignore Russia if it is too hard to deal with." But this approach will allow the Kremlin to engage in a no-holds-barred fight. Is America ready for that fight?

On the other hand, those who fear the consequences of Western paralysis urge the United States to return to its former role of maximal global responsibility. "It's time to revive Atlanticism!" they proclaim. They want the American president to shed his seeming aloofness and stop shying away from global problems. The United States cannot ride into town like John Wayne and save the world again, for the simple reason that the world has changed. Besides, if America aspired to be an international

arbiter and to reassume the role of a great power, it would have to reclaim its credibility and demonstrate that it has a strategy and knows where it wants to lead the world. Such a reincarnation is not possible while President Obama is in office. How can the president who flip-flopped on important issues so many times prove to everyone that he would not change his mind again and reverse course in a few months?

If, when the United States is under new leadership, it decides to return to a leading role on the world stage, it will find a much less forgiving audience. The United States will have to prove that its behavior is driven by values and not just another tactical trade. Washington has imitated the process of standing up for human rights, democracy, and reforms far too often; the next time around it will have to go to great lengths to prove that its new act isn't just a rerun of the old one.

If President Obama should suddenly start thinking of his place in history, he may want to help Sweden, Poland, and Lithuania in their struggle to aid Ukraine's European choice. Participating in the Ukrainian project will test America's ability to operate within a normative framework, and it will also send a message to an old and tired Europe. It could be Obama's one big chance to change his global image and legacy. Will he give it a shot?

# 15

## UKRAINE'S CHOICE IS A TEST FOR THE WEST<sup>3</sup> (ABRIDGED)

Ukraine has found choosing its civilizational path to be an agonizing ordeal. The Ukrainian elite—not the society as a whole—has presented the biggest problems in this regard. By coming out in great numbers to the Maidan (Independence Square) in 2004, Ukrainians proved that they were ready to defend one of the backbone principles of an open society: the peaceful transfer of power. But the Ukrainian elite (primarily its alleged reform segment) has shown itself to be feckless when it comes to guaranteeing the new rules of the game for the whole of society.

This is not to say that Ukraine could have ever had an easy path; from the beginning it has faced structural obstacles in its choice of trajectory. Ukraine became a state before becoming a nation. In order to shore up its national identity—an essential ingredient for consoli-

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3 Lilia Shevtsova, “Ukraine’s Choice Is a Test for the West,” *The American Interest* (October 31, 2013).

dating society—Ukraine first has to develop one. To do this, it must extract itself from the “imperial body” that once consumed it. This process of detachment from Russia is extremely painful. For Ukraine, developing national identity means writing and rewriting its own past, rejecting many of the mental habits and characteristics it has shared with Russia.

In this regard, Viktor Yushchenko—otherwise a totally ineffective president—accomplished one very important thing for Ukraine: he declared the Holodomor, the great Soviet-induced famine of the early 1930s, to be a Ukrainian national tragedy. By doing so, he essentially started the process of writing the first independent history of Ukraine. This process will force Ukrainians to take a fresh look at their historical heroes and villains, and at those who brought Ukraine into Russia and those who fought against it. We Russians will have to accept this revisionism as a natural part of forming both a new state and a new national identity of a country that was once absorbed by Russia.

The process of forming a Ukrainian national identity will also unearth another issue. In order to completely extract itself from Russia’s “body,” Ukraine will have to find a new reference point. If it wants to move toward modernity, then its only viable reference point is Europe. But moving toward Europe will mean that Ukraine, whose national identity has still not taken shape, must be prepared to have that very national identity dissolved into the greater European identity...

One thing is clear: Ukraine can no longer attempt to sit in two chairs simultaneously. The delicate line it has walked until now has implied commitments to both the European trajectory and to “special relations” with Russia. Leonid Kuchma was especially effective at implementing the “two-chair” policy. Viktor Yanukovich has tried to stick with it, but what was possible even a few years back is out of the question now. The Kremlin’s own choice—to pursue the claim that it is a “unique civilization” and thus to reject integration with Europe—is now forcing Kiev to make its own choice: Russia or Europe? Kiev can no longer share a bed with two partners. There is only one way that Ukraine can be allied with Russia: it has to agree to become Russia’s satellite. As the Belarusian example demonstrates, such relations are not without their compensations—not least among them, a guarantee of the ruling elite’s hold

on power. But the price that the political elite of a satellite state must pay the Kremlin for these guarantees is steep...

However, Ukraine can become a European country only by becoming a democracy. Having started on its march toward this goal, Ukraine will also help Russia by depriving it of the temptation to preserve its old power matrix by dragging its neighbors down into a tighter orbit.

Of course, losing Ukraine would strike a heavy blow against Putin's new model, which places Russia at the center of the Eurasian Union. Russia's personalized power regime requires external support in the form of new imperial claims. These claims provide the regime with additional legitimacy, the semblance of greater power, and more public support from Russian society.

Why does Ukraine play such a role of special importance for the self-reproduction of the Russian system? Because including Ukraine in Russia's orbit helps Russia to maintain its European face. Besides, the Russian political class still considers Ukraine, with Kiev as its capital, to be part of the Russian community—Russia's "younger brother." In the eyes of many Russians, Kiev and Kievan Rus are cradles of Russian Orthodoxy and indispensable parts of its origin story. To many, Kiev is as important to Russia as Kosovo and the fourteenth-century Battle for Kosovo are to the Serbs. This is why the Kremlin has tried so hard to substantiate its claims that Kiev is where the Russian state and official religion originated.

