

## **The Post-intelligentsia and the Russian Catastrophe of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

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## I

I've already had an occasion to note how authoritarian regimes in Russia replace each other (Piontkovsky 2009). It isn't some eternal blow or a daring foray by the opponents that brings down the government. Instead, the regime collapses suddenly from a strange malaise, existential disgust with itself (Sartre's *la nausée*), the kind that currently plagues Putin's regime. Clearly, his system is ailing, even though it has successfully paved over the entire political landscape in Russia.

If the post-Communist decades have yielded such paucity results, it is in large measure because of the intelligentsia, or as its representatives prefer to call themselves these days – “intellectuals.” The latter have betrayed the ideals of Andrei Sakharov. In the 1990s, the self-proclaimed reformers showed more reverence to Augusto Pinochet than to the principle Sakharov valued the most – morality in politics. Russia's “systemic liberals” bear the responsibility for bringing Putin and his KGB thugs to power and fostering the “bandit capitalism” that is now pushing the country down the path of demodernization.

For Sakharov, democracy was an honest electoral contest between competing political forces. For Russian “systemic liberals,” it is a system that allows “democrats” to preserve power and wealth by any means possible. Andrei Dmitrievich Sakharov would have bristled at the idea that the people were ignorant sheep waiting to be led to a better life by self-proclaimed “progressive thinkers.” The Russian political class is convinced that barely 10-15% of the Russian population is ready for modernization, and that without the “enlightened” leadership the country would be lost.

The Russian post-intelligentsia turned away from Sakharov's legacy when its members assumed power or were hired by the authorities. In the process, they committed moral and ideological suicide. It would be a mistake to view the intelligentsia's recitations about the backwardness of the Russian people unprepared for democracy as just Kremlin talking points. Rather, we should see in this mantra a desperate attempt to salvage self-respect and rationalize the betrayal of their countrymen by the *intelligenty*.

Untranslatable into other languages, the word “intelligentsia” signifies a peculiarly Russian phenomenon, an amorphous social mini-group that sprang to life as a by-product of Peter the Great's attempt to Europeanize Russia, that miraculously survived for three centuries, and that has experienced a double alienation from both the state and the people.

## II

The modernizing Tsar Peter set out to reform Russia by fashioning a “window onto Europe.” But in reality, he only opened up a narrow crack that the “Russian political elite” managed to peer through. There have been two separate peoples in Russia since then, *barin* and *muzhik*, roughly approximated in English as “nobleman” and “peasant.” Every country in the world has had and continues to have social gradations, but nowhere else has this divide between the “noble” upper crust and “ignoble” peasants been as deep and fundamental as in post-Petrine Russia. This isn't a class divide as much as a cultural or even an anthropological one; these are actually two different peoples who simply did not know or understand each other. This schism is at the heart of Russia's perpetual historical tragedy, making the country lurk from one catastrophe to another.

To the peasants, it seemed that all its imperial institutions, including the church,

operated in the interest of the nobles. That's why they allowed the Bolsheviks to crucify the generals on their bayonets and tear down all the crosses. An explosion after centuries of tension was inevitable, and the fall of the Romanov empire in the 1917 revolution was historically foreordained. But the reins of the rebellion were seized by a small circle of people who were not in any way the real leaders. What happened in Russia at the time was essentially a Pugachev peasant revolution skillfully manipulated by the Bolsheviks.

Different ethnic groups, justifiably feeling oppressed by the Russian empire, did their part to hasten the collapse of the old regime. But the Bolshevik leadership's international makeup was not a significant factor here. The Russian Bukharin, Jewish Trotsky, Georgian Stalin, and Polish Dzerzhinsky were equally alien to the majority of the Russian people (a population that was 90% peasants). What mattered was not the revolutionaries' national or ethnic origins but their global aspirations. Marxism's simplistic theories were so seductive that they were fated to blow up the world at least once in the history of mankind. The Russian peasantry simply didn't fit into the equation.

We study the history of the civil war through the lens of "Red" or "White," but never through the vantage point of "*muzhik*," whose story is still poorly understood. Its paradox is that the schism between noble and peasant and the ferocious energy it released was harnessed by a force even more metaphysically antithetical to the peasant than the noble. The Bolshevik leaders, these *intelligenty* in leather jackets and pince-nez, were seemingly far more alien to the Russian peasants in civilization and culture than the noblemen living next door to their villages. So why did they prevail?

