

Putative Roots of the Embellished Ego of Russian Leaders

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The generation living during the nuclear destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki is particularly aware to the global dangers of atomic weapons. While fears of human extinction led to international agreements to minimize the risks, a few countries still promote military nuclear capabilities. This is acceptable once the rational is to deter potential existential threats, but there are also menacing leaders ready to use such weapons to achieve their political aspirations (e.g., Kim Jong Un against South Korea and the US; Vladimir Putin against Ukraine and NATO; and Ali Khamenei against oil-producing countries in the Middle East, as well as against Israel and the US). Hence, the world faces unprecedented global risks, which evidently raises questions about the rational of those endangering humanity. The putative basis of such 'insane' perception may be either ignorance, or, a foolish religious belief in the 'shaheed' approach (sacrifice while disregarding the possible global consequences), or, deliberated intention to frighten the opponents (ref. 1). No question, Putin's threats to use nuclear weapons against Ukraine or NATO are most bothering as it might instigate a world nuclear war, a horrible futuristic assessment. This is particularly outrageous as it involves a country that in certain aspects was a 'World Cradle of Culture' (e.g., arts, literature, science, sports) and origin of immigrants initiating 'seeds' of societies over numerous locations. Still, rather than fostering additional aspects important for the welfare of the citizens such as freedom, privacy, civil rights, and most importantly a reasonable economy and improved life standards, the Russians were always lagging behind the West, despite their enormous potential, impressive history, and large country size with vast natural resources. This is likely due to inappropriate economic policy and political corruption at all state and municipal levels. Amazingly however, despite the impediments, Russia has shown success in military development and space research, proving its great potential. Still, rather than recuperating the economy by basic reforms, the Russian leaders came to terms with the poor reality, while playing the 'macho game' both nationally and internationally. The ever-lasting competition with the United States alongside fears and feelings of inferiority led to the establishment of the Soviet Union as well as the Warsaw Pact, a counteracting force to NATO or any other illusory threats, thereby raising a dangerous 'Cold War' between East and West.

To figure out the basis of the trailing economy and aggressive national and international affairs, one should consider the Russian history with a background of multinational population* (mostly Slavic and Caucasian) with exceptional archaic pride, superstitions, prejudice ideas, and admiration of physical power (ever since they belonged to previous empires such as the Mongolian), as well as their continuous attempts to sustain a position of a world superpower. These considerations evidently required a tough central regime, often brutal, to avoid any attempt of revolt or disintegration. Indeed, with such a background, the success of the central regime to preserve the Russian unity during many centuries is undoubtedly impressive,