What will become of Putin's Eurasian Union without Ukraine? With the "younger brother" absent, it would clearly be a defective family. This is precisely why the Kremlin will continue looking for different ways to keep Ukraine in its grips...

Will Europe have sufficient political will not only to protect Ukraine from the Kremlin's advances but also to offer some positive incentives for Ukraine's transformation? Or will Europe prefer to avert its eyes as Ukraine falls back into the Kremlin's suffocating embrace? We will soon know the answer. There is no doubt that Brussels' policies on Ukraine will testify to the viability of the idea of a United Europe and to Europe's ability to break free from its current paralysis.



# 16

## UKRAINE HAS NOT YET PERISHED <sup>4</sup> (ABRIDGED)

Over the past year we have witnessed three global developments that have demonstrated the limits not only of the current world order but also of Western civilization's ability to confront challenges to that order. All three developments—the Syrian civil war, the Iranian nuclear problem, and the new Ukrainian rebellion—have demonstrated that at best the West can offer only partial solutions to global problems, if indeed it chooses to face up to those problems in the first place.

One might be tempted at first to pick the first two of these three developments, Syria and Iran, as the ones with the greatest possible impact. But in fact, of all three it is Ukraine's destiny, the destiny of a European nation of 45 million people, that could hold the key to the future of Russia and other "Eurasian" states, which has tremendous civilizational importance. What I mean by this is that Ukraine and its near- to medium-

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<sup>4</sup> Lilia Shevtsova, "Ukraine Has Not Yet Perished," *The American Interest*, (December 2, 2013).

term future will give us answers not only to the question of whether or not Russia will continue to see itself as an empire, but also to the questions of how committed Europe is to the values it espouses, and how far the West is prepared to expand its influence, if it is to expand at all.

The recent Eastern Partnership saga, culminating with Ukraine's decision to ditch the Association Agreement (AA) with Europe at the Vilnius EU summit on November 29, is a dramatic story with many plot twists: desperate clinging to power, bluffing, predatory instincts, attempts to survive by bullying, naïveté, a lack of strategic thinking, and the drive for dignity and freedom. The lessons of this saga must still be learned if its disastrous repercussions are to be avoided...

To be sure, the Kremlin has indeed been harassing Kiev. In August 2013, it even staged a dress rehearsal of what would have come if Ukraine had signed the pact, blocking the export of Ukrainian goods to Russia. But were these tactics anything more than what everyone had already expected of Putin? Hardly. The Kremlin had made it abundantly clear that Russia was ready to pursue a new foreign policy doctrine: the revival of the Soviet foreign policy posture—the “Brezhnev Doctrine,” in fact, adapted for new times. This recycled “Putin Doctrine” seeks to create for Russia a galaxy of satellite states. Establishing this galaxy is essential to the survival of the personalized-power matrix; Ukraine, which has always been the jewel in the Russian crown, would not be forgotten. Beginning with the August (2013) trade war with Kiev, Moscow has been showing the world what tactics it will employ to promote this doctrine. At any rate, there wasn't any confusion in Moscow about its plans for Ukraine; both Kiev and Europe had plenty of time to prepare for the Moscow offensive and to plan measures that could have at least neutralized the Kremlin's assertiveness.

Yanukovich's role is another factor that has impacted the situation. Naturally, he is trying to ensure his re-election in 2015. This motive, more than Ukraine's national interests, has guided his actions so far.... Just before Vilnius, Yanukovich concluded that European integration would not guarantee his electoral victory and so decided to fall back on Putin's formula of preserving power by appealing to traditionalist voters. This could have been his plan all along; his longstanding refusal to endorse the most important laws from the Eastern Partnership agen-

da—the ones that could have undermined his monopoly on power—suggest this possibility. Traditionalist voters demand a union with Russia and retention of the old rules of the game, including the paternalistic state. In this case, then, Yanukovych's preferences coincide with the preferences of this archaic segment of the Ukrainian electorate.

None of this is to say that pressure from Moscow did not also play a role. “Moscow is pressuring me,” Yanukovych complained to everyone in Vilnius. “Ukrainian FM Kozhara in our discussions confirms that Ukraine has succumbed to severe Russian economic pressure in postponing EU agreement,” tweeted Swedish Foreign Affairs Minister Carl Bildt. Again, yes, there has been and there will be pressure from Moscow, and cajoling too! But the Kremlin simply helped Yanukovych to make the choice—or rather to justify the choice he had already made—that was most likely to preserve the regime. In this situation Putin has been instrumental in helping Yanukovych to achieve his personal agenda.

If Yanukovych thinks that, after winning the 2015 elections with the help of the paternalistic base and the Kremlin's neutrality (or even support), he will have a broader field for maneuvering and can turn to Europe, then he is wrong. Will Europe be eager to sit down at a table with a man who just gave it a slap in the face? Hardly. Will Putin be inclined to let him off the hook easily? Hardly. And will the Ukrainian people give him breathing room? Hardly. And with respect to this last question in particular, Yanukovych has successfully provoked the most active part of Ukrainian society, including even part of the elite, to rebel against his rule.

Finally, Vilnius has demonstrated the extent of the West's paralysis and loss of mission. Yanukovych's behavior shocked the unprepared Western capitals; this only shows how little they understand the processes underway in Kiev (and in Moscow). A couple of weeks before Vilnius, the West was sure that its Ukrainian jewel was about to be ensconced in the European crown. The West continued in its complacency even after Moscow began to intimidate Ukraine. If the West wanted to embrace Ukraine, and if it didn't want to ready an economic package as a safety net in case Moscow began to tighten the noose, then its leaders could have at least escalated their rhetoric in defense of Ukraine. Did Merkel call Putin to say “Keep your hands off Ukraine!”? Did U.S. leaders—at least Vice-President Biden—place a call to Yanukovych to talk him

through his hesitations? One may doubt whether this would have had any effect on Moscow's position, since the Kremlin is used to Europe's inability (as the Kremlin sees it) to match Russia's skills at hardball. But it was at least worth a try.