Because the Russian peasant could not forgive the nobles for what they had done with the country. The schism between the elite and the people was preserved in various incarnations of the Russian state. The Bolsheviks used that energy of protest that could be traced to the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, but the new rulers merely recreated the gap between the elite and the people. They built a system in which the regime viewed its people as an unlimited reservoir of slave power available to implement global imperial designs. The Communist nomenklatura treated peasants in much the same manner, remaining as distant from the people as the nobility before them. Just think about it: it was only at the end of the 1970s that the Russian peasants finally received their internal identity papers that allowed them to move freely throughout the country.

When it comes to the Civil War, we usually forget about its second stage, crueller and bloodier than the first one, the forced collectivization. This was an undertaking unprecedented in world history. Collectivization was the war waged by the new Communist elite against its unarmed people. While the Civil War of 1917-1920 had its own internal logic, the forced collectivization amounted to a sacrificial offering in which millions have been slaughtered for an ideological cause.

The ancient Aztecs engaged in warfare with the sole intent of taking prisoners for their sacred human sacrifices. In the same way, Russian peasants in the throes of collectivization were ritually sacrificed to the ruling Aztecs and their Marxist gods. After destroying the nobles and then the peasants, the Aztec-Bolsheviks finally created a new historically fractured anti-community of Soviet citizens. Eighty years later, the survivors voted Head Priest-Executioner Joseph Ahuizotl Stalin as one of the top three candidates to represent "Russia's Name" in a national poll. That alone leads one to doubt the psychological health of this long-suffering nation and its televised post-intelligentsia spiritual leaders.

The Communist doctrine has finally fell from grace, at least externally. But the unsinkable *nomenklatura* remained, and the reality of the metaphysical divide between the elite and the people has grown even more visible. There are two Russias, one comprised by the decrepit poor villages, the other by gated communities on Rublyovka, both watching each other wearily on television screens. The schism between the two goes back to Peter the Great's "modernization," with the Bolshevik attempt to modernize the county following the same pattern. There is a difference between the 19<sup>th</sup> century Russian intelligentsia with its roots in the nobility and the post-intelligentsia residing in the Rublyovka district: the former was raised on classic Russian literature, venerated the peasantry, and had a pronounced guilt complex, whereas the latter prefers easy reading and fashionable authors and is completely shameless and untroubled by any complexes.

### III

Every grand dream the Communist-KGB *nomenklatura* fancied in the 1980s about *perestroika* has come true. What has it achieved during the past 30-year cycle? A complete concentration of political power on par with what it had before, enormous personal wealth that was previously unthinkable, and a radically different life style that includes regular trips to Courchevel or Florida. Most importantly, these leaders have discarded all social and historical obligation. No longer must they wail in unison: "Happiness of the common people is our all-encompassing goal." No need to abide any longer by this rank hypocrisy. Now they dryly repeat the mantra about "the continuation of market reforms and the 'glory of Russia'." Of course, none of them believe that any more, nor could they spell out what exactly that means. Through the lips of Putin in his latest – fifth – incarnation, the regime promises its people the "unpopular measures" that are sure to bring long-term success. And that after 30 (!) years of reform. Meanwhile, these "measures" have been very popular among the few at the top who managed to enrich themselves handsomely through all these years.

The past century saw Russian history caught in a time loop. Generation after generation stubbornly repeats the systemic mistakes of our august modernizers. Dazzled by the technical and consumer goods of the eternally despised and ever-enticing West, our Scythian rulers contemptuously reject the roots of Western civilization, the hated dreams of Freedom and Human Dignity.

That's why Putin is with us forever, whatever new name he may acquire in his next iteration. That's why these ill-fated modernizers end back at square one after each attempt at mobilization, in a country with mountains of cast iron and steel per capita and rotting submarines and missiles, endlessly flying along an unpredictable trajectory (Putin, 2015).

Nearly a hundred years later, the great evildoers of the revolution (Lenin, Trotsky, Stalin) turned first into comical old men (Brezhnev, Andropov, Chernenko), and then, having drunk the "dead waters" of *nomenklatura* privatization, into young, athletic oil traders with charm and sex appeal (Putin, Abramovich, Timchenko). The latter are the true heirs of October 1917, the last incarnation of its leaders, the logical and inevitable outcome of the evolution of the "new class." Truly, they've made it. The tens of millions of victims of this hundred-year experiment ("losers" in their terminology) have filled the cemeteries for their benefit. Their personal Fukuyaman end of History has come to pass. They don't need any plans for the future; they are already in this malformed eternal life. This ill-made Putin eternity is the black hole of Russian history collapsed upon itself, the Svidrigailov-style village *banya*, smoky and crawling with fat spiders – veterans of East German Cold War posts and the

cooperative “Ozero” set up by Putin’s buddies.

