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## The Illusions and Realities of Russian Nationalism

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## The Illusions and Realities of Russian Nationalism

During the war in the Balkans, Western media reported that there was a sharp rise in anti-American feelings among the Russian population and that Russians and Americans were on a collision course. The talk was that if the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) sent ground troops to Serbia, Russia would supply the Serbs with weapons and volunteers. The collision became even more likely when Yevgeny Primakov, the Russian prime minister, made a dramatic gesture—he ordered his plane back at the last instant when he was flying to the United States. During the crisis, Russian liberal (and until recent events in the Balkans, quite pro-Western) newspapers began printing the sort of articles that one could formerly find only in Communist and nationalist vehicles.

The shrill tone of this nationalistic rhetoric was worrisome to me, as I am a naturalized American originally from Russia, and I had been planning for some time a trip to Moscow to do some research in the Russian national archives. I feared that I would not be able to obtain a visa and would lose the money for my nonrefundable ticket. Plus, months of preliminary research on a long project that I had been working on would be down the drain.

However, I received my visa and, once in Moscow, I visited with various members of the Russian intelligentsia from different politico/intellectual camps. I also engaged in conversation with many ordinary Russians. My Russian is native, and most of these ordinary citizens did not know that I am American (at least at the beginning). And this, I believe, provided me with an insight into the current mood of the Russian population that most Western observers would not be able to obtain.

It is clear that the Russian elite is increasingly more anti-Western. The

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anti-Western feelings have spread from those who are called the “Red-to-Brown” to those who belong to the liberal movement and, until recently, usually held pro-Western views.

There are other important changes. Those who have envisioned the rise of a nationalistic regime have usually put their hopes on the anti-Yeltsin opposition. The nationalists, it was believed, would rise to power through either election or the use of force. These sorts of people are still around. At the same time, new theories have developed, based on the assumption that the present regime, the Yeltsin government, or those who would emerge from the present-day ruling group will lead the country’s nationalistic transformation. It is clear that quite a few of the members of the present-day Russian elite are anxious to see a mighty nationalistic state respected and feared by the West.

Yet there is a powerful impediment to the creation of such a state, at least at the present. That sort of state needs to have a harsh authoritarian or semitotalitarian makeup. A rise in the economic and military power of the state would require all members of Russian society, including the elite, to sacrifice their own interests. And the present-day Russian elite is not ready to sacrifice any of its interests, including economic ties with the West, despite all its nationalistic rhetoric.

The situation is complicated by the fact that the majority of the Russian population is completely removed from all the nationalist rhetoric. Their worries are their daily needs, and they are hardly willing to make such a sacrifice either. All of this suggests that the present-day nationalistic fervor that one reads about in the Russian newspapers—especially during the Balkan crisis—is not an indication of Russia’s imminent transformation into a powerful, nationalistic state but rather of the further weakness that could lead to the semidisintegration of the Russian state.

## **The Way to a Nationalistic State**

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I decided to start my observation with a visit to Alexander Dugin, a young nationalist philosopher. He is well known in the West. *Foreign Affairs* recently published an article about him and his philosophy. Dugin is a proponent of Eurasianism, a nationalistic-type theory that was born among Russian emigres in the 1920s and 1930s. The point of Eurasianism is that Russia is neither European nor Asian, but a political entity that was formed from all the people who live in Russia, both those with Slavic and non-Slavic roots. Dugin is regarded as one of the most interesting representatives of the Eurasianist movement in present-day Russia. He is also an advisor to Seleznev, the Speaker of the Russian Duma.

Dugin also represents the new nationalistic thought. While he has published pieces in *Zavtra*, one of the major newspapers of the “Red-to-Brown” movement, he is contemptuous of the Communists. In his view, they have lost their energy and dedication. He believes that the new nationalistic dictator will rise from the Russian elite, perhaps from among the financial tycoons, who in themselves constitute a sort of Russian oligarchy. His reasoning is that the Yeltsin elite has finally come to understand that the West will never accept Russia as an equal but will remain hostile to the country.

