

optimist - not because I am more sanguine about intentions
of Russian leadership but ~~just~~ about ability of Russia to
project its power & its dilemma: internal + external - vis-a-vis China

THE RUSSIAN FACTOR IN EUROPEAN SECURITY IN THE POST COMMUNIST ERA IN COMPARATIVE HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

by Thad Radzilowski

In a panel on The Russian Factor in European Security a discussion of the Problem of "Russia and Post-Communist Europe" presents an interesting dilemma. A key indicator to the weight of this problem has in the minds of most Europeans, especially in Central and Western Europe, is very much like Sherlock Holmes' most famous clue "The Dog which did not bark". This is a topic on which there is a virtual silence. For most Europeans outside of the areas of recent Soviet Hegemony this is not an issue of pressing importance. Russia now a middling power - with nuclear weapons to be sure - with an economy about the size of California's located beyond two or three tiers of new buffer states neither engages nor concentrates the minds of West Europeans when they think of security concerns. The fact that most Russians are concentrating on domestic problems with the economy as the paramount problem and that the chief concerns about issues beyond the frontier are issues of the "near abroad" - the states of the Former USSR which border the new Russia-feeds the West European sense that this is a non-issue. A friend of mine - a

U.S. diplomat serving in one of the former satellite states - remarked recently that while the issue of NATO expansion is of considerable concern to the political class in Moscow - an important group without doubt - it is little or no interest to most Russians outside of Moscow or outside of official circles.

We can argue that nuclear weapons are always a potential threat and dangerous to the security of neighbors of the state with the weapons but in a age of nuclear standoff they don't much change the basic problem of relations between states except to raise the ante. The proverbial madman with nuclear weapons is an interesting theoretical problem but offers little insight into long term problems affecting policy and security. In any case, as we know, Russia is, in fact, engaged in nuclear disarmament and no longer targets its European neighbors. There is no factor on the horizon that would point to any imminent change in that policy. In fact, with some optimism we can speak of more economic improvement than most predictions only two years ago foresaw and a gradual growth of a political culture more hospitable to rule of law and parliamentarianism than most observers expected.

The collapse of USSR and the Soviet Empire does, however, provide us with a new vantage point to look back on the problem of Russia and European Security in historical and comparative perspective. The well known Polish Historian Jerzy

Jedlicki wrote in the wake of the fall of Communism in Poland and the Soviet Bloc that "These are idyllic, golden times for historians. All revolutions arouse historical consciousness. A revolution implies a re-evaluation of a nation's history". Indeed, it also gives us an opportunity to take another look at Russia's role in Europe in this century and it invites a comparative perspective as the fall of Communism-with a whimper rather than a bang-has served in part to demystify what might be called Communist Exceptionalism.

Russia has played a significant role in European Politics since the 18th Century, first claiming the right to be considered a major player on the European scene in the wake of its victory over Sweden in the Great Northern War. The progressive decline of Poland - Lithuania in the 18th Century as graphically demonstrated by the War of Polish Succession brought Russian Armies into Central Europe before mid-century. Its role in the Seven Years War confirmed Russia's position as one of the Great Powers and showed its ability to project its power into the heart of Central Europe. The partitions of Poland moved its frontiers further along the trajectory traced by its armies earlier in the century.

But the partitions of Poland which brought Russia's borders only up to the approximate border of the USSR in mid-century, was not the event which was to give Russia a pre-eminence in European Affairs. It was the collapse of the

European order and the final defeat of France as a result of the Wars of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic period. If the decline of Poland-Lithuania had opened the European door to Russia in the 18th century, the defeat of Napoleon allowed Russia to take up residence in the European House. The treaty of Vienna in 1815 which effected the fourth partition of Poland, gave the Grand Duchy of Warsaw, carved out of the Prussian Partition, at the Treaty of Tilsit in 1807, to Russia in trade for 2/3 of Saxony. This put the Tsarist Empire deep into Central Europe. The victory over Napoleon and the aura of invincibility it gave Russia, made her the leader of the Reactionary Camp and the arbiter of Europe's destiny for a period of more than 40 years: from 1815-1856. The prestige of the Empire and the need to maintain Russia as head of Monarchical Europe doomed the possibility of reform. Anna Tuitcheva, the daughter of the poet, wrote in 1854 that, however oppressive the system was, Russians felt they had to accept this Oriental despotism "as the price of prestige of might and of unquestioned political and military preeminence." Everyone had become accustomed 'to believe incontrovertibly in the might, strength and invincibility of Russia." This was the Russian Empire that crushed the Poles in 1830-31, the Hungarians in 1849 and bolstered the monarchs of Central Europe as the Revolution of 1848 shook their thrones.

The Crimean War, Russia's first strategic defeat since 1711 - since before she

had entered European Politics - shattered that illusion. The invincible Russia which had defeated the Corsican conqueror of Europe proved unable to win a small war on its own territory. Tuitcheva wrote in her diary a year before the Fall of Sebastapol that "the breath of events was enough to bring ruin to the whole illusionary edifice." The Russian envoy in Vienna, A. M. Gorchakov, wrote in October 1854 - "It is impossible to understand this crises unless one takes into account the fact that from it must inevitable arise a new world." The future Tsar Alexander wrote in the margins of Gorchakov's report, "This is just what I think and what I have said from the beginning of the War."