#### IV

The spring of 1993 was, for millions, the apex of painful losses and crashes in the post-Communist withdrawal period. In the April referendum, the post-intelligentsia reformers were most afraid of the outcome, and reasonably so. Particularly of voting on the second question: “Do you approve of the government’s economic policy?” The answer, “Yes, we approve,” came not just from the 10-15% of *“the small, mobile group equivalent to the Western middle class”* but from the majority of Russian population.

At the time, the *“rigid and ignorant”* people had enormous trust in the *“liberal reformers.”* That trust is now lost, and not just due to some professional economic mistakes, which could be forgiven and corrected. No, they lost that trust because they flaunted their opulent lifestyles. Mistaking themselves for aristocrats, nearly every single one of them discovered a plebeian passion for immediate (right from their Cabinet seats) and fabulous enrichment. The “elite” categorically refused “to be with its people where its people dwelled unhappily at the time,” and where they still dwell. And now, trying to drown out the remnants of their own consciences, the systemic liberals levy accusations of every sin against the people who trusted them and who they deceived, robbed, and betrayed (psychoanalysts may call this “projection”).

The air is heavy with a sense of catastrophe, an approaching third collapse of a Russian government in less than a century. The Putin myth, this pitiful simulacrum of a grand ideological style, is now as dead as the imperial myth was in 1917 and the Communist myth in 1991. The third fall of the Third Rome could surpass the previous two in its tragic consequences. Judgement Day for one particular country is at hand, and each person will have to come to terms with his or her degree of guilt. The privileged elite, now in ideological and logistical preparations for a humanitarian evacuation, wants to prove that they have nothing to do with this mess, that it was once again Dostoyevsky’s *“god-bearing” people that f\*\*\*ed everything up for them*, that gray mass of drunks in villages and city outskirts voting for Putin. Just give those xenophobes the vote and they’ll declare war on America.

**This is nonsense.** In the process of naming Putin “President for Life,” all the boldest and most daring dreams of the opponents of universal suffrage came true. The president, as we all know, was not chosen by village drunks, but by six quite wealthy citizens of stainless libertarian conviction. Literally, the *crème de la crème* of the nation: Roman Abramovich, Boris Berezovsky, Valentin Yumashev, Tatyana Dyachenko, Alexander Voloshin (nicknamed *Sanka-Obligatsii* or “Xander Bond for some shady trading in the 90s), and Anatoly Chubais. The worthiest of Russians, naturally.

Any six convicts selected at random from the files of the Federal Penitentiary Service would possess a greater moral right to choose the president of Russia than this “cream of the nation” (as they like to call themselves). The convicts would have gone about it more responsibly. Professional criminals, the self-respecting members of the Russian mafia, would never have perpetrated massacres like Basayev’s mayhem in Dagestan, the bombing of residential buildings in Moscow and Volgograd, the “training exercises” in Ryazan, or the criminal war Russia waged in the Caucasus, which claimed the lives of thousands. This entire crew of super-elite electors, minus the one who died by hanging, is still in fine spirits and showing not an ounce of guilt. They even arranged something of a public corporate retreat on

the Atlantic coast to which they invited the intellectual conscience of the nation to play court jester – Russia’s Voltaire in striped shorts (Kak otdykhaet, 2013).

The powerful and their servitors – restaurants, taxis, girls, media leaders, fashion designers, priests, sommeliers, political scientists, PR managers, pedicurists, members of the Civic Chamber – they are all corrupt to the core. And not just in the plain criminal sense. The incredible lightness of being they experience as potentates with unlimited financial resources has gone to their head and is now ingrained in their subconscious. Russia’s “golden million” live as no Russian “elite” ever has before. What’s more, with their style of aggressive consumerism, they have far outpaced the golden million of any other broken state. The Russian top million is a trustworthy pillar of the regime, which, in return for this fairy tale brought to life, ask only for a minimum membership fee – absolute political loyalty. In conditions like these, there will never be another “perestroika.” Or never in time to do any good.

And so, the miraculous *troika* rushes along with a crooked head coach at the reins, with other nations scattering out of the way in shock and horror. Nobody knows where it is rushing. No answer is forthcoming. But it’s clear that it’s not rushing off after Portugal or some such. We are no petrostate, the “elite” likes to remind us, backwater suppliers of raw materials to the global economy. We are a Great Nuclear Power getting off our knees and landing powerful blows against American diplomacy. Anti-western and anti-American complexes and passions rage most fiercely not in the Russian villages but in the thin upper layers of the Russian dignitaries who send their wives to give birth in American clinics and enroll their children at American universities. The nation’s elite did not “store up for themselves treasures in heaven,” nor has it squirreled away its fortunes in North Korea, Iran, or Venezuela. Their worldly treasures are kept in the despised USA, which is why they hate this country even more.

