GlobalResearch
Center for Research on Globalization

Crisis in Ukraine: A Retrospective on Russia and the Dissolution of the Soviet Union

By Vladislav Krasnov
Global Research, July 28, 2014

Region: Russia and FSU
Theme: History
In-depth Report: UKRAINE REPORT

Today is St. Vladimir's Day. The Christians in Ukraine, Belarus and Russia celebrate it as the day of Baptism. In the year of 988 Grand Duke of Kiev whose patrimony extended from the Baltic to the Black Sea accepted Christianity in its Byzantine Orthodox form. This happened after his trip to Khersones in the Crimea where he met Anna, the sister of Byzantine Emperors.

According to a legend, he wanted to marry Anna so much that accepted the baptism as a condition. The Baptism of the whole of Kievan Rus followed, laying the foundation for the predominant cultural identity of Russian, Belorussian and Ukrainian peoples as co-equal descendants of the Kievan Rus. Later, parts of Ukraine and Belarus came under sway of the Pope of Rome and Western influence, which partially explains their distinctiveness from Russia.

Those historical events are still relevant today. In the USSR, whose state-mandated ideology was avowedly atheist, those religious distinctions in the identity of the three nations were downplayed and distorted, while the Catholics were singled out for greater persecution on the pretext that they retained loyalty to the Pope of Rome. But, like in Yugoslavia during the 1990s, they came to the fore in Ukraine in 2005 and now again.

Jack Matlock, former US ambassador to Moscow, is right saying that the conflict in Ukraine is an essentially internal conflict among Ukrainians who have different cultural leanings. And so was George Kennan, the architect of a successful Cold War strategy of containment, who argued, after the downfall of Communism, that Russia should be left alone and NATO should not be used to pressure her.

In stead, the Neocon-dictated US policy of unilateral global domination was adopted in the Balkans, Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, Syria and, now, Ukraine. After a dubious success in the Balkans, it failed miserably elsewhere and unlikely to succeed in Ukraine. The main obstacle is a New Russia under President Vladimir Putin.

The emphasis is on "New" because Western politicos and mass media have deliberately demonized Putin's Russia as a throwback to Soviet Empire. Hence their emphasis on Putin's KGB background and on his alleged ambitions to invade former Soviet Republics. They love to quote his 2005 statement that he regarded the dissolution of the USSR a disaster. Patrick Armstrong, a former Canadian diplomat, has shown convincingly that Putin did not mean what Western journalists impute to him http://www.russiaotherpointsofview.com/2010/11/the-third-turn.html

Putin does not have a nostalgia for the Soviet Union. Its dissolution was a disaster not in itself but the WAY it happened. Under Gorbachev and Yeltsin the country practically lost its sovereignty. The so called "shock therapy" which Western economists recommended for transition to free-market capitalism caused such disruption, poverty and death that one has to go back to the Great Depression to get an idea of the amount of suffering Russian people sustained as a result of this clumsy Western meddling. Peter Reddaway and Dmitry Glinsky aptly entitled their book "The Tragedy of Russia's Reforms: Market Bolshevism Against Democracy". The book titles of Janine Wedel's Collision and Collusion: The Strange Case of Western Aid to Eastern Europe and Chrystia Freeland's Sale of the Century: Russia's Wild Ride from Communism to Capitalism are just as eloquent.

The West missed, downplayed or distorted such Putin gestures as–his reverent attitude toward Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn;

–he defined Russian patriotism not in ideological "class struggle" terms as was the case under Communism but, in Solzhenitsyn's words, as "love for one's country, its history, people and traditions"
–followed Solzhenitsyn's recommendation that the main task of the government should be "saving people's lives" (the demographic situation has lately improved)
–personally lay a wreath on the monument to the victims of GULAG in Norilsk
–stated "History proves all dictatorships, all authoritarian forms of government, are transient. Only democratic systems are intransient".
–far from wishing to come back to Communism Putin spoke against "the outrageous price our country and its people had to pay for that Bolshevist experiment".

Not that there are no problems with democracy in Russia: it is still in a nascent stage, for democracy cannot be introduced overnight, like potato. It needs patient and steady cultivation over generations. The basic mistake of the 1990s was that democracy and free-market were introduced in such a sudden and haphazard way that the immediate result was anarchy, criminality, corruption, oligarchy, and erosion of sovereignty. It took a reversal to a more autocratic rule under Putin and Medvedev to undo some of the mistakes of the 1990s while retaining the fundamentals of private ownership and free enterprise. In the very least, Russians now have a country of their own where they can try different forms of social, economic and political organisation.

