

The Time of Troubles in Alexander Dugin's Narrative

DMITRY SHLAPENTOKH

DW 332, Indiana University South Bend, 1700 Mishawaka Avenue, South Bend, IN 46615, USA. Email: dshlapen@iusb.edu

Alexander Dugin (b. 1962) is one of the best-known philosophers and public intellectuals of post-Soviet Russia. While his geopolitical views are well-researched, his views on Russian history are less so. Still, they are important to understand his *Weltanschauung* and that of like-minded Russian intellectuals. For Dugin, the 'Time of Troubles' – the period of Russian history at the beginning of the seventeenth century marked by dynastic crisis and general chaos – constitutes an explanatory framework for the present. Dugin implicitly regarded the 'Time of Troubles' in broader philosophical terms. For him, the 'Time of Troubles' meant not purely political and social upheaval/dislocation, but a deep spiritual crisis that endangered the very existence of the Russian people. Russia, in his view, has undergone several crises during its long history. Each time, however, Russia has risen again and achieved even greater levels of spiritual wholeness. Dugin believed that Russia was going through a new 'Time of Troubles'. In the early days of the post-Soviet era, he believed that it was the collapse of the USSR that had led to a new 'Time of Troubles'. Later, he changed his mind and proclaimed that the Soviet regime was not legitimate at all and, consequently, that the 'Time of Troubles' started a century ago in 1917. Dugin holds a positive view of Putin in general. Still, his narrative implies that Putin has been unable to arrest the destructive process of a new Time of Trouble.

Introduction

Many nations appeal to the history of foreign countries to define their own national identities. Russia, whose elite has been perplexed about their nation's civilizational position for generations, is one of these. For more than a century, the Russian elite has been fascinated with the French Revolution.

Interest in the French Revolution as an explanatory model was not due to external similarities between events in Russia in the twentieth century, and especially the first half of that century, and those in France in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Rather, a considerable segment of the Russian elite, increasingly

westernized in outlook and behaviour in the last years of the tsarist regime, wished to see the country following the West, broadly speaking. These views were espoused not just by liberals but also by radicals. As a matter of fact, the creed of the latter, Marxism, was of Western origin. Belief in the West was the cornerstone of most Russian intelligentsia, especially those of a dissident or semi-dissident streak in the big cities. And it was they who hailed the Gorbachev reforms and the final collapse of the regime. Situating Russian and Soviet history in the context of a final and irreversible ‘Thermidor’, they had a variety of expectations. It would be naïve to assume they actually believed in the triumph of democracy as the final sign of Russia’s incorporation into the Western order. Very few actually professed ‘Fukuyamianism’, so popular in the West in the early 1990s. Most of them deeply despised the masses – disgusting ‘sovki’ who either acted in cahoots with the Soviet regime in persecuting the intellectual elite or were absolutely foreign to intellectuals. They saw no problem in the Soviet authorities dealing harshly with the populace, a tradition going back to the early nineteenth century when Russia’s seminal poet Alexander Pushkin compared the masses with sheep that were oblivious to any sense of honour (*chesti klich*). Therefore, they should be either fleeced or slaughtered for meat. While democracy was not the expected fruit of the new ‘Thermidor’, might and prosperity were expected. Westernized Russia, in this narrative, would join the concert of Western powers and retain its equality with the USA. It would be a rich country with speedy economic progress. The imperial inheritance was seen as a liability that prevented Russia from achieving all this in the new ‘Thermidorian’ era.

These things did not happen. Consequently, non-Western paradigms re-emerged; it is worthwhile remembering that these had never been completely absent from official and dissident/semi-dissident discourse. With the increasing economic and geopolitical crises they became increasingly competitive with Thermidorian and other Western historical models, albeit they never eliminated the Western model completely, at least through the late 1980s and 1990s. Several historical models coexisted and occupied their particular intellectual niches. The ‘Time of Troubles’ model emerged as one of the most popular. The historical ‘Time of Troubles’ was a series of turbulent events in the beginning of the seventeenth century, marked by dynastic crises, foreign interventions, civil war and general chaos. This model addressed or explained many aspects of late Gorbachev/Yeltsin Russia that neither a ‘Thermidorian’ nor any other Western model could explain: the sociopolitical meltdown, economic collapse, and extreme geopolitical weakness that made Yeltsin’s Russia almost a failing state. The model not only provided an explanation for Russia’s misery but also held out at least some hope for those that espoused it. It implied that the country’s misery was not permanent and did not necessarily lead to its demise. Actually, it could be a peculiar precondition for a new rise. This model, which implies humiliation and death as prerequisites for a new rise, has deep cultural roots in Orthodoxy as it regards suffering as beneficial for the individual and essential for spiritual elevation. One should note that this tradition can be traced back not just to the beginnings of Christianity but also to ancient agricultural civilizations (e.g. ancient Egypt), where death and burial were clearly related to planting seeds; the

Egyptian myth of Osiris is a good example. The popularity of the 'Time of Troubles' in public discourse attracted a variety of Russian intellectuals. Alexander Dugin, prolific and seminal Russian publicist and philosopher, was one of them.