The Kremlin’s current occupants, all these worn-out former sergeants or accountants from the St. Petersburg mayor’s office, now find themselves at the head of an enormous country thanks to good fortune and the furious energy of the late Boris Berezovsky. These “leaders” are but plebes dreaming about legalizing their multimillion-dollar family businesses in the eternally beloved and hated West. Roman Abramovich, the keeper of Putin’s main slush fund, has already moved his household there.

The outskirts of cities are not the “*rebellious border regions of Russia*,” as one member of the post-intelligentsia sneered about an outlying district of Moscow (Kolesnikov, 2013). They are Russia with its generations of children who have lost out in the “liberal” reforms carried out by the “cream of the nation.” With unshakable snobbery and self-assurance of born prophets, the powerful announce the upcoming “unpopular reforms,” which the backward rabble burdened with paternalistic mentality are incapable of understanding. Hence, the various schemes for restricting the rabble’s right to vote.

“*By their fruits you will know them. Do they gather grapes from thorns or figs from thistles?*” (Matthew 7:16).

A quarter of a century later, this conglomeration of mafia cream finds itself unable to give up the spoils of the oil trade. This top elite knows from experience and not just from academic theory that private property in Russia – be this an oil company or a vegetable stand – is only provisional, that ownership depends exclusively on loyalty to feudal suzerains stretching up the entire length of “power vertical,” to use Putin’s favorite expression. Such property is granted and withdrawn in line with the owner’s power perch and administrative leverage. With sky-high oil prices, such a system can stagnate for a long time, forestalling any

meaningful development, business initiatives, or innovations.

The arrested economic development in Russia is not caused by the refusal of the parasitic pensioners to die off, or the failure of the “elite to institute a 60-hour work week. Russia’s economy fails because there can be no creative impulse in such stifled conditions, in an environment where the entire vertical from the alpha mobster of all Rus’ to the neighborhood cop blocking off all avenues of social mobility. One of the most respected members of the “liberal” post-intelligentsia (Yasin, 2010) said this about the plebeian masses, defeated, in his view, by their own paternalistic mentality: “No one stole anything from you. You didn’t have anything to steal.” This wonderful phrase could have come from the mouth of Marie Antoinette, and will, of course, go into the history textbooks explaining the catastrophic history of Russia’s twenty first century. If a theft was committed, it was just petty cash – a trillion dollars of assets in Kremlin slush funds sitting in America (Piontkovsky, 2018). In the last 20 years a new generation has grown up, born to those “from whom nothing was stolen,” and that generation is just starting to present Putin with the bill.

From December 2011 on, the elite opposition sought to “take charge of” the protest movement and lead it in a direction safe for the state (*we must influence the state, not overthrow it*), while increasing their capital as effective troubleshooters inside the corporation they run jointly with the government’s security forces, JudoCo LLC. Alas, their fear of being left alone without Putin and his political police is stronger than their dislike of the former security officers who’ve climbed the government ladder. It is Their State, the one they have created, and this state must serve the interests of the highest caste to which they belong. These fashionable rebels are overfed and cowardly. They bite the hand of the powerful and then immediately fall to lick their boots, dragging themselves to their stalls in the Kremlin stables and waiting for the fateful “elections” of 2023 and 2030.

So, the next wave of protest, if this country still has any collective instinct for self-preservation, will not just be more massive but also different in character. It will be led by different people for which the former intelligentsia may not care at all. They will have no one else to blame but themselves.

## V

The second fatal sin of the former intelligentsia resulted from post-imperial madness. I categorically disagree with the view popular in fashionable liberal circles that the country is divided into the 15% forward-thinking “cream of the nation” standing in opposition to the 85% “imperial stooges.” Look at the odd characters raving daily on worthless TV shows. Every single one of these “experts” spouting nonsense about foreign policy comes from the group convinced that it is the “cream of the nation.” This group is to blame for the Russian catastrophe of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The ideological foundation on which Russian foreign policy discourse rests is the “humiliation” suffered by Russia following the USSR’s loss in the Cold War (Shevtsova, 2015). This ceremonial tearing of sackcloth and baring of geopolitical wounds is the favorite pastime of the political “elite” indulged by the “Asiopeans” Prokhanov and Dugin as much as by to pro-western Arbatov and Lukin.