Some of the above points are made in Introduction to my new book in Новая Россия: от коммунизма к национальному возрождению. Actually, it is a Russian translation of my old 1991 American book, Russia Beyond Communism: A Chronicle of National Rebirth. However, whereas the American original was predicting that the fall of the USSR will lead to the emergence of nation state in Russia, the Russian edition was prompted by recent events that make the prediction true. After setbacks suffered during the reign of Yeltsin, the process of nation-building in Russia has gone through starts and stops and now appears to be gaining momentum.

The predictions are not mine. They are from the actual writings of dozens of outstanding Soviet writers and thinkers, dissidents and defectors. I only arranged them polyphonically so that people of different persuasion speak their mind. The conditions of glasnost during the 1980s permitted for the first time in Soviet history non-Communist authors to speak up. Many of them outlined their dreams and visions "beyond Communism".

All wanted to return to national roots and traditions, including Christian ones that were

destroyed or undermined after the Bolshevik 1917 revolution. None envisioned a full-blown "wild' capitalism, much less corruption and oligarchy that set in in Russia–and Ukraine–during the 1990s.My contribution to those "voices" of glasnost was the observation that throughout the Cold War the predominant Western attitudes to the USSR were dictated not so much by ideological anti-Communism as by russophobia, that is a distrust and fear of historical Russia.

After all, two of the three ideological pillars of Soviet ideology, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, were Western. So the Soviet experiment with socialism was seen a lot more compatible with Western thinking than any Russian religious philosophy or the mysterious Russian soul. When Solzhenitsyn, after being expelled from Russia and settling in the US, stated in 1974 that he will return to a free Russia, America's "best and brightest" ridiculed him as a reactionary dreamer. This explains their fear of a post-Communist Russia lest it chooses its own path of development based on its own spiritual tradition. The book was dedicated to the Millennium of Russian Christianity which happened in 1988 when I was writing it.

Russia's own path need not to be hostile to Western civilization. That's why such Western conservatives as Patrick Buchanan or Marine Le Pen seem to think of Putin's resistance to the US as helpful to the preservation of basic Western values which are often forsaken in the West.

Besides bearing the name of St. Vladimir, Putin has lately exhibited an unusual degree of religious devotion. Last Saturday, when Russia celebrated the 700 anniversary of the birth of St. Sergius, the spiritual unifier of the Russian nation against the Mongol yoke, Putin went to Sergiev Posad to honor the saint jointly with Patriarch Kirill. Not only did Putin venerate the relics of St. Sergius, he also made a speech praising the saint. In our difficult time, said Putin in apparent reference to anti-Russian sanctions, "only love and unity can save our nation". http://ria.ru/religion/20140718/1016629264.html#ixzz37taz8DoW

Since Soviet soldiers were forbidden to wear a cross until the very end of the USSR, is it not amazing that now, 23 years later, the Commander-in-Chief of the Russian armed forces venerates a religious relic? Is this not a tectonic change in a nation which for 73 years advanced throughout the world the ideology of "class struggle"?

In the twenty three years I have been annually visiting Russia, but I have never seen such an upswing in patriotism as I see it now. It was evident during the Sochi Olympics and it exploded in the wake of March 16 referendum in Crimea for joining Russia. As a matter of fact, after taking part in a scholarly conference in Gurzuf, Crimea, at the end of May, on June 1st, I was invited for my book presentation at a history club in Sevastopol. http://grafskaya.com/?p=15035The people in Crimea were enthusiastic about reunification with Russia. But my ten-day visit was too short for definitive conclusions. From what I have seen and heard, the process of re-unification went smoothly and referendum was genuine. I also met two Ukrainian guys who were on a visit to Crimea. They did not want to return to Ukraine for fear they would be drafted to "fight our brothers in South-East". The Tatars were certainly happy that after joining Russia their language gained the official status (which Kiev denied them for so many years).