Dugin and the Time of Trouble: Philosophical Framework

Dugin's views have been studied in the West for a long time, but they have often been simplified in attempts to lock him into one convenient ideological box. Observers have found his views contradictory, a point usually elaborated on by those who present Dugin as just a reactionary intellectual curiosity, where the label 'reactionary' serves as not just a sign of Dugin's particular political or philosophical views but also as a means of denigrating him as an intellectual. Attempts to locate the sources of Dugin's views invariably look at European 'New Right' philosophy and Eurasianism. Without an analysis of Dugin's social or sociocultural upbringing, though, neither his philosophy in general nor his views on the 'Time of Troubles' can be properly understood.

Dugin is a child of Soviet society, and the latter's nature – or at least the external manifestations of the late Soviet state – must be properly understood. Most important – at least for our narrative – was the state's approach to ideology. Its policy and the images it projected were contradictory. On the one hand, the state was sceptical of society and did not rely much on ideological indoctrination. Fear, coercion, and economic incentives were the major tools of rule until the Gorbachev era, and the weakening of state control immediately led to the collapse of the regime. Ideological postulates were not much internalized by the majority of Soviet citizens, or at least played little if any role in shaping their behaviour. This explains why the regime collapsed with such extraordinary speed and ease; the end of the USSR was absolutely bloodless, at least in Russia itself. On the other hand, and quite different from the modern West, where the major ideological shibboleth of the elite is internalized by considerable segments of society, the Soviet elite *were* ideologized and various forms of National Bolshevism, with its imperial messianic quest for endless expansion, remained present in their minds up to the very end of the USSR. Contrary to the Western elite, they did not worry about elections and had only limited opportunities for corruption. Absolute power and its application was a goal in itself, not just a means to get special shops and dachas, which were basically only major incentives for the lower level bureaucracy.

Needless to say, the dissidents were also ideologized in the extreme. For them, the struggle against the regime had a deep metaphysical meaning as the regime was the embodiment of almost cosmic evil. This shows the great role of ideology, the peculiar cultural spiritualization, of both the upper echelon elite and its most dedicated enemies; one might add that the semi-dissidents' '*dissida*', as it was often contemptuously called, paralleled the low-level bureaucracy. Remember also that intellectual/cultural and social trends in the regime were contradictory and there were many layers, as in any society. Still, the degree of ideologization or spiritualization of certain segments of society should not be discounted. And this explains Dugin's approach to the 'Time

of Troubles'. In his view, the Russian state had a great messianic, moral, and Orthodox-oriented mission. This spiritual underpinning justified its very existence. Russians devoid of these attributes actually ceased to be Russians, or at least such de-spiritualization is a manifestation of a very serious crisis. This spiritualization of the state makes it truly 'Eurasian'.

Dugin has declared himself a supporter of Eurasianism, the intellectual and quasi-political trend that emerged in the 1920s among Russian émigrés. The literature on Eurasianism, both the classical and more recent modes, is extensive and growing. Those who study Eurasianism usually note its protagonists' particular vision of Russia and the USSR as a peculiar civilization based on the symbiosis of Russians and other Slavs with non-Slavic, mostly Turkic, minorities. This was indeed a specific characteristic of Russia and the USSR. But it was not the only and, as one may deduce from Dugin's narrative, nor the most important characteristic of Russia and the USSR. 'Synthetic' cultural and ethnic arrangements may be found in other multi-ethnic empires, and Dugin undoubtedly is aware of them. The point is that the British Empire, the classical example of what Dugin calls 'Atlantic' civilization, was utterly devoid of a spiritual or meta-physical ethos; its residents were concerned only with economic well-being. The British Empire, together of course with other capitalist maritime civilizations of the past, became the forebears of the USA, the 'Atlantist' civilization *par excellence* and the mortal enemy of the 'Eurasian' world.

The story with the 'Eurasianist' state – and in this narrative Russia emerges as the Eurasian state *par excellence* – is quite different. Its essence is not economic benefits and even less the well-being of its citizens, but rather to serve a sublime goal. This can be Orthodoxy – Dugin's focus in the most recent phase of his intellectual evolution – or any structurally similar creed, from Marxism in its idiosyncratic Soviet reading to National Socialism. While clearly not a multi-ethnic empire, Nazi Germany was clearly an 'ideocratic' state that made a goal of building a global empire. 'Ideocratization' as a framework of societal existence is most important in Dugin's view of Russian history as is the way how the 'Time of Troubles' should be applied in understanding its course. For him, Russia has had not one but several Times of Troubles. All were marked not so much by physical degradation – anarchy, disintegration and foreign intervention – as by spiritual degradation and moral decay. In this narrative context, the Time of Troubles could continue even as the external façade of the state looked strong and its territory expanded.