Russian cinema, which one half-forgotten classic pronounced *the most famous art in our illiterate country next to the circus*, shows how humiliation could be harnessed to Russian foreign policy needs. From the caring hands of our own Riefenstahl – Balabanov,

we got our very own “Triumph of the Will,” seamlessly blending the national hero and the national killer Danilo with his famous rallying cry, “Your America is done for.” The impact of this movie on the public was greater than Goethe’s *Faust* or even Putin’s famous threat to his enemies “to rub them off in the outhouse.”

Which is unsurprising, because the mythology of this well-crafted movie blockbuster, *Brother-2*, does more than inspire aggression; it reaches deep into the most sensitive erogenous zones of the collective unconscious. The bald prostitute, a modern Sonechka Marmeladova, is trusting Danilo-the-killer symbolizing holy Rus’ desecrated by soulless foreigners to avenge her. Danilo is cast here as St. George with an axe ready to strike down the money-lender American without bothering to ask foolish questions about whether he is a creature trembling in fear or a man who has the right.

We spent about half a century before striking “powerful blows against American diplomacy” and, as Khrushchev phrased it, “putting hedgehogs down America’s pants.” Meanwhile, we ended up without pants of our own. The latter does not, however, apply to the elite who led us then and continue at the helm of the unsinkable political class that weathered the loss in the Cold War and emerged wealthier than ever. After ensuring that they and their descendants would be dining on caviar for generations to come, this elite turned its aspirations not toward the Constitution but to the Asiopian glory of a new Golden Horde set out to unify the nations destined to eat out of the ruler’s palm.

The Russian political elite, thieving and untalented, sneaky and cowardly, scurrying between Courchevel and the seven hills of Moscow, can’t understand that they are utterly unwanted as political gurus or a unifying center in the post-Soviet landscape. Putin’s JudoCo doesn’t look like a haven to anyone – not the millions of Ukrainians desperate to rid themselves of their own state gangsters, or for the Central Asian dictators who aren’t looking for a mob boss in the Kremlin to rule them. The Ukrainian 90% “yes” vote in a referendum about their European future meant “no” to the post-Soviet model of gangster capitalism, and a “no” to the Taiga Union of the four bosses.

Russians might have found an ally among its neighbors if the country’s elite, hoarse from booing the West, had offered some plausible Anti-Western Ideological Initiative. But the whole world knows where this “elite” hides its treasures, where their members go to see a doctor, and where they send their children to school.

Today’s sworn enemies of the West, maniacally fixated on raising the black banner of the Global Caliphate over its ruins, view Russia as part of that corrupt West – its weakest and most vulnerable part ready to be split apart before any other country. Our foreign-policy priests denounce their neighbors as “pro-Western” without realizing that they have condemned their own policies. Where are these “pro-Russian” leaders for whom we built our sand-castle empire? Perhaps, after all, there is something wrong with us and our policies, and those presidents are simply pro-Ukrainian, pro-Georgian, pro-Belorussian? Moscow will never see the emergence of “pro-Russian” (in its sense of the term) powers in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).

Spiritually lazy, arrogantly imperial, and wrapped in its megalomaniacal fantasies, our elite is unable to comprehend that the drive for independence is more than a formality for our neighbors. All these traits peculiar to the Russian kleptocracy have naturally led to a cycle of alienation and enmity throughout the post-Soviet space. The failure of all attempts at “domination” in their self-righteously proclaimed “zones of privileged interest” make the Kremlin players from the Forbes list feel frustrated and humiliated, as we can glean from the



psychiatric-couch narrations by foreign-policy orators here and abroad. Material prosperity isn't enough for them. The Russian "elite" needs "glorious greatness." It prides itself on its lofty spirituality and decries the mercantilism of the decadent West. Alas, this greatness is nowhere to be seen, neither in terms of the Russia's influence on global politics, nor in the indicators of economic and technological development, nor in the quality of life the elite has to offer to its people. The only way to change those unfavorable parameters is through a long determined effort to change the irresponsible attitude of the ruling crowd to its country and its Putin-bearing people.

## VI

There is a simpler route to staunching humiliation, however, to achieving the sweet sensation of one's own importance and greatness. All that's necessary is to declare yourselves an Aryan tribe (Magarshak, 2014), descended from the Carpathian Mountains, your extra chromosomal spirituality proudly swinging between your legs, and boldly spread around the world to Fort Ross in California, besieged on all sides by the combined forces of globalism, Atlanticism, Judeo-masonry, and Satanism. Today, this tribe of cloned *Brothers-2* characters has filled every screen in the country with its round-the-clock hate-shows.