Yet the majority of intellectuals with whom I engaged in conversation still correlate the rise of anti-Western feelings to opposition to the Yeltsin regime. Some of them continue to believe in a Communist or nationalist *revanche*. Indeed, another of my Moscow friends who teaches philosophy at Moscow University expressed the idea of the coming Communist *revanche*. He elaborated on the well-known fact that Moscow residents enjoy a much better life than the rest of the country. Conditions in the provinces are appalling and would lead to revolt. And here he quoted Alexander Pushkin, the semi-national Russian poet whose two-hundred-year anniversary was celebrated this summer with a great deal of pomp. Pushkin characterized the Russian revolt as “brutal and senseless.” My friend also sees the end of the present-day regime as inevitable and believes this could constitute the serious danger for Russia and the global community. He pointed to the rise of various extremists groups and of the scandalous writer Eduard Limonov, who is the leader of the “National-Bolshevik Party,” which has combined both Nazi and Communist rhetoric in its dogma.

My response here was that Limonov and his party were merely theatrical and have no real influence. My friend retorted that there are powerful forces behind Limonov and similar extremists, and it would be unwise to dismiss them. He also was quite emotional when he asserted that the Russian people are weak today but still remain proud and great. In the end they will never accept being reduced to a marginal player on the geopolitical stage, the role in which the West seems determined to cast them. They will do whatever is needed to be a great people of a great power. The West, he proclaimed, did not understand this and had pushed Russians into a corner.

The response to this desperate situation might be horrible both for Russia and the rest of the globe. To illustrate, he pointed to his poodle who was scurrying around the room and told a story of when the poodle was chased by a big dog, which drove him into a corner. The desperate poodle managed

**The present-day Russian elite is not ready to sacrifice any of its interests.**

to jump over the big dog and hurt him badly. The same could happen to the West if it persists in humiliating Russia. He concluded with the statement that the new forces led by Primakov will prevail and Russia will definitely be able to stand for itself.

He was similar to Dugin in one important way. He stated that the ideas behind Eurasianism are spreading and "Primakov is Eurasianist." It was clear from my conversation with him and other intellectuals that the Russian elite and its representatives are increasingly anti-Western. Their feelings are

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shared not just by the representatives of the Communist/nationalist opposition, but by those who lean toward the liberal side. Moreover (and this is also a novelty), some nationalists, for example Dugin, assume that it is not the Communist opposition but the ruling elite that will be transformed into a highly nationalistic body. In either case, Russia eventually will confront the West.

My conversations were collaborated by what I read in the Russian newspapers. For example, even the liberal and usually pro-Western newspaper *Izvestia* has started to print the sort of articles usually reserved for nationalistic and Communist vehicles. This seems to confirm the predictions of many Western specialists in Russian affairs who have stated that present-day Russia is quite close to the Russia that existed on the eve of the Bolshevik Revolution or to the Germany of the eve of the Nazi takeover. While there are other scenarios about how political developments in Russia might proceed, they all emphasize the rise of a strong nationalistic state. And the numbers who preach such a scenario have increased since the devaluation of Russian currency in August 1998 and especially since the war in the Balkans. There is no doubt that the rise of a nationalistic dictator is a possible scenario, especially in the case of the sudden and abrupt drop in living standards. It could well emerge from a sharp conflict at the top, especially if one of the players is tempted to use force, as was the case in 1993 when Yeltsin shelled the parliamentary building. But the installation of a nationalist dictator would be a most daunting enterprise. My observations in Moscow provided me with many arguments against such likelihood.

One of the most important problems here is the opinion that the views of the Russian elite are the same as those of the masses. It is assumed that if a considerable part of the Russian elite has a nationalistic fervor it is because the temperature in the society is rising to a boiling point. This is not the case. Although anti-Western and anti-American feelings are on the increase in the country, it has little to do with a concern for Russia's lost glory. The

problem is much more mundane. The reality is that economic reforms have not brought a better life for the majority, and the collapse of the ruble made the situation worse.