The Early Crisis

Dugin regards Russia as born in the bosom of Kievan Rus'. Here, of course, he follows the majority of Russian historians. Dugin believes that Kievan Rus' was already implicitly 'Eurasian', not because it included various ethnic groups but because it became a spiritualized society due to the religious and cultural heritage of the Byzantine Empire. The disintegration of Kievan Rus' was the first 'Time of Troubles'. Still, it was a prerequisite for a new great rise and was directly related with the Mongol invasion of the thirteenth century. This invasion was one of the major

events in Russian history and, actually, in all of Eurasia. Most Russian historians, and not only they, regard the Mongol onslaught as one of the greatest calamities Russia ever experienced. Both pre-Second World War classical Eurasianists and the famous Russian historian Lev Gumilev (1912–1992), however, viewed the Mongol Invasion differently. They downplay the destructiveness of the Mongol invasion and emphasize the event's positive characteristics. For the pre-war Eurasianists and Gumilev, the most important benefit the Mongols brought to Russia was the gift of tolerance: the Mongols taught the Russians to live in peace with peoples of different ethnicities and creeds. The Mongols also bequeathed to the Russians a strong power tradition without which Russia would not have been able to survive.

Dugin does not discount these aspects of Mongol rule. Still, for him, the most important legacy of the Mongols is that they solidified the 'ideocratic' nature of the meta-physical goal of global conquest as transcending human history as it is usually understood. Mongolism also reinforced the cultural essence of the Russian people that had been shaped during the Kievan period. In this social-existential context, a person lived not for himself but for a goal that transcended his phenomenological being. The Mongol conquest and rule could thus be interpreted as the end of a Time of Troubles, finally leading to the transition from Mongol domination to the Russian state of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The latter could then be seen as the perfect embodiment of spiritualized Mongolism and Orthodox Byzantinism eternalized and permeating the life of every Russian with spiritualized religiosity regardless of social position.

The beginning of the seventeenth century, the actual historical 'Time of Troubles', plays a comparatively small role in Dugin's overall views. He deplores it not just for the disintegration of the state and the role of the Poles who were ready to take over Russia. In Dugin's narrative, the problems lay not just in the danger of the Russian state being taken over by foreigners and the suffering of ordinary Russians. Russians suffered much more under the Mongols, the country's masters for more than 200 years. The problem was quite different. The Mongol cultural and existential outlook was quite similar to that of the Orthodox and Byzantines espoused by the Russians centuries earlier. Consequently, the Mongols and the Russians engaged in a spiritual and cultural symbiosis beneficial for the Russian *socium*. The Poles, however, were already poisoned by Renaissance and Reformation, a culturally alien product with an emphasis on materialism and individualism. They were thus the carriers of a 'proto-Atlantism', and their triumph would have meant the end of Russian Orthodox civilization and the inevitable de-sacralization and de-spiritualization of the country's soul. Understanding this threat, the Russians and allied Tatars – with a spiritual makeup close to that of the Russians – fought the alien Poles. Dugin implies that they fought the Poles even more decisively than the Mongols, for they understood that no symbiosis would be possible in the case of a Polish victory. The Russians finally prevailed. Most important here was not so much the fact that the Russian state had retained its independence, but rather that Russia remained an Orthodox spiritualized civilization and escaped the materialistic germs of Renaissance and Reformation Europe, which had destroyed the spiritual fabric of the wholesome European Middle

Ages. This triumph was, however, short-lived. After the end of the seventeenth century, the spiritual fabric of Russian society was once again under threat from the reforms introduced by patriarch Nikon of Moscow (1605–1681; patriarch 1652–1666). These reforms did not endanger the state as an institution, but in some way they were much more harmful than the Mongol invasions for they endangered the spiritual makeup of the country. They actually formed the start of new, long periods of ‘Times of Troubles’ that only ended with the establishment of the Soviet regime.