Berlin, a principal European actor immersed in its own problems, proved unable to consolidate the European position or react to the pressure from Moscow. As a matter of fact, it was the lack of strong German support for the robust Eastern Partnership that made the project vulnerable from the very beginning.

One more factor must be mentioned: in many ways, Kiev's behavior was also the result of the absence of an unequivocal position in Washington. The American reaction to Kiev's refusal to sign the agreements was too little, too late, and it only reconfirmed America's lack of interest in the region. The United States made the mistake of ceding to Europe the task of trying to integrate Ukraine into the West.

Not only were Western leaders late in reacting to the Ukrainian developments; there is an even more substantial problem: the systemic weakness of the Eastern Partnership project itself. The Polish and Swedish initiative to create the Eastern Partnership was no doubt a positive step that proved that these two countries care about what is happening in the eastern part of Europe. But the program, at least after it passed through the Brussels "pipeline," was structured with incompatible goals, leading inevitably to paralysis. First, the Eastern Partnership became hostage to the European Union's reluctance to irritate Russia. Second, Brussels focused on cooperation with authoritarian and semi-authoritarian governments, or with governments (like Ukraine) that have begun to move toward personalized rule. Third, bureaucratic and technocratic approaches prevailed. Fourth, the free trade zone and visa facilitation mechanisms have proved insufficient spurs for political liberalization. As the experiences of Azerbaijan and Belarus showed, the Eastern Partnership program did not prevent member states from moving toward harsh authoritarianism. Fifth, the Eastern Partnership lumped six countries together that had little in common beyond the fact that they were post-Soviet. Each is moving along its own path. Sixth, European leaders went too far in making it clear that the Eastern Partnership wasn't a guarantee of EU membership, which begs the question: what does it lead to?

Just as was the case with the EU-Russia partnership, instead of encouraging the new rules of the game in the spheres of administration and government, the Eastern Partnership became a support factor for the initiatives spearheaded by increasingly undemocratic and illiberal regimes.

It has now become evident (regrettably, not evident for everyone!) that one of the major premises behind the Eastern Partnership is wrong. I have in mind the fact that many in Europe believe that the Eastern Partnership should serve as a bridge between Europe and Russia. They keep saying that the Partnership should not be treated as a zero-sum game, and that its members can be involved in alliances with Russia. But is this “driving two horses” act possible when the Kremlin has declared that Russia has to be a “unique civilization,” ready to contain the demoralized Western system?! If this is the case, then no matter how much Brussels wants to avoid it, zero-sum politics with Russia is unavoidable. We are dealing with two civilizations built on incompatible principles. Moscow itself has put an end to the ambiguity. That means that the new independent states can no longer play at being simultaneous partners with both Moscow and Europe.

In truth, I am not only talking about a geopolitical choice for Ukraine and for other newly independent states, but also about a civilizational choice. Europe, it appears, is not ready to frame the question in such terms. Doing so would have forced the European Union to alter its approach to Russia, which it is not prepared to do.

In short, Europe’s error lies not in forcing Ukraine to make a choice, as some analysts have suggested. Europe, rather, has erred by failing to convince Ukraine to make the right choice, and by failing to provide Kiev with additional incentives, including financial ones, to help its political leadership make this choice.

If Europe proceeds in its current bureaucratic mode, rejecting normative dimensions and trying to be pragmatic, it is bound to lose to Moscow in the struggle for influence over the newly independent states. Moscow has learned to play such games much more effectively. Thus, Europe has to choose a new strategy.

What will that strategy be? The European Union needs to diversify its relations with the Eastern Partnership member states (Azerbaijan and Belarus should be treated differently from Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine;

dealing with Armenia possibly requires yet another approach). The principle of conditionality should be stressed (loans and assistance should be granted as a reward for accepting new rules of the game). The European Union must engage in a dialogue with civil society and assist in its development. It should not limit itself to dealing with the state. Fortunately, the Kremlin is doing everything in its power to force Brussels out of its political lethargy.

Ukrainians fighting for the chance to make a European turn are giving Europe a chance to renew its mission and help Ukrainian society. The most important help Europe can give is to prevent confrontation and violence and help Ukrainians find a peaceful road map out of the current political crisis.

Moscow, of course, is watching the Ukrainian developments now with dread and fear. In 2004, the Orange Revolution forced the Kremlin to turn to openly authoritarian rule. Today a new tide sweeping across Ukraine could force the Kremlin to ramp up even more the crackdown inside its own borders and its assertiveness outside the country in order to stem the tide of anti-Russian anger. But as the Ukrainian example shows, the suicidal statecraft of corrupted regimes ends in the people's anger sooner or later. Keeping these tides from growing into a tsunami of violence could be Europe's new mission in the region.

# 17

## AFTER YANUKOVYCH: TEN CHALLENGES FOR UKRAINE <sup>5</sup>

The corrupted and criminal regime of Yanukovich collapsed. However, it is too early to say that Ukrainians finally won. It isn't clear how long the uncertainty over Ukraine's new trajectory, new government, and new system will last. True, the challenges that the country is facing are more obvious. Here are a few of the major ones.