The Western Victory had the effect of shattering the Russian position in the European System and driving Russia out of Europe into Asia or to Europe's wild margins in the Balkans. The defeat also acted as a precipitant of reform: moral, social, political, and economic ideas, forming for decades, now all at once crystallized into action and policy. Serfdom was ended, a new legal system was created along with the first Russian legal Bar, local rural and municipal governing institutions were created, the military draft system was democratized, the central government was revamped and a significant economic development began that was marked by periods of the most intense growth and industrialization in the country's history.

To be sure, Russia did not give up Empire or its idea nor release its subject minorities, nor did it become, by any measure, as free and democratic as France or England - so the change was partial and incomplete - but it did change dramatically. Alexander Gershenkron in his brilliant lectures "Russia in the European Mirror" discussing this period notes that the Russian Experience "appears as an integral part of a differentiated overall European Pattern". He concludes that "Russia was indeed becoming Europe".

Ironically, precisely when Russia lost her key role in European politics and her ability to threaten European Security; when she was effectively pushed to the margins of Europe and her former role assumed by the new Germany after 1870, did Russia begin to move internally toward Europe in society, culture and economy.

The First World War and the Bolshevik revolution drove Russia further out of Europe and most certainly out of the framework of its international system. Most importantly, it stopped the evolution of Russia in the direction of European Society. The new USSR stabilized and rebuilt a smaller and more terrible version of the old Russian Empire.

The Second World War created conditions similar to those which had first permitted Russia to become a dominant power on the Continent. The European order was again smashed, in a new and terrible war that again resulted in a great

invasion of the successor state of The Russian Empire, the USSR by Hitler's Germany and ended again in the defeat of the invader through a heroic Russian effort. The victory allowed the expansion of the Soviet Union into the vacuum created by the collapse of the Nazi regime. Russian troops and Russian Hegemony returned to Central Europe and to center of European Security concerns. Again, Russia was the pre-eminent military power on the continent whose weight in European military and political affairs could only be balanced by the United States at the time. The Soviet impact on European politics and its threat to European security lasted 45 years this time.

The cost of maintaining an oppressive domestic police state, carrying on of an ambitious worldwide competition with the United States and trying to match its rival's formidable military prowess and to hold on to its reluctant satellites proved too much for the Empire. It did not have the resources to sustain so ^{massive an} ~~Hereulean~~ ^{take on excitement} Empire. As in 1856, the observers of our century were surprised to discover that colossus had feet of clay. This time the collapse was more complete. Finally, the Empire disintegrated and Russian power receded eastward even further than it had in the 19th Century. In both centuries the very conditions under which Russia succeeded in asserting a temporary Hegemony over a weakened Europe prevented it from actually creating the internal conditions to make it permanent and the

rebounding of Europe economically and politically helped to doom it.

Looking back on the two periods, we are drawn to the conclusion that while Russia was indeed a formidable military power whose regional pre-eminence was never in doubt, its claim to European wide hegemony was perhaps weaker and more contingent than it appeared to many at the beginning of the 19th Century and in the middle of our own. The aura of power and invincibility born out of the heroic defeat of the major European conqueror of each century masked the fact that expansion of Russia into the vacuum created by those events became impossible to maintain as the world returned to normal. Russia's weaknesses hidden behind its autocratic facade were too great to allow it to be what it pretended to be for more than four decades.

As in the 19th Century, the very process that pushed Russia out of Europe also coincides with a new attempt to become more like Europe as Russia tries to develop a market economy, a parliamentary system and a free new civil order. It is also struggling to come to terms with the loss of Empire and to create a new national identity.

A further conclusion is that a system of European Security that maintains the integrity of Central Europe and East Central Europe is necessary to keep Russian power in check should it become a formidable military power with a leadership

interested in articulating an aggressive foreign policy aimed at hegemony over its neighbors. In this era, the structure provided by NATO which guarantees the integrity of the states of East Central Europe and which gives Russia a constructive role to play through instruments such as the NATO Partnership for Peace is a key to peace and the balance of power in Europe by preventing the development of those conditions which allowed Russia to move into Central Europe in the past. Beyond guarantees to Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic, another key to the restraint of Russian expansion is a strong, democratic and independent Ukraine. There is no strong Russian position in Europe without Ukraine. -Jaroslav Billinsky

The involvement of the U.S. in European Politics and its role as the guarantor of security on the Continent makes the 20th Century far different from the situation in the 19th Century. What is similar is that again, as Russia seeks to reform itself in the wake of its loss of pre-eminence in European Politics, a new united Germany has emerged at the heart of Europe. All future discussions of European security will revolve around German-Russian relations. As a new European security system emerges in the 21st Century, Germany is likely to be its lynch pin (the U.S. influence and role in Europe despite NATO will gradually ebb, if all goes well). The major problem of any restructured European System will be to find a constructive role for Russia in it. It might not be too much to suggest that other

European States especially those in East Central Europe, will welcome Russia as a counter weight to Germany in the not too distant future if it can make a successful transition to democracy and a prosperous economy.

One of the most optimistic scenarios was suggested recently by a Russian economist.

In twenty years, we will be a normal country. In fifty years, we will be a very affluent country. In a hundred years, Europe will join us.

If Russian power is to be projected into Europe, that is one of the better way to have it done.