The crazy concept of the "Russian World" was borrowed by the new tribe leaders from the more experienced creators of Hitler's foreign policy in the 1930s. A shameful attempt to implement this policy was the Ukrainian invasion, the apotheosis of the quarter-century orgy of this "cult of humiliation" (Vy khotite umeret, 2014). In Ukraine, Russia acted out the degrading role of the impotent rapist. The patient has, at last, revealed the nature of his humiliation to those around him, long troubled by his inappropriate behavior. The Russian person on his rendezvous with History, it turns out, is humiliated when he cannot trample and dismember with impunity his former allies in the construction of Platonov's *Foundation Pit*.

The post-intelligentsia's best writers have explained to the city and world that a people of Russia are wild, ignorant, unready to be entrusted with the power to choose their leaders. And if, God forbid, free elections did take place, then fearful fascists would come to power. Henceforth, such elections must be prevented. The circular route of Russian history and Russian liberal thought has closed, returning after a hundred years to the original maxim of Mikhail Gershenzon: "We should bless the regime that protects us with its bayonets and prisons against the people's fury." Only now, we can replace "bayonets" with "television screens."

*"You wanted me to protect you from the people's rage?"* our Bare-Chested Horseman of the Apocalypse, cross swinging from his neck, might justifiably remark. *"Well, I defend you as best I know how. I channel that rage at our neighbors beyond our borders, where you and I, gentlemen, travel on vacation and where our wealth is stored, and against defenseless Tajiks, who clean our toilets on Rublyovka. Enough with the empty dreams, and don't try to take down a judo wrestler. You'll get tired of ending up face down in the dirt."*

Speaking out against the Gershenzon-Radzikhovskiy school of thought (Piontkovsky, 2010), I had a chance to warn that

*giving up free elections and preserving Putinism is a 100% guarantee of fascism ahead. Let us estimate the possibility of fascists coming to power through victory in free elections. For that to happen, they would have to solve a very difficult problem.*

*Over three months of open, televised debates, where they would be facing some of the best that Russia has to offer (that being the whole point of “free elections”), these halfwits would have to convince over half the population of the righteousness of their point of view. We need to be a bit more optimistic about the mental capabilities of the majority of our fellow citizens.*

*It would be practically impossible for fascists to come to power in Russia by winning an absolute majority in truly free elections. Even the Nazis weren’t able to do that, despite widespread misconceptions on that matter. In the last free election at the Reichstag in 1932, the National Socialists were starting to lose ground. It wasn’t the masses who brought Hitler to power in January 1932; it was a conspiracy of the elite.*

*And now let us ask ourselves what fascists would have to do in Russia to come to power, without a victory in free elections, but through the internal evolution of the Putin regime, a conspiracy by, if you’ll excuse the term, the “elite.” Is that an easier or more difficult endeavor? In my view, a much easier one. They wouldn’t have to win over 50 million voters. They would just have to convince 3-4 scumbags in the inner circle of national leader.*

*But they wouldn’t need convincing. They have all along been fighting the “Jewish oligarchs who robbed the country,” for their, as Dugin helpfully suggested, Eastern Orthodox equity stake. They simply need to be told that in a worsening systemic crisis and failing government, the only way to preserve their billion-dollar stake is to embark on the path of openly fascist dictatorship. You don’t need the support of the majority for that kind of dictatorship. The security forces, television, and a couple million enthusiastic implementers are quite sufficient. One, two, three, we’ve got them all. Under totalitarian rule, the majority would be at a loss, passive. All the more so, since they won’t come for everyone all at once.*

That academic discussion with colleagues ended on March 18, 2014. Fascism came triumphantly from above, imposing its extra chromosomal spirituality on us all. Putin’s Crimea speech to the Federation Council was such an obvious remake of Hitler’s Sudetenland speech to the Reichstag that the propagandist Migranyan had to “soften” the impression by proposing the “good Hitler” concept (Piontkovsky, 2014). The Good Putin declared that the Russian people were divided and that it was his sacred duty to defend Russians all over the world – and not just citizens of Russia (every country is obligated to protect its citizens) but also ethnic Russians, Russian-speaking people, and even the descendants of Soviet citizens and citizens of the Russian Empire. It was an idea just like this one that lay at the foundation of Hitler’s foreign policy, which led to the Second World War.