1. *On the Ukrainian Revolution.* So far, the Ukrainian rebellion has only caused the Yanukovich regime to fall. There are grounds for concern that the rebellion will eventually result in just another regime change, followed by the return of the old clannish system. The oligarchic groups will again be represented by the 2004 opposition (including Yulia Tymoshenko), which is responsible for establishing the corrupt oligarchic system in the country. Besides, the leftovers of the Yanukovich regime

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5 Lilia Shevtsova, "After Yanukovich: Ten Challenges for Ukraine," *The American Interest* (February 27, 2014).

represented by the Party of Regions retain strong positions in the south and east of Ukraine, preserving the threat of counter-revolution.

2. *On the Maidan.* One of the great achievements of the protests was the emergence of a nationwide, grassroots political organization. The new opposition, which bears no responsibility for the past wrongs, is still not influential enough; thus the Maidan remains the only force that can stop the country and its political elite from reverting to its corrupt past. Calls for disbanding the Maidan, issued by the representatives of the forces who took power, testify to their intention to make themselves unaccountable to the public. Another scenario—co-opting the Maidan forces into state structures—would also make it impossible for the people to control the government, since there is still no strong opposition independent of oligarchic influences.

3. *On the reforms.* Apart from changing the ruling team, Ukraine has to change the rules of the game. The return to the 2004 Constitution does not guarantee the creation of a rule-of-law state. The parliamentary system may become a convenient tool for advancing the interests of the oligarchic clans. It should come as no surprise, then, that the pro-Russian lobby supports this constitution. Only a government of national trust, one untarnished by past misdeeds, and one that includes people ready to sacrifice their political ambitions, can implement painful reforms. The interim government, formed with the approval of the Maidan, seems to be an attempt on the part of the opposition to create a government trusted by the people. True, the results of this experiment are unclear.

4. *On the old regime.* Some in the West oppose the prosecution of members of the Yanukovych regime. The new regime is certain to discredit itself if it fails to purify itself and lets Yanukovych's accomplices from the Party of Regions join the new authorities.

5. *On legitimacy.* Given the collapse of all other institutions, the Ukrainian Parliament—Verchovna Rada—has naturally become the main governing body. During the Velvet Revolution in Poland, the Old Sejm also became the political institution responsible for legitimizing the transition to the new system. However, preserving the Rada, which served as a tool of the repressive old regime, will undermine the new regime's credibility. Thus, there is an urgent need for new parliamentary elections within the shortest time period possible.

6. *On the West.* Western governments demonstrated a lack of coordination in their policies toward Ukraine. They had no political will to deal with Ukraine's problems. The paralysis of the West in many ways exacerbated the crisis and prompted Yanukovich to turn to repressions. The agreement signed by the opposition and Yanukovich on February 21, under pressure from the French, German, and Polish foreign ministers, further illustrates the failure of Western policies. The agreement, which was to prolong Yanukovich's rule until the end of 2014, was rejected by the Maidan, bringing a much swifter end to the dictator's regime. Nevertheless, the West continues to seek to return stability to Ukraine by supporting forces associated with the old system only because they are known in the West. The West is urging Ukrainians, in the words of a *New York Times* editorial, published on February 24, 2014, "to include Russia in the transition, both to prevent the Kremlin from undermining any rescue plan and to reassure Russian-speaking Ukrainians that the West is not promoting a government dominated by nationalists." Including the Kremlin in the transition is a sure-fire way to derail it!

7. *On Russia.* Moscow remains the main foreign policy player on the Ukrainian stage, and its intentions with respect to Ukraine are quite clear. As part of its efforts to keep Ukraine in its orbit, the Kremlin has proved that it is ready to undermine the integrity of the country. We should give the Kremlin's political technologists their due. The Kremlin is supporting Ukrainian separatism and making harsh pronouncements, thus extorting the West and the Ukrainian regime with the threat of destructive possibilities in order to force them to recognize the Kremlin's interests. Few would believe that Moscow would want to deal with the pain associated with partitioning Ukraine and annexing Crimea, whose Tatar natives could turn it into another Chechnya. Every rational person would say that the turmoil in Crimea, clashes between the Crimean Tatars and the pro-Russian activists in the Crimean capital, Simferopol, and the readiness of the Crimean Tatars to form self-defense units would turn the peninsula into zone of confrontation and war. But Moscow decided to cross the red line, de facto annexing Crimea and trying to destabilize the southeastern regions of Ukraine. The post-Cold War settlement has collapsed, which will have implications difficult to predict.

8. *On Ukraine's exit from the crisis.* Ukraine is juggling two conflicting goals: it needs to construct a new system while preserving the integrity of the country. To accomplish both of these goals at the same time, Kiev will have to compromise. But abandoning painful reforms to please the paternalistic southeast will also undermine the integrity of the country. The new government will have to win the trust of the people in its southeastern regions.

9. *Guarantees for Ukraine.* Europe must reassure Ukraine of its prospective EU membership, provided Ukraine satisfies the membership requirements. But the Ukrainians need massive, internationally monitored assistance right now to help them survive. Besides, the country needs international guarantees of its territorial integrity. The easiest way is to return to the Budapest agreement of 1994—which was signed by Russia, Ukraine, the UK, and the United States, and which guaranteed Ukraine's security and territorial integrity—and adapt it to the new situation. Russia should participate in this process. These discussions will not be easy—but the very fact of their taking place would signify recognition of the problem. Any “Finlandization” scenario for Ukraine would bring the country back into the gray zone of uncertainty that it has occupied until now. Besides, the Ukrainians will treat any negotiations of their country's fate between Russia and the West without Ukraine's participation as a replay of the 1938 Munich Agreement.