The Crisis of the Seventeenth Century

One might regard the end of the historical ‘Time of Troubles’ as the country’s final triumph. Russia had not only preserved its independence but had set out on a new round of territorial expansion in both the West and the East. But, for Dugin, the strengthening of the state in itself was not of much value unless it corresponded with the strengthening of traditional Russian and Eurasian values. The end of the seventeenth century heralded the beginning of a spiritual Time of Troubles more dangerous than any other malady the country had experienced. According to Dugin, by the end of the seventeenth century Russia started to experience a spiritual degeneration that was much more serious and harmful than it had experienced in the past. Russia had preserved with the wholesome Byzantine tradition for a long time, but the Nikon reforms were a turning point for Nikon pushed the Russian church along the road of true degeneration.¹ Dugin implies that these reforms set the pattern for other similar disasters up to the Gorbachev era. The spiritual glue of Orthodox Christianity, Russia’s sacred ‘paradigmatic’ tradition which implies that the Russians are messianic people, was shaken not from below – throughout most of the country’s history, the masses were deeply attached to their beliefs – but by the degenerate elite and even its rulers. Nikon’s reforms led to a true crisis in Russia. With the resulting religious split (*raskol*), the Russian Orthodox Church and Russian society in general moved closer and closer to the Western model, which was the wrong path for the country to go because the pragmatic individualism of the post-Renaissance West was absolutely foreign to Russian society.² Nikon’s steps opened the gate to the most serious and damaging ‘Time of Troubles’ – the Petrine reforms of Tsar Peter the Great (1672–1725). These could be regarded, in Dugin’s narrative, as the second stage of the ‘Time of Troubles’ launched by Nikon. They were different from previous calamities in several ways. They brought no benefits, as was the case with the Mongol onslaught and rule. They also brought more harm than the historical ‘Time of Troubles’, for they undermined the spiritual backbone of Russian civilization. This approach to the Petrine reforms has much in common with that proposed by Slavophiles and neo-Slavophiles since the nineteenth century, as well as by pre-Second World War Eurasianists.

Petrine Russia

According to Dugin, the eighteenth century led to the degeneration of Russian society. Several problems emerged. First, the chasm between the masses and the elite

deepened. The masses continued to follow the wholesome traditions of the seventeenth century, while the elite adopted European mores and culture and forsook Genghis Khan as role model.³ This departure implied the de-spiritualization or demessianization of the process of empire building. Petrine Russia's departure from Orthodox Mongolianism and implicit messianism led, according to Dugin, to a deep spiritual degeneration of the Russian society and state. 'Autonomous statism is absolutely foreign' to Dugin and, he implies, to the Russian masses, at least when the masses follow Russian tradition. He totally rejects the modern European vision of the state. The 'state as desacralized' entity is nothing but an 'artificial pragmatic construction'. The notion of a desacralized pragmatic state is absolutely foreign to Russian tradition, but prevails in the narratives of such European thinkers as Jean Bodin, Machiavelli and Hobbes.³ In these ideological constructions, the desacralization of the state is related to the alienation of the elite from the majority; the elite are the representatives of ethnic, religious and cultural minorities foreign to the rest of the population. According to Dugin, this is indeed what happened in eighteenth-century Russia.⁴ This view of the eighteenth century is shared by Dugin's ideological allies.⁵

Nineteenth-century Partial Revival

The spiritual degeneration of the eighteenth century led to a new revival, at least in the cultural and spiritual realms, but this revival was not firm, and so consequently only slowed down the Time of Troubles.

The Romantic era in Russia for Dugin is marked by healthy reactions, Russian Slavophilism being one of these. This did not mean that the overall Westernism of the Russian elite was discarded, but a certain scepticism arose in regard to the Russian ability to adopt the Western civilizational model without taking into account Russia's specificity. The stress on national specificity was a direct result of the influence of European Romanticism, which led to a peculiar type of European Eurasianism, or at least an ideology that contained the seeds of Eurasianism.³ Eurasianism here was interpreted not as a symbiosis of Slavs and Muslims of various ethnic backgrounds or even as the integration of peoples of different cultures or ethnicities, but as a teaching that emphasized national and cultural specificities. The Romantic era also hallowed the notion that each nation has its messianic goal, and this aspect of Romanticism is clearly pleasing to Dugin. Indeed, Dugin praises the Slavophiles who fully developed the notion of the specificity of Russian civilization and the messianic role Russians should play in human history. He also notes that it was not just conservative thinkers but also radicals who became imbued with nationalistic ideas and an understanding of Russia's specificity.³

While the rise of Slavophilia demonstrated some spiritual revival, it was not strong enough to roll back eighteenth-century degeneration, and the Russian crisis continued. Slavophile influence was limited among the elite. Not the degenerate gentry and the members of the tsarist family, but the Russian peasants, more than other groups, preserved the 'noble Aryan traditions'.⁶ Dugin's appeal to 'Aryanism' is not

just related to some statements of the European New Right but also to the ideas of Slavophiles such as Aleksey Khomiakov (1804–1860), who regards Russia as partaking of the European racial stock regardless of all conflicts with Europe. In Khomiakov's view, Russians actually are more Aryan-Iranian than Europeans, who suffer from 'Kushite' domination. 'Kushite' is a generic term for someone who is not pure Indo-European and who is related to Asians and black people. In Khomiakov and Dugin's interpretation, 'Aryanism' denotes a spiritual rather than a biological category and stands as a symbol of elevated spiritualism and messianism. From this perspective, one might say that Dugin sees Orthodox Christianity and 'Aryanism' as cognate forces.