Yet this has not led to a nationalistic or radical heat as one could assume if his only source of information was articles in Russian newspapers. My observations in Moscow led me to believe that the average Russians remain quite passive, seeing nationalistic rhetoric as merely a ploy of this or that political force to use patriotic feelings as a vehicle to bring to power those who utter it. And power is coveted by all of these politicians not to improve the life of the masses or to make Russia great again but for another reason. The majority of simple folks with whom I conversed believed that the elite (both pro-Western and anti-Western) want power merely for their own personal enrichment. The source of their skepticism and disregard for any nationalistic rhetoric can well be illustrated by several episodes.

### **The Passive Populace**

When NATO launched air strikes against Yugoslavia, violent demonstrations took place in front of the U.S. embassy. Quite a few young people participated in the event, and for some Western and Russian observers this was a sign of the coming nationalist revolution, so I was quite interested in learning more about this event.

An acquaintance of mine, whom I routinely see in the major libraries and archives during my trips to Russia, told me that the demonstrations near the U.S. embassy were indeed a manifestation of anti-Western feelings among the majority of the Russian population. In this case, it was the younger generation that took the lead. An emissary was sent to student dormitories and nearby cities to help gather a crowd. The crowd had thrown stones into the embassy and attracted thousands of people, both young and old. And this, according to my acquaintance, was a sign of the country's patriotic awakening. He encouraged me to attend one of these Communist/nationalistic gatherings to witness this remarkable turn of events with my own eyes.

Intrigued, I attended a couple of meetings. One of them was held June 22, as a commemoration of the German attack on Russia in 1941. The rally took place downtown, not far from Red Square. The crowd gathered near the monument to the war hero Marshal Zhukov, whose imposing stature symbolizes both the victory over the Nazis and Russia's imperial might. The speakers warned that NATO had actually won the war in Yugoslavia and the same could happen to Russia. Several people held posters that equated NATO with the Nazis. Other placards enjoined Russian officers to wake up and kill the traitors, implicitly Yeltsin and his entourage. Nationalistic news-

papers, such as *Zavtra* and *Duel*, were on display. There were also several books of similar content, including the works of Dugin.

The crowd chiefly consisted of older folk, though there were some people in their thirties and forties. More importantly, the crowd, especially the young, hardly reminded one of the patriotic Germans of the early 1930s. The young people strolled aimlessly about, sipping coffee, kissing each other. I asked two young girls about their views, and they responded with giggles, saying that they loved Russia and would never leave the country even if some rich American might make such a proposition. Two other girls snapped that they were Armenian and for this reason were uninterested in Russia's problems. What they knew for sure was that they would never date Azeri boys.

Not only did the crowd seem detached, the whole set had the flavor of a vaudeville theatrical performance rather than being the stage for launching a national mobilization. One grizzled World War II veteran and his companion, a chap dressed as Lenin, asked for alms. I asked Lenin whether he needed money for the Party or for Inessa, his mistress. Lenin, of course, was ignorant of my historical allusion and complained that I had taken his picture without paying him.

While the proffered hand of Marshal Zhukov blessed the defenders of the motherland, a leggy girl in high heels and skin-tight black pants made the sign of the cross in front of the newly restored church. Japanese tourists took pictures of some Russians who were dressed in the costumes of seventeenth-century musketeers and nobility. Patriotic songs and the former national anthem of the Soviet Union were interwoven with the melodic sounds of the bells from the newly built churches of the neighborhood. The Red Stars, which are still proudly displayed on the Kremlin's towers, peacefully coexist with the imperial eagles on the restored old buildings. The beggars, some managed to ply their trade in broken English, engaged in the trade in the same manner they had done three or four centuries earlier. And indeed, the whole scene was more reminiscent of the Moscow kingdom of the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries than to Weimar Germany or Imperial Russia on the eve of 1917 Revolution. Almost instinctively one remembered the poem of one Western traveler of that time who had dubbed Moscow as a place of churches, drunks, and "painted whores."