10. *On the post-Soviet model.* Ukraine experienced a crisis of the post-Soviet model, which is characteristic of other post-Soviet states (except for the Baltic countries). Thus, the path Ukraine takes to overcome this crisis will have implications for all of these states. If the Ukrainian revolution is aborted, it will not only be a result of the Ukrainian elite's inability to think strategically, or of Russian interference, but also a result of the West's inability to understand the need for radical change in this country and to support it effectively. In this case, the Ukrainians have learned what they needed to do to express themselves by means of public protests. Hopefully the Ukrainian elite now understands the high price of repeating its old ways of doing the people's business.

# 18

## THE UKRAINE CRISIS: FALLING INTO PUTIN'S TRAP<sup>6</sup>

I never expected so many intelligent, perceptive, and influential media and political personalities to fall so easily into Vladimir Putin's trap. After the initial shock to the world, and especially to the West, following Moscow's announcements about the possible use of Russian armed forces in Ukraine, and then after being forced to acknowledge that Russia has already occupied Crimea, the West breathed a collective sigh of relief upon hearing Putin's March 4 press conference, where he suggested Russia doesn't have any plans to seize eastern Ukraine. I intentionally waited a while to make sure that this would indeed be the prevailing Western reaction after the dust settled—and it was. Western capitals felt encouraged by Putin. In the *New York Times*, Peter Baker confirmed that “American officials took some solace” after hearing Putin's explanations.

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<sup>6</sup> Lilia Shevtsova, “The Ukraine Crisis: Falling Into Putin's Trap,” *The American Interest* (Published on March 10 and updated on March 27, 2014).

One may suppose that the Europeans, who are much more inclined to forgive Putin than is Washington, have felt more than just relief, but actual satisfaction, at the news.

When it became apparent that Moscow was hurriedly attempting to annex Crimea through a “referendum” scheduled for March 16—in the presence of thousands of Russian troops—some in the West have grown nervous once again. They were wondering why the Kremlin was in such a hurry, and why it was acting so crudely, without even pro forma attempts to clothe its naked aggression. But they did not need to wonder. By now it’s obvious that both Europe and the United States, unable to reverse the course of recent events and unwilling to pay the price for restraining Russia, are ready to participate in Putin’s gamble. Until recently, stunned and appalled, the Western capitals have been merely reacting to the Kremlin’s moves, however belatedly or inadequately. But now the liberal democracies seem prepared to accept the new status quo—that is, to recognize the Russian annexation of Crimea as a *fait accompli*, since they do not dare force Russia to back down. They are now focused on stemming Russia’s expansion to Ukraine’s eastern and southern regions, apparently fearing that anything but acceptance of the new geopolitical reality will result in a much more dreadful outcome. Let us clarify what this reality is all about.

First, it is about the destruction of the post-Cold War world order. This order was based on the premise that Russia and the West are not in the business of “containing” each other anymore, and that both support the principle of the territorial sovereignty of the independent states that emerged from the break-up of the Soviet Union. Moscow began to destroy that order as early as its 2008 war with Georgia, followed by the virtual annexation of Georgia’s breakaway territories, Abkhazia and South Ossetia. No less than President Nicolas Sarkozy, during France’s term of presidency of the European Union, ratified and legitimized the Russian occupation of Georgia’s territories. And Moscow’s interference in Ukraine’s internal affairs and its use of force in dealing with Kiev dates back to the Kremlin’s trade war against Ukraine in August 2013. So there’s nothing new or strange in the West’s inability to find a convincing way to react to Russia’s moves. Moscow concluded some time ago that it was free to take additional steps toward establishing the new order.

Second, it is about more than just setting a precedent allowing the Kremlin's direct interference in the affairs of a sovereign state. Not only did its behavior validate the presence of Russia's spheres of influence, thanks to the lack of meaningful Western reaction, but the Kremlin also reintroduced the "doctrine of interference" under the pretext of protecting the "Russian-speaking population." Since Russian speakers live in most of the newly independent states, this "doctrine" threatens the stability of the entire post-Soviet space. Even Russia's willing partners—Belorussian leader Lukashenko and Kazakh leader Nazarbayev—understand the looming threat to their countries' territorial integrity, and so have stubbornly refused to support the Kremlin "solution" for Ukraine.

Third, it is about paving the way for the second stage of Moscow's plans, which is to bring southeastern Ukraine under Russian control. This would make Ukraine a failed state and zone of instability, which will serve as an invitation to Moscow to "stabilize" it. One should even expect there to be Western supporters of Russia's "moderating" role. Indeed some have already hinted that Moscow has its "interests" in the regions that have to be "accommodated." And Moldova is likely the next target. In short, Eurasia is entering a period of instability.

I would argue that, so far, the Western political community has demonstrated a rather simplistic understanding of Putin's psyche and goals, and this has made it easier for the Kremlin to carry out its agenda.

Here is a sampling of Western explanations for Putin's mindset and goals, proffered by various politicians, analysts, and journalists:

- "Because Putin can."
- Because of "Putin's appetite for expansion."
- Because it's a "land grab."
- Because "he wants Ukraine back."

(If these explanations are true, then why is he only trying this now? And why was he interested in Ukraine, specifically, rather than, say, Moldova?)

- "Because Putin is afraid of NATO expansion."  
(But NATO currently has no plans for expansion.)
- "To prevent clashes between the nationalists and the pro-Russian population in Crimea and the East."

(But there had been no such clashes, until Russia got involved.)