particularly when considering the country size and population variety. These aspects may also explain why capitalistic and democratic principles had never been implemented in Russia. Moreover, the complications and derived constraints were reflected on the political election system and expectations from the final presidential nominee: Besides presenting a clear plan of national security, ways of improving the international status while preserving the Russian pride, and satisfying national needs, the candidate should prove administrative abilities that fit the political aspirations of his supporters. On the other hand and quite surprisingly, the educational background and psychological status of the nominee seem less important, which might have opened the door to leaders with psychotic dangerous personalities. Following the 1917 revolution (Bolsheviks and then Communists), most leaders were selected out of a supreme council, such as the Politburo (the principal policymaking Communist committee), a belligerent group with personal interests overriding national requirements. Consequently, the elected leaders were actually detached from the public, and contributed only little or even exacerbated the life standards in Russia. Joseph Stalin, a revolutionary leader and head of the Communist Party, was elected after Lenin's death (1924) by the Council of People's Commissars of the Soviet Union. As may happen to individuals accumulating excess power, their self-esteem increases towards levels beyond their real knowledge and understanding, which may lead to false decisions and actions. This seems a precise description of Stalin's behavior and leadership (1924-1953), recording perhaps the darkest period in Russia's history with millions suspected as potential opponents to the leader, like the Bolsheviks Leon Trotsky and Nikolai Bukharin, eliminated by his command ('The Great Purge'; ref. 2). Stalin's primitive thinking, scientific ignorance, and brutality led to disastrous economic situation and massive starvation due also to adoption of a false agronomic perception - 'Lisenkoism'**. His exaggerated self-esteem and arrogance led him also to sign an agreement with Adolf Hitler about division of the world between Germany and Russia, which soon after appeared to be a German deceit when they invaded Russia in mid-1941 (Operation Barbarossa). Upon Stalin's death in 1953, the Council of Ministers (actually Politburo) nominated Georgy Malenkov as leader, and soon after Nikita Khrushchev (1953-1964), known for his attempt to deploy nuclear missiles in Cuba, and for his brutal behavior (knocking with his shoe on the table in the United Nations). Khrushchev was elected on the basis of his contribution to the victory of the Red Army during WWII, although his international abilities as leader were questionable. He was replaced in 1964 by Leonid Brezhnev (1964-1982), who developed a powerful military and lived hedonistically, while neglecting national economic needs ('Era of Stagnation'). After Brezhnev, Yuri Andropov, a non-impressive leading personality, but a member in the highest council, took the lead (1982-1984), but was replaced soon after by Konstantin Chernenko (1984-1985), another non-influential *persona*, who was succeeded by Mikhail Gorbachev (1985-1991). Gorbachev was a scholar known for his reforms ('Glasnost' - increased governmental openness and citizen freedom; and, 'Perestroika' - reformation and restructuring of the Soviet political and economic systems), and especially for the disintegration of the Soviet Union into a large number of independent nations***. Although these steps paused the 'Cold War' and raised promise for improvement in Russia's international status and economic situation, the hopes were not realized during Boris Yeltsin's rule (1991-1999), and so the 'capture' of leadership by Vladimir Putin under whom Russia experienced democratic backsliding into an authoritarian dictatorship, ended the expectations for a 'better world' and awareness to the fate of humanity. *Therefore, the period ever since the rise of Communism may be considered a wasted time in the development of Russia.* Rather than utilizing the great potential and natural resources to cope with the advances in the

West and improve Russia's economy, human rights, international affairs and positive political status, the chain of elected leaders, except Mikhail Gorbachev, presented an embellished ego and antagonism to the West, while worsening the political isolation of Russia, and resuming (especially during Putin's term) the 'Cold War' between the East and the West. It seems that the inflated ego and totalitarian approach are most likely built-in characteristics of leaders, resting on Russia's past, election system, and aspirations of returning to the empire days. Hence, the spiritual and political stagnations accompanied by exaggerated self-esteem and bullying approach, all wrapped by superstitions, prejudice ideas, and primitive manners, obstructed considerably Russia's development. Notably, such a poor depiction of the Russian typicality was reflected already during the monarchic period of Tsar Nicholas II and Tsarina Alexandra with their support in the political rise of an uneducated cunning monk (Rasputin) in the background of ignorance and prejudice ideas that were common and still dominate in this large country****.

Although Russia exists over 800 years (former name Kievan Rus) and occupies a territory larger than the entire European continent, the ancient origin of the people, enormous geographical territory, and military history have most likely outlined their rigid characteristics and feelings of prominence and unbeatable security, that were likely substantiated upon the defeat of the Germans during WWII as well as rescue of Europe from the Nazi occupation. Yet, it also required an iron fist to control such multinational large country and maintain the loyalty to the Central regime located at the West side of the country (e.g., Moscow, St. Petersburg). Following the 1917 revolution, the Russians established legislative rules with a national Parliament-like institution (DUMA) constituted from representatives of all country populations. However, the supreme council (e.g., Politburo) remained the highest authority. Presently, Vladimir Putin, a former intelligence officer and trained administrator, maintains an iron fist leadership actually since 2000. Notably, he is not the only one with an embellished ego and imperialistic perception. Recent declarations of the Russian Foreign Minister, Sergei Lavrov, about the slim possibility for peace between Russia and the United States, reflects the dangerous insight of the Politburo. His words in press interviews have demonstrated the aggressive tendency of the Russian leadership about using nuclear weapons (ref. 3). Considering the extremely large Russian territory, a major factor in its safety, Lavrov's declarations of willingness to protect the Russian security and interests using doomsday means reflect substantial hypocrisy, almost insanity. In fact, Russia is not really threatened by the West, and all economic and social troubles have been created by corrupted regimes, primitive faiths, and false developmental priorities that are still hard to be cured, even by Putin's initiative of recent series of liberal economic reforms (flat income tax of 13 percent, reduced profits-tax, and new land and civil codes), that reduced profoundly the poverty. Yet, the present regime with Putin's leadership resembles in a way the Tsar days of totalitarianism. Despite Putin's calm look and logical-like (bogus) appearance, his aggression, corruptive wealth, hedonistic life-style and murderous acts against various opponents resemble dark days in Russia's history and are quite disturbing. As revealed in the war against Ukraine, human life is cheap in his eyes, and he is ready to sacrifice hundreds of thousands of soldiers and civilians to achieve his megalomaniac aspirations. It seems that serious considerations about the future of humanity and threats to Earth are of low priority. This assessment concomitant to evidence about his prejudice and superstitious ideas that led him to consult with a Mongolian shaman (ref. 4) as well as with a woman 'magician' about his political moves, demonstrate that the Russian leadership is still primitive, and dangerous to humanity. It seems that a change in the