After the meeting, I went to the City Archives on the outskirts of the capital. On the streets I saw a stack of leaflets put out by the Russian National Unity Party. The leaflets, printed with their Swastika type symbol, called for all Slavs to be united for the common cause. Yet they seemed to arouse no interest among the passersby and were surrounded by numerous posters with more prosaic information about the exchange of apartments, the selling of various goods, and similar stuff. Upon entering the archive, I struck up a con-

versation with one of the workers. She was in a rather good mood for the archive is the domain of Moscow mayor Yuri Luzkhov, whose Richard Daley-style of rule is quite popular among Muscovites. Luzkhov pays his archivists regularly. This, of course, is in sharp contrast to the federal libraries and archives which are run down and where the workers do not always receive their salaries. I discussed the situation in the Balkans with her and recalled my Communist friend's report about the patriotic gathering in front of the U.S. embassy when the American flag was burned. Her reply was contemptuous. "Big deal to burn the flag. I would like to see one person who would burn one American dollar." Her point was clear. Patriotic rhetoric is cheap, but no one is willing to sacrifice his interests, even the smallest iota, for the county. The other women librarians followed suit and admitted with an air of irony that all of these statements about Russian morality and Western immorality did not stand up to the facts. Indeed, how could Russians condemn NATO for bombing the civilian population when during the Chechen War the Russian Air Force had razed entire cities?

**The passivity of the populace will impede the rise of a nationalistic dictator.**

I arrived home late in the evening and turned on the TV. The movie was on an appropriate subject, the Great Patriotic War. On the screen were symbols of Russian might and past glory. The brutal advance of German tanks, the heroic stand of Stalingrad's defenders, and then the climax: the Russian counterattacks. There seemed to be a countless armada of Soviet tanks that easily swept through the entirety of Eurasia. The war was not only a contest of might but also of the proper morality. The West was represented by a Nazi sniper, the pitiless and courageous Sigfried who seems to be taken from Wagner's Ring. This angel of death endangers his life defending Deutschland, epitomized by his wife, a gorgeous blonde. Yet she is not pure and, while Sigfried decimates Russian soldiers, she fornicates. She is juxtaposed to a Russian female sniper, who is both tender and devoted to her fellow soldiers and the motherland. Sigfried finally kills her, but in her death sacrifice, she imitates Christ and achieves a moral victory over the Germans.

After watching this movie with its implicit messages of sacrifice to the motherland and the glorification of Russia's imperial might, I turned the channel and discovered something entirely different. The broadcast was entitled "About This Stuff." Moderated by a black Russian female named Khanga, the program dealt with various erotic subjects of today. There were interviews with a couple in which the husband was excited by scars on the female body. And his loving wife had cut herself to please him. A discussion



with a female painter who painted pictures of fruits that depicted female genitals followed the interview.

While the first program represented Russia as it prefers to be perceived, the second program characterized Russia as it is.

## **After Victory Celebration**

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Later, I visited the branch of the major state library in the outskirts of Moscow. I was greeted by graffiti on the wall that read as follows: "Forward Serbia! Kill Americans!" I entered the building with a sort of trepidation and, after giving my handbag to the elderly women, struck up a conversation about the situation in Serbia (I prudently concealed the fact that I was a U.S. citizen). To my surprise, the women had no interest in Serbian affairs, despite the nearby nationalistic slogan. Moreover, they stated that they wouldn't mind having a U.S. politician such as Madeline Albright in the Kremlin. And the reason for this was simple enough. With all of her problems, she did not steal, and, from that perspective, she looked much better than most Russian politicians.

Those members of the general populace who are really concerned with Russia's glory and are ready to sacrifice for it have no influence on the majority. An incident at the Library of Social Sciences does a great deal to illustrate the problem. The library looks like the remains of ancient civilizations, and it evokes in my memory images of Luxor, Karnak, and the Roman Forum. During the period of imperial glory, the temple/library had grandeur and was full of dignified priests who engaged in prayer and research. Sacred crocodiles swam in a nearby pond. But today, the building is in a state of disrepair. The pond has dried up and now is filled with garbage.

As I walked around the building looking for a place where I might buy a snack, I had the sense that days of Soviet glory were not just a few years ago but a millennium away. And present-day Moscow is populated by tribes who have come from afar and are unaware of the great builders of the empire. Various members of these tribes had covered the walls with graffiti, of which I stopped to take pictures.

