

Russia is an Enigma Wrapped in a Mystery
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Russia never fails to fascinate us. The very scary Cold War has been over for several decades, after a fifty-year period in which the Soviet Union and the United States engaged in a conflict that could have ended in nuclear holocaust. But real friendship has not replaced the hostility either. We have a cold peace.

Nations have long histories. Russia has been shaped by its geography. It occupies a huge expanse of the Eurasian plains, from Eastern Europe all the way to the Pacific. It lies too far north to have dependable agriculture and has little by the way of defensible borders. This geography has produced a land power that is always paranoid, always subject to invasions from both east and west. Sweden almost conquered Russia in the 17th century, France in the 19th under Napoleon, Nazi Germany in World War II, and much older than any of these, the Mongols and Tatars in the Middle Ages. In each case, Russian peasants suffered, being forced into serfdom by their own nobility and the invaders. This is not a happy history.

Like many enormous land powers (Russia, China, Rome, Persia, the Incas in the Andes), security depended on very powerful central rule, usually dominated by a single dynasty. But all dynasties and empires grow old and lose their grip over time and what replaces them is anarchy and warlords. For this reason, the people who live in such former empires prefer the devil they know (even a bad king) to the other devil they know, anarchy. Democracy is not a natural choice for people with such experiences.

Democracy, when it comes to fallen dictatorships, is only championed by the young and/or educated. It does not last long. Russia is a good example; they do have a republic, they do vote, but their democracy is shaky and uncomfortable. President Putin becomes more autocratic by the day, and most Russians breathe a sigh of relief for it.

Demonstrations that we see roiling Moscow or St. Petersburg represent the young and educated and are severely suppressed. Russian prisons are full of journalists and demonstrators and even (ridiculously) a group of skinny young woman who danced on an Orthodox church altar, dressed up as a punk band (Pussy Riot), mocking Putin and the Church.

We can laugh at this, but a Russian labor camp for \342\200\234insulting Putin and the church\342\200\235 is no laughing matter for these girls.

One good thing has come out of Russia, however, since the end of the Cold War. Many formerly sequestered documents are now being uncovered by scholars. The highest-ranking Soviet bloc intelligence officer who defected to the West, Romanian Lt. General Ion Mihail Pacepa and law professor Ronald Rychiak have just published Disinformation, a book that says that \342\200\234by 1972, Andropov\342\200\235s disinformation machinery was working around the clock to persuade the Islamic world that Israel and the United States intended to transform the rest of the world into a Zionist fiefdom.\342\200\235 With the Muslim world\342\200\235s paranoid mindset and appetite for conspiracy theories, it did not take much prodding.

The Soviets trained Palestinian militants to hijack El Al airplanes, commissioned the first Arabic translation of The Protocols of the Elders of Zion (a fraud exposed in the 1920s as such), and distributed reams of propaganda throughout the Muslim world, material also welcomed by many of the university elites around the world.

The KGB, says Pacepa, took secret credit for attacks against Israeli targets in Jerusalem and the Ben Gurion Airport. The author also concludes that much of the anti-American sentiment in the Middle East and elsewhere can be traced to Soviet clandestine operations.

This Soviet campaign has morphed into the international terrorism that threatens us today---and has blown back on the Russians themselves. Russia\342\200\235s population is half of what it was at the beginning of World War II, and is predicted to decline by 10% more by 2030. Their Muslim population, however, is increasing, and this spells big trouble for them.

Poor Russia. People aren\342\200\235t voting with their feet to move there. Evil blows ba

ck.

676 words

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