- “To protect the Russian-speaking population.”

(But why, then, hasn't Moscow shown any enthusiasm for protecting the Russian speakers in Central Asia, where their rights are genuinely being violated? And why is Moscow so interested in this group's fate in Ukraine at this particular time?)

- “To recreate the Soviet Union.”
- “To start a Cold War with the West.”

(In my view Putin hardly looks the part of an insane person who has totally lost contact with reality. He hardly wants to rally the world against Russia to fulfill some sort of bizarre dream of going down in flames with his country. Besides, the Cold War actually had some rules that both belligerents observed; the Kremlin has demonstrated that it does not respect any rules.)

As you can see, there are major questions about most of the popular explanations offered to explain the recent events in Ukraine. I do not claim to have a monopoly on the truth on this or other questions. We political pundits have demonstrated how pathetic we are, not just when it comes to making adequate forecasts of developments in Ukraine, but also when it comes to explaining what is happening in real time. We all could use a healthy dose of humility when discussing these developments. With that in mind, I would suggest the following explanation of the Kremlin's motives and its agenda regarding Ukraine.

Annexing Crimea is not an end in itself for the Kremlin, nor is partitioning Ukraine. These are just means to a more ambitious end. The Kremlin's intervention in Crimea and involvement in the destabilization of southeastern Ukraine exemplifies the Putin Doctrine, formulated by the Kremlin in 2012 to 2013. One of the goals of this doctrine is to find ways to reproduce the traditional Russian state and Putin's regime, and to respond to new domestic and international challenges. This doctrine is based on three premises: Russia is a “unique” civilization and must contain the demoralized West; Russia can only exist as a galactic center, around which orbit satellite-statelets; Russia is the civilizational pillar whose mission is to defend “traditional values” globally.

Many have viewed the Putin Doctrine as an exercise in empty rhetoric, but Putin has proved that it is the real thing. He has also proved that foreign policy is now the key instrument serving his domestic agenda.

What a lesson this has been for those Western politicians who believed they could rest their Russia policy on the basis of “de-linking” domestic and foreign affairs!

We need to keep in mind that, even if a new imperialism and a hunger for land are behind Russia’s recent actions, they do not fully account for the brashness of the invasion, nor for Moscow’s open rejection of all accepted norms and principles of international order. The invasion and destabilization of Ukraine are Moscow’s means of pursuing not just the geopolitical goal of guaranteeing influence, but a civilizational goal as well: eliminating the very idea of the Maidan as an alternative to the Russian Matrix (namely, the Russian personalized power system and the individual’s subjugation by the state). In the Kremlin’s view, the Maidan is the Absolute Evil, which must be erased permanently and utterly, with the utmost cruelty. The Kremlin’s Ukrainian campaign is thus a *preemptive strategy* with the ultimate goals of reproducing and preventing any threats to the personalized power system in Russia and the post-Soviet space. I also think that the flagrant and aggressive beating to which Putin has subjected Ukraine has certain psychological underpinnings. We might surmise that they also come from a desire to humiliate the Ukrainian state and nation, to both punish and terrify—*pour encourager les autres*, including Russians. In fact, Putin is demonstrating the judo style his coach once described: “You have to hit first and whack down the opponent to scare the hell out of him, forcing him to accept your domination!”

Actually, the Kremlin’s tactics against Ukraine are the same ones it used against the Bolotnaya protesters in Russia: the government will use both psychological and physical terror tactics to ensure dominance and guarantee obedience—both here and over there. This is an up-to-date version of the Brezhnev Doctrine used in 1968 against Czechoslovakia, an aggression that was also meant as a warning to Soviet society.

Ukraine has long been Putin’s personal project. The site of a stinging rebuke during the 2004 Orange Revolution, Ukraine now presents an opportunity for the Kremlin to exact revenge for both past and present Maidans, to teach the rebellious Ukrainians a lesson, and to warn Russians about the price of insubordination or attempts to escape the Russian Matrix.

Yet another angle: Russia is warning the West, “Don’t meddle—this is our playground!”

But this is not the end for the Kremlin’s agenda. Ukraine is supposed to test the West’s ability to accept Putin’s rules of the game. Let us not forget that this test has already been conducted once before, in Georgia. Moscow’s decision to take over Crimea indicates that Putin has concluded that the West is ready to accept the Putin Doctrine, or that it can be persuaded to do so. The chain of recent Kremlin statements and steps—Putin’s March 4 press conference; various comments by Kremlin officials, including Putin’s press secretary and the minister of Foreign Affairs; Kremlin press releases summing up Putin’s talks with Western leaders (and first of all with Obama)—all signal the start of a new phase in Moscow’s self-affirmation of its civilization-state status. This new phase will be characterized by a combination of “hot” and “cold” tactics: constant threats to use force beyond Russian borders, as well as a wide range of administrative, financial, and other pressure mechanisms.

It’s ironic that the Western leaders have been discussing “face-saving” options for Putin—moves that would allow him to voluntarily “de-escalate” the crisis. Escape valves are the last things on his mind: he’s looking for ways to destroy the West’s reputation and to force it to accept his way of dealing with the world. What the West is treating as a pause, perhaps even as a prelude to retreat, is in fact a new stage in the Kremlin’s offensive.

Just look at the Kremlin rhetoric: at his press conference on March 4 the Russian president delivered an ultimatum to both Kiev and the West. But this ultimatum, which has been repeated by Russian officials non-stop since Putin first uttered it, is itself a safety valve for the West—couched in rhetoric allowing Western leaders weary of the Ukrainian headache to accept it without completely embarrassing themselves.