Suddenly, a small, dark man, with the sort of distinct features that cause Muscovites to refer to them as "people of Caucasian nationality," approached me. His eyes shone with anger as he asked me why I was taking pictures of the graffiti. "Are you going to publish them to shame Moscow? Are you a Muscovite?" I explained that I was from the United States, and this information excited him enough that he launched a small speech about the details of his life. He told me that he was an Azeri who had been living in Moscow for 15 years.

Now, Muscovites are suspicious of “people of Caucasian nationality,” as they are regarded as causing the increase in crime, and the militia frequently stops them to look over their papers. Yet, my newfound friend was proud that he had a resident’s permit. In fact his pride, I imagine, was akin to that of a Germanic warrior informing a stranger of his Roman citizenship. My Azeri friend was also still in love with the Soviet empire. “Do you know what started all this?” he asked excitedly in his thick accent. “When Reagan launched Star Wars. Do you know what Andropov told him? ‘You want a war? You can have a war.’” He added with a mixture of excitement and gloom, “We were the strongest nation in the world.” He was one of the last soldiers of the empire. Indeed, he was ready to die for the state.

Yet the pain of this Azeri and his longing for imperial splendor is not shared by the predominantly ethnic Russians. While he related the pathetic conditions in Moscow, or the so-called Third Rome, several males and females, apparently patrons of the library, lounged around drinking beer and eating dried fish. I turned to them and launched into a discussion about the NATO attacks on Yugoslavia. I tried to provoke them with the statement that NATO’s aggression was not only directed at Yugoslavia but at Russia. I told them they should be deeply touched by the tribulations that the motherland was being put through go to Serbia to help protect their Slavic and Russian brothers.

My argument failed to move them. In fact, they were not even interested in the topic. One of them said, dryly, while sipping his beer, “You need to join up with Zhirinovsky.” Here he alluded to the well-known nationalist Vladimir Zhirinovsky, who has Jewish roots and who despite his patriotic rhetoric and outrageous nationalistic statements, always submits in the end to Yeltsin, who apparently has bought him either directly or indirectly.

This passivity of Muscovites extends further than their lack of response to the war in Yugoslavia. To the south of the country the danger is more imminent. While I was in Moscow, the clashes in Dagestan increased, and the turmoil in Afghanistan were also worrisome to the Russian elite because success on the part of the Talibs and their fundamentalist ideology could lead to the rise of fundamentalism in Central Asia and possibly in Russia itself. I struck up a conversation in the subway with two Afghanis. One of them spoke fluent Russian, and he told me that he had regularly commuted between Moscow and Afghanistan for years. He was involved in some sort of trade venture. He said that he had no problems with Russians, who treated

**The new  
dictatorship would  
return the country  
to the days of Stalin.**

him well, but he implied that he had not lost the ability to fight and real Muslims eventually will take advantage of this ability. "We will take over Central Asia and move into Russia," he vowed. His Taliban friend smiled enigmatically while the Muscovites standing nearby were silent, seemingly accepting of their lot.

The lack of national spirit is due not only to a lack of interest in restoring the greatness of the state but also to a general sense of passivity about all matters. This general passivity had been evident during my visit three years ago, and I sensed that the situation was now worse. Quite a few people told me that they were not going to vote for anyone because they could not detect any differences in the candidates. This is in contrast to 1996, when people told me that they were tired of politics and craved nothing more than stability. They feared that the Communists would plunge the country into another shake-up. Yet most of them were going to vote. Thus, the increasing passivity of the populace is a powerful impediment for the rise of a nationalistic dictator. However, this passivity is not the only reason that it would be difficult for such an event to take place. Indeed, global history has witnessed many occasions when a charismatic and united elite has forced the apathetic masses into submission and then driven the populace to international adventure. Yet Russian society has a problem not only with the masses but also with the elite. To start with, not all members of the elite are glowing with a nationalistic animus. Though they admit that the West has treated Russia with disdain, some have no desire to reciprocate. Many other members of the elite who spout nationalistic rhetoric actually do not want a confrontation with the West.