After the annexation of Crimea, the next item on the agenda for implementing the grand scheme of the “Russian World” was recovering Novorossiia, which the Bolsheviks unfairly gave to Ukraine (*let God judge them*). Anyone opposed to the plan was proclaimed a traitor to the nation (yet another calque from 1930s Germany). Before March 18, the goal was blocking the pro-Europe vote in Ukraine, and the annexation of Crimea was an instrument for achieving this end. After March 18, the gathering of Russian land, the “Crimeanization” of the former Soviet Union or even the Russian Empire became, in the narrative of Kremlin’s mythmakers, the almost mystical goal of the Russian ethnos, which finally got off its knees and acquired a worthy national idea. While at the same time legitimizing the lifetime rule of

the man at the top, waving his cross and birch branch.

More than four years have passed since then. How is Putin's fascist "Russian World" project going? It is a dismal failure. And that outcome became obvious soon enough. The still-ongoing televised hysteria, the pseudo-surveys of the population (meaningless in authoritarian states), the senseless aerospace exercises in Syria, the over-the-top victory celebrations every May 9 – these are but attempts to hide the failure, to extend life after death.

The failure is evident in Ukraine and, more importantly, in the hearts and minds of its Russian citizens. As it happens, in 10 of the 12 regions in Novorossiia the invaders couldn't even find enough extras to hold regular public protests with processional banners and icons of Putin. In two regions, several cities are held by a motley crew of the armed to the teeth professional saboteurs, Motorola's newly arrived degenerates, MMM deputies, Russian National Union fascists, dressed up as Cossacks, veterans of the 35-year Afghan-Caucasian colonial war. To keep them from getting tossed out of Donbass, Russian army units moved to in with tanks and armored personnel carriers equipped with rocket launchers and anti-aircraft weapons systems. The radiant dream of "Novorossiia" has dwindled down to the measly terrain of Lungandonia ruled by bandits.

This movement of "native inhabitants driven to desperate measures" is inherently weak. What differentiates it from other separatist fights is the absence of any fresh ideas, its inability to articulate either the reasons for its "desperation," or the rationale behind its vociferous protests. The vast majority of Russians in Ukraine have rejected the "Novorossiia" myth and the "Russian World" ideology, and remain loyal citizens of the Ukrainian state, and supporters of its European choice. Putin attempted to unleash an ethnic conflict, but a fight between the heirs of Kievan Rus and the Golden Horde didn't take. The Kremlin's aggression in Ukraine died down, and Ukraine at last freed itself from its Muscovy overlords.

Those who had recently "got off their knees" couldn't admit to this failure and keep blaming those damn Yankees. Intoxicated by unthinkable wealth, the politicians from St. Petersburg and their servants from the post-intelligentsia indulged in wishful thinking of "geopolitical greatness." Very much like that woman in Pushkin's tale who fancied herself a noble lady and demanded to be ordained the Queen of the World, our leaders demanded from the American golden fish not only the status of wealthy Westerners, but also a new "Yalta deal" recognizing them as the rulers of half the world and bringing entire peoples and states into their possession.

The U.S. was, in fact, prepared to quietly assign to the business partners who had invested trillions into the American economy "Yalta status." After all, in his controversial *Atlantic* interview, Obama's position pretty much added up to, "*The Russians wanted to invade Ukraine more than we wanted to protect it, and we can't do anything about it*" (Goldberg, 2016). The inhabitants of the Kremlin are simply incapable of understanding that the problem with their geopsychological wish list isn't the Americans but Russia's neighbors who would never meekly accept the new Yalta, that no one wants them or their "Russian World."

## VII

The Golden Horde ideology of the "Russian World" suffered a defeat just as painful in Russia itself. That defeat, however, actually happened a quarter century earlier. Two Communist empires fell in 1991: first the smaller, Yugoslav one, then the larger Soviet

empire. The “spiritual bonds” of Communism had turned to dust, and nothing held the lesser brothers in orbit around their imperial brother (sister) – Russia and Serbia. The nature of the fall was determined by the relationship of their respective peoples to it. Born populists, both charismatic leaders, Milosevic and Yeltsin, aligned their policies with the wishes of their citizens. The Serbs, infected by the virus of small-town imperialism after the dreams of saving the whole empire were dashed, endeavored to cut a “Serbian World” out of its body. In the process, they started and lost half a dozen wars that took tens of thousands of lives.

A similar plan to divide the Soviet empire took hold in Russia, primarily among the political “elite.” The anti-Gorbachev putsch wasn’t a Communist counterattack, it was an imperial strike. G. Popov, one of the leaders of the “victorious democracy” and a prominent member of post-intelligentsia, urged that Ukraine be cut up along the very lines Putin has drawn today. Such sentiments were not widespread, however. On the day the Belovezh Accord was signed and the USSR split along the formal borders separating its republics, no more than 100 people came out in Moscow to protest the ratification of the accord by the Supreme Soviet. The Soviet Union, and indeed the whole world, owes much to the wisdom of the Russian people who were not tempted by the calls from Popov and his ilk to “collect the ancestral Russian lands.”