Now the MH17 tragedy in Ukraine. Regardless of whose fault it was–I certainly do not want to make judgement before a thorough investigation–the ultimate responsibility rests with those Maidan leaders who on February 21, 2014, rejected the compromise agreement with

President Yanukovich and opted for a coup d'etat. Ukraine has been going downhill since. Never mind all Yanukovich's faults, his democratic constituency was about half of the country and much larger in the South-East. By forcing him out, the new Kiev government split the country in two, a split that only changed one set of oligarchs for another. The country can hardly be healed by Pyotr Poroshenko, an oligarch whose election took place at the time of unrest, confusion and dependence on foreign hand-outs.

The Malaysian airplane tragedy show that injustice committed against a large group of people in one country can rebound anywhere in the world. The Kiev government failed to exercise control over Ukraine's air space and warn all commercial airlines about the danger. By jumping with unproven allegations against the "separatists" and Russia, Kiev and Washington showed that they are more concerned with scoring political points than human lives.
Well, to those who persevere in search of truth, I recommend

1. Anthony Cordesman, July 18, 2014 The Downing of the Malaysian Airliner: Avoid Rushing to Judgment http://csis.org/publication/downing-malaysian-airliner-avoid-rushing-judgment 2. Michael Shrimpton "my provisional conclusion is that MH17 was shot down by an air defense battery of the Ukrainian army, from Ukrainian territory, using an SA-17 Buk missile. I respectfully associate myself with the statements of the Russian federal government on the issue.:http://www.veteranstoday.com/2014/07/19/the-mh17-shoot-down-over-ukraine/
3.Dr. Paul Craig Roberts http://www.globalresearch.ca/washingtons-propaganda-machine-in-high-gear-what-happened-to-malaysian-airline-mh17/5392304
4. Robert Parry,http://consortiumnews.com/2014/07/20/what-did-us-spy-satellites-see-in-ukraine/
5. Vladislav Gulevich, http://www.counterpunch.org/2014/07/21/amnesty-international-and-the-war-in-ukraine/
6. Alexander DONETSKY | 11.07.2014 | 00:00 Freedom of Speech – Ukrainian Style: Persecution of Journalists and Total Censorship http://www.strategic-culture.org/news/2014/07/11/freedom-speech-ukrainian-style-persecution-journalists-and-total-censorship.html
7. Finian Cunningham: http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2014/07/20/372063/will-russia-shoot-down-wests-lies/, June 20.
8. Paul Joseph Watson, Whistleblower: U.S. Satellite Images Show Ukrainian Troops Shooting Down MH17, Prison Planet.com, July 21, 2014 http://www.prisonplanet.com/whistleblower-u-s-satellite-images-show-ukrainian-troops-shooting-down-mh17.html
9.Webster G. Tarpley, Tarpley.net – World Crisis Radio, July 19, 2014. In his words,Malaysian Airliner Massacre is Wall Street-City of London Riposte to Fortaleza Summit's Creation of BRICS Bank, The Most Formidable Challenge Yet to International Monetary Fund, World Bank, Federal Reserve and Dollar Domination of World Trade http://tarpley.net/malaysian-airliner-massacre-is-wall-street-city-of-london-riposte-to-creation-of-brics-bank/
10. At the end comes Thomas Graham's sensible proposal, America Needs a Real Russia Policy | The National Interest
Thomas Graham is a managing director at Kissinger Associates, Inc., where he focuses on Russian and Eurasian affairs. He was Special Assistant to the President and Senior Director for Russia on the National Security Council staff from 2004 to 2007 and Director for Russian Affairs on that staff from 2002 to 2004.Graham's credentials show that a hope for a return to sanity in US policy is not unwarranted.

The original source of this article is Global Research
Copyright © Vladislav Krasnov, Global Research, 2014

Comment on Global Research Articles on our Facebook page

Become a Member of Global Research

Articles by: Vladislav Krasnov

Disclaimer: The contents of this article are of sole responsibility of the author(s). The Centre for Research on Globalization will not be responsible for any inaccurate or incorrect statement in this article. The Centre of Research on Globalization grants permission to cross-post Global Research articles on community internet sites as long the source and copyright are acknowledged together with a hyperlink to the original Global Research article. For publication of Global Research articles in print or other forms including commercial internet sites, contact: publications@globalresearch.ca

www.globalresearch.ca contains copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We are making such material available to our readers under the provisions of "fair use" in an effort to advance a better understanding of political, economic and social issues. The material on this site is distributed without profit to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving it for research and educational purposes. If you wish to use copyrighted material for purposes other than "fair use" you must request permission from the copyright owner.

For media inquiries: publications@globalresearch.ca