### **The Russian Elite: Divided and Dependent**

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A liberal friend of mine, a writer, acknowledged to me that the Russian elite is in a difficult position. While we sat in his apartment drinking tea, he elaborated. The Russian elite, especially the military, could not reconcile themselves to being a second-rate power. The military feels that it has let the grand Soviet Army decline to its present status, not combat-ready in any form. The elite has also abandoned the imperial drive of Russia, negating Russia's entire history. This has set Russia on a collision course with the West. This is a recipe for disaster, and not only because Russia is part of the West but because Russia does not have the resources for a confrontation. Thus, the sense of apathy, the passivity is increasing in the country. The people, the country as a whole, are not ready for such an event.

Another friend of mine, an elderly bohemian poet, is not excited by the prospect of a confrontation with the West either. He stated that it would be

a mistake for the West to ignore Russia and even more of an error for it to stop the financial aid. A dictator could emerge, or the country could disintegrate into chaos. This would be dangerous to the West. At the same time, he felt that Russia could not follow an independent course, and it would be better for the country to be incorporated into the West than to end up as prey for the Chinese.

While a split in the elite complicates the possible emergence of a nationalistic dictator, it is not an obstacle that cannot be overcome. History, including Russian history, is replete with examples of cases when a small group of charismatic zealots were able to drive a society to fulfill the most daring plans. Were not the Bolsheviks such people? But the sort of people who are willing to sacrifice others and themselves are precisely what the current Russian elite is lacking.

**The Russian elite and its representatives are increasingly anti-Western.**

The point here is that the current elite, including those who preach nationalism, is not ready to accept the consequences of a confrontation with the West. One of the consequences of a confrontation would be the severing of all ties with the West, with the loss of material and other benefits that these ties bring to the country. It also implies a rigid centralized economy, military discipline in the society, rationing cards, and, of course, a continuous wave of repression. The emergence of such a regime would not be reminiscent of Brezhnev's Soviet Union, a time of comparative stability and an acceptable standard of living for the majority of the population, and a lack of a full-scale repression. The new dictatorship would return the country to the days of Stalin, which is precisely what most members of the elite that I met with do not want. They want to enjoy the economic and political liberties of the present regime and benefit from close ties to the West. Yet, at the same time, they would like to have the power and might of the former Soviet Union, hence one sees today anti-American rhetoric accompanied by looking for handouts from the West.

Quite a few members of the elite continue to espouse the Utopian way of thinking, characteristic of the mentality of Russian intellectuals for centuries. At the beginning of the political and economic changes in post-Soviet Russia, Russian intellectuals and, in fact, a considerable portion of the population assumed that the stability of the socialist system would easily be combined with that of the West. For example, they believed that salaries would increase and that the positive aspects of both political systems could easily be joined. This paradigm was wrong, of course, and the majority of present-day Russians enjoy

neither stability nor the high salaries of the West.

And today they entertain a new illusion. They assume that Russia can be both an enemy of the West and receive Western aid. This section of the Russian elite also has failed to understand the political implications of a real confrontation with the West instead of a mere verbal one. A system girded for a confrontation with the West would be a harsh authoritarian/totalitarian regime, for only such a regime could provide some resistance other than the sort of verbal sputtering we witness today. And most of the intellectuals,

**Russia will not move in the direction of becoming a strong authoritarian state.**

the members of the elite who crave a confrontation with the West, would be among such a regime's first victims. Their living standards would fall drastically. A confrontation with the West would require a sort of "payment" not understood by some of those who spout nationalist rhetoric as easily as they preached liberal capitalism a few short years ago. It is this dichotomy, between nationalistic statements and a craving for

Western dollars, that makes their anti-Western sentiment as much as a burlesque as the "Red-to-Brown" demonstrations discussed earlier.