The Yugoslav scenario in the post-Soviet landscape studded with nuclear weapons could have been a global catastrophe. As a consolation prize, loony binge imperial fanatics like the famous war criminal Girkin were sent to the Balkans to kill Croats and Bosnians. The retired KGB major Putin was not among them; in those days he was busy carrying the briefcase of the mayor of St. Petersburg and acquiring his first million from the “Metal for Food” scam.

The cartoonish chimera of the “Russian World” with its own sacred Khersones/Chersonesus is a crazy attempt by an aging dictator to go back 25 years and resurrect the Soviet Union, this time in line with the Yugoslav model, and extend the death rattle of his decaying kleptocracy, and decorating it with his ideocratic project in the Grand Style reminiscent of Hitler’s fascism and Stalin’s Communism. This attempt was doomed to fail, primarily because the Russian mentality hadn’t changed in those years. The brief euphoric support of “Our Crimea” did not signify the people’s approval for the “father of the nation” to wage endless hybrid warfare in “defense of ethnic Russians and Russian speakers” throughout the post-Soviet landscape. No wonder reports of our losses in Donbass became the country’s most classified information, while parents had to bury their dead children-soldiers in secret.

“*To us Russians, even death is beautiful out in the world,*” the Chief Commander announced in April 2014 (Putin, 2015). The “Russian World” died out, but it was a shameful rather than beautiful end, following a stab at the fraternal rape of Ukraine.

By all laws governing the life and death of authoritarian regimes, the Putin simulacra should not survive the Ukrainian metaphysical catastrophe caused by the dictator’s gross miscalculation. But the regime is trying to prolong its place at the table over the sweet pie of power and wealth by sharply increasing its stakes in the geopsychological confrontation with the West. “Good Hitler” has his very own *Wunderwaffe*. No, not the missile horror movies he showed at a recent Federation Council meeting. The West has a similar arsenal of horror, and in a better state of combat readiness. No, Putin’s unique wonder-weapon is the psychological nuclear blackmail he employs, beginning with the annexation of Crimea, his boast about a willingness to issue the first nuclear strike, and an absolute contempt for the value of human

lives (Russian and foreign) that he has demonstrated once again.

In his recent speeches, Putin has repeatedly invoked an apocalyptic scenario, hinting at his willingness to order a nuclear strike. An astute commentator noted that he spoke about this outcome with obvious relish. Judge for yourselves. Watch his face carefully in the film “World Order 2018” in which Putin tells V. Soloviev (yet another member of the post-intelligentsia) that he doesn’t need a world without himself at the helm (Putin, 2018). Yes, without Putin in power. As Hess/Volodin told us, Russia today is Putin in power. And he needs the little people exclusively as a nuclear electorate and potential collective Shahid.

So once again, we see a wild man wandering around an icy wasteland, like 100 years before, but now brandishing a nuclear bomb instead of an axe.

P.S. The Syrian boy from Aleppo, who vowed to complain to Allah on his deathbed, was one of those thousands on whom new Russian weapon systems were tested (Yablochkin, 2018). A child threatening his tormentors with an appeal to God is an image straight out of Dostoyevsky. An agnostic my entire conscious life, I never wished so ardently for God to exist, so that boy from Aleppo could tell him what he had witnessed. About the “testing,” about Putin, Lavrov, Shoigu... About us all for whom there should be no sympathy, no forgiveness.

May we all be damned!

### **About the Author:**

Andrey Piontkovsky (born in 1940) is a Russian academic, political writer, and analyst, and a member of the International PEN Club. He graduated from the Mathematics Department of Moscow State University, holds a PhD in applied mathematics, and is a member of the American Mathematical Society. He has been for many years a regular political commentator for the BBC World Service and Radio Liberty. Piontkovsky is the author of several books on the Putin presidency, including *Another Look into Putin's Soul* and *Russian Identity* published by the Hudson Institute. After Russia’s General Prosecutor’s Office found evidence of “extremism” in his writings, Piontkovsky had to leave Russia in 2016 to evade imminent arrest. Since June 2017, he has been a Senior Adviser of the Free Russia Foundation, and a Hudson Institute Visiting Fellow. The author wishes to express his gratitude to the Donner Foundation for providing support during his work on this project.

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