Russian foreign affairs demands a national revolution to restrict Putin's tyranny and imperialistic aspirations, as well as division of Russia into several geographical ethnic entities (ref. 5), which may require a military defeat of the Russian army.

References

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*over 190 ethnic groups, among them 77% Russkie and East Slavic people forming the Russian identity since the Middle Ages, and groups of surrounding regions like the Bashkirs, Belorusians, Chechens, Chuvashians, Dargins, Estonians, Georgians, Gypsies, Ingushians, Kabardians, Kazakhs, Lezgins, Moldavans, Mongols, Mordvins, Ossetians, Tatars, Ukrainians, Uzbeks, Yakuts, and even Viking offspring's.

**Lysenkoism was a false perception raised by the cunning biologist Trofim D. Lysenko, who suggested that plant traits were transferred from parent-cells to offspring cells physically rather than through genes. A simplistic example was that by removing all leaves of a plant, its future generations would grow without leaves. Lysenko's rise to power and implemented reforms in agronomy (supported by Stalin) destroyed the Russian agriculture and exacerbated food shortages that killed millions. His theories were based primarily on principles of Lamarckism, but reached thereafter ludicrous determinations (e.g., 'plants could be educated'; or, 'heritage in plants does not involve genes'). Despite his preposterous theories, Lysenko was twice awarded the Order of Lenin, and became president of the Lenin Academy of Agricultural Sciences of the USSR, a full member of Russia's Academy of Sciences and a member of the Supreme Soviet. He used his political power to harass Nikolai Vavilov, a leading biologist, who followed the Mendelian genetic principles and devoted his life to establishment of a gene bank of all significant agricultural crops. The removal of Vavilov from his academic position was made at the initiative of Stalin himself in support of Lysenko's demand.

***Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Estonia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgystan, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan.

****Rasputin (Grigori Yafimovich Novykh) was a Siberian peasant, who grew up as a monk acquiring his surname due to his promiscuous and heavy drinking habits (in Russian 'rasputin' translates to 'debauched one'). He was acceptable by women probably due to his exceptional appearance (tall with piercing hypnotizing eyes) and uncontrolled behavior, but some healing ability. In 1905 he was introduced to the royal Romanov family desperate for someone able to cure their son, Alexei, suffering from hemophilia. Although lacking higher education, Rasputin was clever enough to stop some bleedings of Alexei, probably through hypnosis as well as elimination of aspirin (a blood diluting drug) from his medications, and so he gained total trust of the royal couple (Tsarina Alexandra and Tsar Nicolai). In 1915, when the Tsar was busy in battles of WWI, leaving all Russian affairs in Alexandra's hands, Rasputin was appointed as her closest advisor and gained an upsetting political power. His continued promiscuous habits instigated a group of Russian nobles to get rid of him during the mess of the Bolshevik revolution, and so he was assassinated at the end of 1916, approximately a year before the execution of the royal family. Rasputin's climbing to a national status exemplified how an uneducated peasant could get to power in the background of ignorance and prejudice ideas common in Russia, as evident even nowadays in Putin's consultations with the great Mongolian Shaman about his political decisions, or the rumors about the bloody bath he took to increase his masculine potency.