I witnessed this dichotomy in an old friend, whom I visited during my stay. He once was strongly pro-Western, and for this reason his views were important to me as I felt they would give me some indication of the views of the liberal intelligentsia in the country. My friend met me at his apartment. With him was a specialist in Russian literature, a man in his early fifties. During the course of our conversation, we touched on the subject of Russia's position vis-à-vis the West. To me, his friend seemed to have seen not the reality of the situation, but virtual reality. In his view, Russians were as mighty as they were during the Cold War. The army was as good as ever and the production of new weapons was going full-tilt. Not only had the Soviet Union not fallen apart, but even Eastern Europe continued to be controlled by Moscow, as those countries were dependent upon Russian raw materials and the Russia's large market for imported goods. The defeat in Chechnya was merely an illusion and merely an internal squabble. At the same time, the Americans were in deep trouble because of their inability to subdue Iraq and they were now bogged down in Yugoslavia.

He soon left, and I continued my conversation with my friend. We touched upon Yugoslavia again, and contrary to his friend, he admitted that Russia was weak and had been humiliated in Chechnya. And then he suddenly became animated. "You know, I listened to Radio Free Europe all my life. And now I wish I hadn't because it spoke nothing but lies. They humili-

ated Russia. The Communists were better at defending the country's interests. And does this mean that when I voted for Yeltsin I was a complete idiot?"

I responded that Russia in many ways was responsible itself and one should not expect the country to be treated as equal to the West when it had actually destroyed itself. My friend jumped to his feet. "I'll throw you through the window." I reminded him that more than twenty years ago, before my emigration, I had told him that international relationships are based on the balance of power and that no one would treat Russia (or any other country) with respect if it was weak. At that time, I reminded him, he had said that I was an idiot. He thought for a while. "Okay, I will not throw you through the window. But the West needs to know that we still have the Topol, a new missile, and could blow you up. We could be pretty nasty. And if the West doesn't show us some respect, a Russian Nazi could come to power." After his little speech, however, he started to discuss me with the possibility of receiving a grant from a Western foundation and expressed worry that he might not receive the promised grant. In his mind there was no contradiction between being dependent on the West and confronting it.

While most Russian intellectuals with anti-Western feelings choose to ignore the consequences of the installation of an anti-Western regime, some of them do indeed understand the problem and the sort of Kafka-esque twist to their political rhetoric. One of them, I was told, expressed his sentiments in this way: "When I come to power, I will shoot myself."

The strong anti-Western feelings among a considerable part of the Russian elite and the apparently paranoid twists in their views on the Russian-Western relationship is, of course, fraught with various outcomes and none of them should be excluded. Yet it would be wrong to assume that their anti-Western statements could mean only one scenario could come to pass—the immediate rise of a harsh, anti-Western regime, meaning that the Russian bear had decided to jump from its den for a final confrontation with the West. This scenario is pleasing for both Russian intellectuals and quite a few of the Western experts in Russian studies. Both of them have a vested interest in presenting Russia as a dangerous threat to the West. For the Russian elite this image of Russia as a permanent danger to the West is important to receive "loans," which they have no intention of repaying. For specialists in Russian studies, the image of a dangerous, mighty, totalitarian Russia is important as it enhances their intellectual importance.

Yet the sad truth for both groups might be that Russia will not move in the direction of becoming a strong authoritarian state. The model of development might be quite different. The present-day, anti-Western outcry on the part of Russian elite may be not the battle cry for a future confrontation,

but the groan of a mortally wounded (self-inflicted) animal, ready to retreat.

Indeed, one should put the present anti-Western statements in historical perspective. Vladimir Zhirinovsky has promised that Russians will not only restore the Soviet Union but will expand the borders of the empire to the Indian Ocean. But just after his outrageous statements, Russia launched a war with tiny Chechnya, which led to Russia's crushing defeat. At the beginning of the recent Balkan war, Viktor Chernomyrdin proclaimed that Russia and NATO were dangerously close to nuclear war. Right after this, Russia accepted the Western role in the Balkans and has done nothing to prevent the Serbs capitulation.

It is quite likely that the present anti-Western stand of the Russian elite could well be a sign of further weakness. The road here is not a road to the strong nationalistic state, but rather to the disintegration/semidisintegration of the Russian Federation. The West should take this scenario seriously enough to be prepared for a new twist in the geopolitical situation. It should have a stratagem ready for what to do with the pieces of the "Third Rome," the Russian hinterlands, which could fall into absolute oblivion as was the case with the "First Rome" more than a millennium ago.