The notion that there existed deep cultural differences between the different segments of Russian society is a sound observation. The big Russian cities, especially the capitals, were not much different from European cities. At the same time, they were absolutely different from the Russian countryside. The latter was still in the pre-capitalist era: peasant private property of land was legitimized only after the 1905-1907 Revolution by Stolypin's reforms. The peasant *Gemeinschaft* outlook – to use Ferdinand Tönnies' famous definition – was in sharp contrast with urban capitalist life, which was absolutely foreign to the peasants and evoked in their minds nothing but deep revulsion. It was also related to the life of the village elite, especially landlords, and explains the acts of gratuitous brutality and destruction of any symbol of an alien society, from books to pictures. Thus, the explanations put forward by Dugin and his intellectual predecessors are not completely off the mark. Consequently, while elaborating on the problems of late tsarist Russia, he notes that the conflict between the Westernized elite – absolutely foreign to Russian tradition – and 'noble' 'Aryanism'/'Mongolianism' and Orthodox Byzantinism – all structurally similar – led to a deep crisis in imperial Russia, and finally to a new Time of Troubles and the emergence of the Soviet regime.

The Bolshevik Revolution and the Rise of Soviet Ideocracy

Dugin's view on the Bolshevik Revolution and the Soviet regime and the Bolshevik Revolution has changed over time. Still, it is clear that from the 1990s to the early 2000s he regarded it not just as legitimate but actually better than any other regime in Russian history, barring possibly that of fifteenth- to seventeenth-century Russia. And, predictably, Dugin regarded the Soviet regime, especially in its Stalinist variation, as the return to the original ideocratic state of Mongolianism blended with Byzantinism, recalling pre-Petrine and even pre-Nikon Russia. Indeed, after the turmoil of the Revolution and Civil War, Russia returned to the position that it occupied in the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries. The ruler holds absolute power and the state is omnipresent. Individual appetites are restricted and harnessed for the state's interests. The state itself was 'ideocratic' too. Its interests were the spread of its influence and the profession of a creed that was essentially Eurasian in spite of the Marxist fig leaf. Finally, the state had created a firewall between Russia/Eurasia and the West, most notably the USA with its corrosive de-spiritualizing 'Atlantism'. After

Stalin's death, the USSR, for Dugin, started to degenerate, mostly due to the fact that its leaders succumbed to the desires of the masses; they became in a way 'democratic'. The notion of a 'democratic'/popular re-orientation of the Soviet state was widely shared in the West, especially in the 1960s and 1970s, when the study of the USSR was in the hands of groups of scholars known as 'revisionists'. They flatly discarded the notions of more conservative historians who regarded the USSR as a totalitarian state that lorded it over the hapless masses. For them, Soviet rulers were truly elected and therefore represented the people's will. Dugin also believed that the Soviet elite were close to the masses. In fact, they were not elite at all, but not because the people in the Kremlin were elected by the common folk. The point here was that the people in the Kremlin were similar to the masses and did their bidding. Dugin's view of the masses was, in a way, contradictory. On one hand, in his narrative, the masses were deeply 'ideocratic' and ready to sacrifice themselves for the higher cause which transcended their personal interests and their very lives. On the other hand, the same masses would indulge themselves and follow their base animal-type instincts unless they were coerced by the state to follow the 'ideocratic' path. And here the problems surfaced. The late Soviet rulers wanted indeed to represent the masses' interests which, unless restrained or arrested by the 'ideocratic' state, were base in nature. The masses' interests were limited to the desire to improve their living standards and the people in the Kremlin started to follow the populace's drive. At the same time, the 'ideocratic' spiritual aspect of the regime was in decline. This progressive de-spiritualization of the regime and of society as a whole led to the decline of the intellectual calibre and will of the people in the Kremlin, and they began to resemble their subjects – increasingly degenerated *hoi polloi*. Still the process of degeneration could easily have been reversed. The elite could have been replaced by the tough spiritualized 'ideocrats' who could have led the masses to a restoration of their true selves, their archaic ideocratic core.

The Soviet State and its Demise: The New Round of Time of Trouble

While the Soviet state had serious problems, it was still a basically wholesome political body with a traditional sixteenth and seventeenth-century spiritual core, and Dugin understood very well that the end of this state would be a catastrophe for the Russian people. For this reason, Dugin wished the members of GKChP (*Gosudarstvennyi Komitet po Chrezvychainomu Polozheniiu* [State Committee for an Extraordinary Situation]) – the body that tried to prevent the collapse of the USSR – success in dealing with the opposition. Later, Dugin recalled his feelings when on 19 August 1991, he woke up to the words of Anatolii Lukianov that 'the country is under the threat of falling apart and an Extraordinary Committee for a State of Emergency has been created'.⁷ After hearing this, Dugin joined the group 'Union', led by Colonel Viktor Alksnis, 'who was known at that time as a tough supporter of the preservation of the USSR and the enemy of the reformers'.⁷ He remembered well what he saw at that time:

Along Novyi Arbat in the direction of the Kremlin from the White House, the stream of people moved on. Watching the nervous faces, I saw that this huge mass of people had only one desire – they wanted to destroy, to decompose, and to be liberated from control and obligations, from any responsibilities. It was an army of chaos which was mobilized not so much to support the idea ‘for’ as to support the idea ‘against’. The majority of those who participated in these events at that time probably deeply regret what they had done or do not want to remember. Only absolutely crazy people or an open enemy of Russia could insist now that everything done at the time was right.⁷

Dugin saw Vladimir Zhirinovskiy (1946–), an influential Russian nationalist politician, as behaving like a ‘madman’. Still, Dugin implied, he preached the right message, for he demanded order and that the masses obey the GKChP. No one paid attention to him and ‘everybody cursed the plotters’.⁷ The GKChP could not hold on. The empire collapsed, and the many ethnicities who had lived together for centuries became enemies to each other. The end of the USSR was the triumph of the USA, which had destroyed its major enemy. On the one hand, the GKChP could be praised for trying to save the state. On the other hand, it did not dare shed blood to save the country and gave up too quickly, turning itself into ‘people who deserved to be despised’.⁷ The very fact that the GKChP were afraid to shed blood did not exonerate them. One must pay for everything and one must remember that the fact that GKChP abstained from violence did not prevent bloodshed later. After their debacle, the blood did not stop being shed in Karabakh or in Abkhazia in South Ossetia. And the clouds were already starting to gather around Chechnya. And, in 1993, the Yeltsin regime did not hesitate to use violence against those people who stood against its pro-American policy.⁷

The collapse of the USSR and the beginning of a new Time of Troubles, or at least an acceleration of the events started by Gorbachev, was a great catastrophe. As with other major Times of Troubles – Nikon’s and Peter’s reforms – it was started from above and it is Gorbachev and Yeltsin who should be blamed for the USSR’s decline. It is claimed the USSR was basically a healthy political body murdered by Gorbachev and Yeltsin. Still, one should not see in Gorbachev and Yeltsin the only reason for the debacle, for the seeds of future problems also could be found during the Soviet era.

Dugin was quite heartened by Putin’s arrival. He believed, and these beliefs were especially strong in the very beginning of Putin’s tenure, that the crass materialistic ethos of the Yeltsin era would be expunged by terror and the empire would be resurrected. It would be the end of the country’s last and most traumatic Time of Trouble. The resurrection of the state and its empire would not just be a goal in itself. Post-Yeltsin Russia would not just be a mighty state similar to the USA – and these were the dreams of many members of the post-Soviet elite – but a peculiar civilization where the major concern would be the preservation of its cultural identity and spiritual wholesomeness firmly anchored in the archaic national archetypes. The ‘Atlantist’ USA would once again emerge as the mortal enemy of the Russians and, in fact, all the peoples of Eurasia, and they would understand that the demise of the USA is their only salvation. Many of these aspects of Dugin’s programme were reminiscent of Soviet ideology and the design of what critics usually call the ‘Red to Brown’

opposition, the motley front of nationalistic-minded Communists and nationalists. Still, there was a clear difference between them and Dugin's programme. While the 'Red to Brown' advocated nationalization, Dugin barely touched upon the subject; it was rather marginal for him. And it was this that made Duginism a useful creed for Putin at the beginning of his tenure where dreams of Soviet restoration were popular among the masses. Dugin's dreams did not materialize and Dugin started to lose his belief in Putin by Putin's second term. Consequently, his belief that the new 'Time of Trouble' started by Gorbachev was about to end was increasingly put into doubt. The Ukrainian Crisis was his last hope.

At the beginning of the events of 2014, Dugin was convinced that Putin would openly move troops to East Ukraine, which would entail a direct confrontation with the West. At that point, he implicitly forgot his early belief that Central and Western Europe were benign Eurasian powers. In his new perception, Europe re-emerged as a hostile force, following classical pre-Second World War Eurasianist theory. At the same time, Dugin finally forsook his Eurasianism. Indeed, there was no mention of a symbiosis between Russians and other ethnic groups of the Eurasian space. There was just the 'Russian world', which included both ethnic Russians and assimilated minorities; as a matter of fact, Russians were defined here as everyone who speaks Russian and is absorbed by Russian culture. The conflict with the West would not just end the rule of the liberals over Russia. The 'Fifth and Sixth' columns – the last one representing those who, in Dugin's view, while professing their support for Putin were actually his enemies – would be purged. Upholding Orthodoxy and the related national identity would be the regime's major goal. The economy would take a back seat in decision-making and in any case would be made subservient to the paramount goal of the spiritualization and at the same time archaization of Russian society, returning it to its primordial archetype. The Orthodox society, the universe of social and personal interactions, would not absorb the individual to the degree when her or his personality dissolved into the totality of the Orthodox community. This would not happen, not only because it would contradict Orthodox doctrine, but also because it would prevent individuals – especially Orthodox individuals – from being prepared for death – everyone's ultimate fate. The preparation for death would be the task of both the individual and society, the bond that would cement the Orthodox Community and give it its ultimate meaning. At this point, Russia could finally stop its long Time of Troubles, the process of spiritual decay.