Since March 4, Putin has repeated his former position on Ukraine more than once that the current Kiev regime is not legitimate. But he hasn’t stopped there. He has also charged that Ukraine has been supplanted by a “new state” whose legitimacy he has also called into question. Moreover, he has listed several terms under which he is ready to deal with Kiev. These terms go beyond a desire to control Ukraine’s foreign policy. Now Moscow is even telling Ukraine how to build its state, by calling for a constitutional change and a referendum, and by

calling on Ukraine to accept the February 21 agreement, which would return Yanukovich to power. These are the kinds of demands one would issue to a protectorate or a colony.

Besides, Putin has openly referred to the possibility of a military option if his demands are ignored. He has also reminded us that Russia has other instruments for influencing Ukraine at his disposal. When Putin mentioned that “Russia will not be sidelined if the Russian speakers are persecuted,” he alluded to the influence Russia wields over gas prices and over Ukraine’s debt. He’s perfectly willing to cooperate with the “legitimate” Ukrainian regime, just as once he cooperated with the Timoshenko government—as long as this cooperation is on the Kremlin’s terms.

In short, the Russian president made it clear that Russia will not be satisfied with grabbing Crimea. (Who really cares about Crimea in the Kremlin?) Russia isn’t about to loosen its grip on Ukraine. He has dangled possibilities in front of the West’s nose (for instance, he won’t send troops into Ukraine unless it is absolutely necessary!) in order to get it to be more receptive to the Kremlin’s other demands. Putin has essentially asked the West to turn a blind eye to any further moves by Moscow to establish its control over Ukraine. He even suggested that the West take part in “normalizing” the situation in Ukraine in conjunction with Russia. It is quite possible that the Kremlin believes (or has grounds to believe) that the West is ready for a repeat of the 1938 Munich Agreement and the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact.

According to the press release the Kremlin issued after the nearly hour-long conversation between Putin and Obama on March 7, the Russian President said, “These relations should not be sacrificed to differences over individual—even though very important—international problems.” Translation: “What’s done is done. Accept it, and we’re ready to discuss other problems. But you need to understand that the world has changed.”

Even the West’s current goal for the Ukraine crisis, to “de-escalate” the situation, is perceived in Russia not as a demand to return to the *status quo ante*, but as an effort to stop any further expansion by Russia. In other words, Moscow believes that the West recognizes and tacitly accepts the new situation. But if the West is ready to recognize one alteration to the status quo, why not another?

In his Address to the Federal Assembly on March 18, Putin even stated that Russians and Ukrainians are “one nation”(!) and “we can’t live one without the other.” This statement could only be interpreted as the rejection of the right for Ukrainians to have their own state.

Meanwhile, all the talk in the West about sanctioning the Kremlin has only served to strengthen Putin’s belief that the West will not dare to really hurt his regime. The first round of the Western sanctions became an object for mockery in the Kremlin and the Russian establishment. All of these sanctions—from imposing visa restrictions to freezing the assets of a limited number of people in the Russian elite—don’t inflict any pain on the Russian political class. The visa restrictions on travel to the United States and Europe don’t alarm most of the elite. Many Russian officials, alerted earlier by the threat of the Magnitsky Act, have found ways to safeguard their assets.

The second round of U.S. sanctions, targeted at some of Putin’s close loyalists and even their banks, have been a more serious warning that the West, or at least the United States, is ready to inflict real pain on the Russian ruling team. However, I would argue that the Russian elite would stand to lose more if key figures of Putin’s gang and oligarchs were closed out of Western banks. But there are signs that this is not going to happen—at least not any time soon. According to a government briefing paper accidentally exposed to journalists by UK officials, the UK government should “not support for now... trade sanctions... or close London’s financial center to Russians.” Similar briefing papers could just have easily been exposed in other Western capitals. Western journalists analyzing the issue confirm that Western financial centers are hardly ready to lose access to Russian money. See Michel Weiss in the *Daily Beast*, Ben Judah in *Politico*, and Oliver Bullough in the *New Republic*. The Kremlin has nothing to worry about on this score, then.

Moreover, the Kremlin has opened a discussion about freezing and confiscating Western assets in Russia, demonstrating its ability to launch a counterstrike. So Moscow is trying to bolster the already powerful world business lobby, which protects the Kremlin’s interests in order to guarantee its own interests inside Russia. The German business community is currently acting as the most fervent defender of the Kremlin’s interests. The Russian regime will do everything in its power to make sure

that the rest of the business community in Russia, as well as influential Western lobby groups that serve the Russian regime, will become more active in defending Russia's interests. They will force Western leaders to abandon their efforts to hurt Putin. The latest rhetorical nuances show that Western politicians are cautiously looking for compromise with the Kremlin on the basis of the new status quo, hoping that its appetite has been sated for the time being.

Never before has the West had such powerful mechanisms for influencing Russia, thanks to the Russian elite's integration into Western society. At the same time, never before has the West been so impotent when it comes to using those mechanisms, thanks to the Russian (Ukrainian, Kazakh) elite's ability to corrupt and demoralize the Western political and business establishment. Mikhail Khodorkovsky was right to say that Russia's exports to the West are commodities and corruption.

What about other means of pacifying Putin? Sailing an American fleet into the Black Sea? Doing this would only give the Kremlin yet another pretext to prove that the West is a threat to Russia. Cutting investments to Russia? Surely Putin has already anticipated this, and if he's willing to accept this risk, it means that the logic of the regime's survival is stronger than the problems presented by a withdrawal of investments. An EU gas boycott, then? Who really believes that could happen today?