Dugin put much store in the transformative experience he thought the Ukrainian crisis would bring, but his plans were dashed. Putin's annexation of the Crimea and Russian engagement in East Ukraine were mostly reactive. This was basically due to two reasons. First, there was the Western, mostly American, pressure. Second, there was the understanding that the USA, and the West in general, is hardly as formidable now as at the beginning of the post-Cold War era. Still, Putin, and of course, the Russian elite who were behind him, hardly ever dreamed of direct confrontation with the West, which would have required increasing government control of resources as only one of many other complications. In addition, one should remember that Russian nationalism, in certain of its manifestations, can be quite dangerous for the

regime. The regime may well not just tolerate but even encourage imperial nationalism if it is limited to verbal expressions of Russia's eternal greatness or lamentations about its lost glory. The Kremlin may also support those imperial nationalists who demand some limited practical actions, such as an increase in the military budget. The story is quite different when it comes to radical racial- and ethnicity-bound nationalisms. Not only do these types of nationalism emphasize that only those who are Russian by blood or ethnicity can be called true Russians, they make other claims as well. In the view of the radical nationalists, the current regime cannot be called truly Russian. The reason is that ethnic Russians, the majority of the population, live in misery whereas the elite, in their view mostly represented by ethnic minorities, live much better. The 'truly' Russian regime should be engaged in the redistribution of wealth, the nationalization of resources, and extending the social security net. In short, the radical nationalists are not just nationalists but also 'socialists', although of course their 'national-socialism' fits a peculiar isolationist framework. Catering to the East Ukrainian separatists and even more so the open invasion of the Ukraine could give these 'nationalists-socialists' a great boost, even to the point of endangering the current regime. It is not surprising then that Dugin's plans for direct, and not just verbal, confrontation with the West should hardly correspond to what the Kremlin wanted. As a matter of fact, the Kremlin soon started to see Dugin not as an asset but a liability. He was fired from his position as professor at Moscow State University and his comments on the country's internal politics were almost completely silenced. And when he makes such comments now it is usually from a pessimistic perspective. His vision of the historical process has also changed; most notably so his views on the Bolshevik Revolution and the Soviet regime. In the past, he assumed that the Soviet regime, at least in its Stalinist form, was almost an ideal 'ideocracy' and needed little change to be as perfect as the Russia of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. In this interpretation, the Soviets had arrested the 'Time of Trouble', which had started centuries before. In this new interpretation, the atheistic Soviet regime had nothing to do with true 'ideocracy'. Thus, the 'Time of Trouble', the process of de-spiritualization and 'de-sacralization' that started in the late seventeenth century, continues up to the present. In this interpretation, there is no end in sight to the Time of Trouble, and regardless of the geopolitical successes of the Russian state the country's archaic true core is in danger of complete destruction.

Conclusion

Interest in some particular historical period is often related not so much to external similarities between past and current flows of events, but to perceptions of this or that civilization. Throughout most of modern Russian history, increasing numbers of the Russian elite have looked at the West as though it were the most powerful and thus attractive region. Even when Russian rulers turned to the East, their conquests were in a way informed by the West; it was a way to pressure the West, as Vadim Tsimbursky noted.⁸ Consequently, the French Revolution emerged as one of the dominant

models for several generations. Even later, when the ossified Stalinist totalitarian regime evoked images from Russian history or the ancient Orient, images from the West continued to compete successfully in public discourse, at least for dissident or semi-dissident intellectuals. The popularity of the French Revolution re-emerged shortly after the beginning of the post-Soviet era. But 'Thermidor' or 'Brumaire' was not related to the expected results: might and prosperity. And non-Western images reappeared in the public mind, including those from Russia's own history. And the 'Time of Troubles' was one of these. The event assumed different meanings for various Russian intellectuals. For some it was a potent symbol of the country's degradation. For others it was a chance for a new rise. The notion of 'rise' had different meanings. In some narratives it was just a return to former greatness, in others the new Russia would be even more powerful than the previous incarnation of the state. Those who believed in geopolitical resurrection were informed by the traditions of the Soviet state, or at least by one aspect of these traditions, namely when the Soviet regime, the USSR, was a mighty superpower equal to the USA and the conflict between the USA and the USSR could be placed in the context of conflicts between big states. Others were informed by another aspect of the Soviet state, the importance of ideology in its peculiar 'meta-historical' variation for both the Soviet elite and dissident/semi-dissident intellectuals who opposed the regime in this or that form.