But let's imagine what would happen if the West decided to start dismantling the money-laundering machine the Russian elite has built with the assistance of the Western "service lobby." Would that precipitate a moment of truth for the Kremlin and the Russian ruling class? I'm not so sure. The Kremlin has prepared for this eventuality. In fact Putin, having declared the need for the "nationalization" of the Russian elite (meaning that the elite must repatriate its wealth back to Russia), is ready for a new challenge along these lines. Moreover, if the West were to cut off the Russian elite, that could only help Putin tighten control over the political and business establishment. Those members of the political class who "come home" would become his political base; others would become the new traitors. One could conclude that Putin is fully prepared to close off the country and pay the price of increased isolation in order to stay in power. You might respond here by saying that Putin wants to remain a member of the Western club—the G8, the NATO-Russia Council, the WTO, and

so forth. But I'm not so certain of this either. Indeed, he would like to prolong his stay in Club West, but only if he gets to set his own agenda. He doesn't necessarily want to remove Russia from the international system; he wants to align the system with his wishes, and he wants an endorsement of his right to break the rules. If the West isn't ready to do these things, Putin would be ready to turn in his club membership card. From now on, he'll be breaking the rules—with or without the West's consent!

In any event, Putin is in bobsled mode. He is hurtling down the track; no one can stop him, and he can no longer reverse course. But the more he acts to preserve his power, the more damage he will inflict on his country. Angela Merkel was wrong saying that Putin is living in another world. He actually fits rather well into his system of power. Every new step he takes along this course makes his departure from power even more improbable, forcing him to take greater and greater risks.

Putin may be convinced that he is succeeding. He may think that the West is tamed, or that it is only capable of wagging its finger at Russia. Berlin continues to defend Putin against the possibility of any serious Western reaction. Obama is reluctant to risk precipitating another European headache. Russian society is applauding Putin's actions. His approval rating is skyrocketing: in March 2014 his approval rating rose to 70 percent (compared to 60 percent in 2013). A majority of Russians support the official view of the motives behind the Ukrainian conflict. In February, 69 percent of Russian respondents accused the Ukrainian opposition and the West of provoking the conflict and the violence. Thus, the majority of Russians are prepared to accept the annexation of Crimea and further Russian action in Ukraine.

Thus, once again Putin has the support of a nation that only yesterday seemed to be so tired of him! He has regained control over the elites, too. He has returned triumphantly to the scene as a War President and as a Triumphalist. True, we know how War Presidents end up. But at the moment his strategy is to focus on his plans for this evening and try to make it last as long as possible.

Thus, nothing could have stopped Vladimir Putin from his current course of action. He has become a hostage of his own logic and couldn't even free himself if he wanted to. He can't leave power, and he can only preserve the regime by showing might, strength, aggression, and reckless-

ness. The only strategy left to him by political circumstances was to mobilize Russia by resurrecting a policy of containment of the West and by the search for new enemies. The inexorable logic of this strategy has even driven him to dig up old slogans from World War II about liberating the Soviet people from fascists and Nazis. There's no stopping now; this strategy dictates that Putin must press on. The moment he stops, he is politically dead; there are too many people waiting in the wings for their chance to knock him down.

Having drawn Western leaders into his own trap, Putin has invented an even more interesting pastime for them: he has now called on them to normalize the situation in Ukraine in partnership with Russia. The Kremlin has even offered a reform package, which it is ready to implement in Ukraine, in cooperation with Western leaders. This package includes provisions to federalize Ukraine (this way it will be easier for Russia to gobble up one region at a time), a constitutional referendum (voters from the eastern regions can be bribed), and talks about Ukraine's fate under the auspices of an EU-Ukraine-Russia framework. (They can even invite Obama if he behaves himself.) Finally, Moscow must like Kissinger's idea of Ukraine becoming a "bridge" between Europe and Russia, since Moscow knows that this bridge will be guarded by Russian soldiers.

Does it mean that the West is trapped? Does it mean that whatever it does, it will only help Putin in his desperate gamble? The West's current tactics to calm Putin down—"de-escalation" and "diplomatic conclusions" without definite resolve—will only feed the Kremlin's sense of impunity. However, if the West were to develop a strategy that had as its goal influencing the part of the Russian elite that will lose out most if Russia turns into a "set-in-stone" state, it could cause a split in the Russian establishment, hopefully leading to the emergence of forces inside Russia that would break it out of its trap. Not soon, but with time. Current Western tactics, however, are only serving to consolidate Russia's elites around their leader.

The Kremlin's moves have triggered the law of unintended consequences. Its tactical victory in Ukraine will inevitably result in a strategic defeat. The Kremlin may fortify the walls of its decaying fortress, but it is undermining the foundation. The incursion into Crimea has already brought on the collapse of the Russian ruble. The Putin Doctrine is turning

the country into a perpetually mobilized command-economy state—the same kind that in 1991 brought about the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The law of unintended consequences is also at work in Ukraine. The Kremlin did what no political force in Ukraine had ever been able to do. The Russian invasion set off the consolidation of Ukraine's disparate political forces—liberals, nationalists, the Left, oligarchs, communists, and even the Party of Regions. It is possible that the only lasting result of Putin's actions will be to help strengthen Ukrainian national identity on the basis of a struggle for national liberation.

Let's hope that the law of unintended consequences will break in a positive direction for the West, too, consolidating its foreign policy and forcing its leaders to acquire the political will to solve the conundrum Putin has created.

I hope that these things will happen, but we are not there yet.

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