One should be clear here: ideology played little role in the actual rule of society. Until almost its very end, the USSR regime relied on repression and control as well as economic incentives. Ideology as an instrument to rule or as the glue for broad social interactions played much less a role than in the modern West, and especially the USA. Daily life and the interactions between the person and the state were much less 'Byzantine', at least in Brezhnev's USSR, than interactions in the West, albeit for many Western observers everything looked quite the opposite. But while actually marginalizing ideology as a way of rule, the Soviet elite – and here I mean the upper echelon of the rulers – were deeply ideologized. Indeed, they were free from concern for re-elections, should have had no real avenue for enrichment and limited opportunities for passing their stakes to their children, and for this reason, by the nature of their environment, they started to act or at least think as 'philosophic kings'. Their desire to preserve the 'sacred' status quo or expand the empire – also related to the 'sacred' status quo – was not a sham, or at least not completely a sham.

Quite a few Russian dissidents were informed by this self-perception of the Soviet elite. For many of them the USSR was not just a regular or common state, albeit quite powerful, but a state with a special mission. The destruction of what they saw as the embodiment of evil was their sacred goal. They implicitly subscribed to the notion of 'negative' messianism, which was something of a mirror image of the official National-Bolshevik messianism. Dugin apparently shared the vision of these intellectuals and this underlies his vision of the 'Time of Troubles', the notion of decline and resurrection. For him the 'Time of Troubles' – both in the post-Soviet era and in the past – was not just the physical demise of the state but also the process of its

peculiar de-spiritualization, the loss of its peculiar metaphysical meaning. Russia's resurrection could not, in his view, just be reduced to geopolitical revival and expansions. The ideal Russia was that of sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries (after the historical 'Time of Troubles'), but not that of the late seventeenth and even less the eighteenth century, despite the fact that Russia expanded rapidly at that time and emerged as one of the strongest powers in Europe. In Dugin's view, this apparent success did not mean a rise at all but rather degeneration because Russia betrayed itself and abandoned its 'paradigmatic' role. This aspect of Dugin's mentality – and in this he is not much different from many other Russian intellectuals of his generation – may explain not just his views on 'Time of Troubles' but his increasing disappointment with Putin who, while representing the interests of the Yeltsin tycoons and the emerging middle class, cares less about the 'messianic' 'paradigmatic' role of the Russian state. It is clear that in Dugin's more recent view the Russian Time of Trouble that started almost 400 years ago continues and that the outcome of this process for Russia and the entire world is not yet clear.

References

1. A. Dugin (1998) *My-Tser'kov' poslednikh vremen. Evraziiskoe Obozrenie.*
2. A. Dugin (2004) *Sotsial'no-politicheskoe i geopoliticheskoe znachenie raskola. Artogaia, 19 March.*
3. A. Dugin (2002) *Evoliutsia natsional'noi idei Rusi (Rossii) na raznykh istoricheskikh etapakh. Evraziia, February.*
4. A. Dugin (2003) *Ob otvetstvennosti Putina pered Kristom i smene rossiiskikh elit. Evraziia, 18 November.*
5. S. Shapovalov (1999) *Natsional'naia tema. Nezavisimaia Gazeta, 2 October.*
6. A. Dugin (2003) *Tsarskii krestianskii trud. Kommunistcheskaia partiia Rossiiskoi Federatsii, 17 September.* Accessed at <http://www.kprf.ru/dugin/ideas/19461.shtml>
7. A. Dugin (2006) *Istoriia vseгда delaetsia krov'iu. KM.ru, 16 August.*
8. Ostrov, pokhishchaiushchii Evropu. Vadim Leonidovich Tsymburskii. old.russ.ru/antolog/inoe/cymbur_o.htm (accessed on 9 August 2018).

Further Reading

- M. Bassin (2016) *The Gumilev Mystique: Bio-Politics, Eurasianism, and the Construction of Community in Modern Russia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press).
- M. Bassin, S. Glebov and M. Laruelle (Eds) (2015) *Between Europe and Asia: The Origins, Theories, and Legacies of Russian Eurasianism* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press).
- C. Clover (2016) *Black Wind, White Snow: The Rise of Russia's New Nationalism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press).
- S. Glebov (2017) *From Empire to Eurasia: Politics, Scholarship and Ideology in Russian Eurasianism* (DeKalb, IL: NIU Press).
- D. Schimmelpennick van der Oye (2010) *The East*. In: W. Leatherbarrow and D. Oxford (Eds), *A History of Russian Thought* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press).

About the Author

Dmitry Shlapentokh is an Associate Professor of History at Indiana University, South Bend, Indiana, USA. He received MA degrees from Moscow State University and Michigan State University and a PhD in Russian/European history from the University of Chicago. He is the author of several books, including *Global Russia: Eurasianism, Putin and the New Right* (Tauris, 2013), and more than 100 articles.