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Modern Empires and Their Significance for Modernity

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The modern world is living through a turbulent time of change, as traditional ways of organizing social and political life are being reshaped. The nation-state, once seen as the most successful and effective model, is now in a state of crisis. It never did take root in the Muslim-dominated Middle East. The secular-nationalist project, launched there in the middle of the 20th century, was radically re-imagined, if not completely scrapped. In Latin America, the introduction of the nation state failed to produce a major boost in development for the local communities, and, to a large extent, served to perpetuate the problems it was intended to solve. In Europe, nation states are facing existential challenges. An incremental and sustainable path of development came to be replaced by income inequality, inter-cultural conflicts and political destabilization.

No matter how convincing it sounded at the end of the 20th century, the idea that building nation-states would place us on the highway towards progressing human civilization, failed to materialize. In fact, the opposite was true: in recent decades, it was the countries which had implemented alternative models of socio-political organization that proved to be most successful. French philosopher Pierre Manent believed that over its entire history humanity has come up with only three forms of political organization: the city-state, the nation-state and the empire. In what combination are the elements of these

three forms present in the modern world, characterised by the growing importance of large urban centers, strengthening of political, bureaucratic and financial powers, and a continued search for hybrid forms combining nationalism with the traits of an empire? What will these combinations look like in the future?

Answering these questions would take several books. The authors of this report set a less ambitious, but more clearly defined goal – to show the extent to which imperial legacy is still relevant to today’s political process. The concept of empire is far from obsolete. The principles and goals at its core exist beyond any specific historical circumstances. However, like any organism, it is changing and evolving. Without a good grasp of its fundamentals, it is impossible to predict what direction its development will take in the 21st century. The first chapter of the report, prepared by A. Miller, focuses on the balance between the imperial and the national in the historical experience of various countries of world. The essay by A. Vershinin covers the transformation of empires in the 20th century, and takes a closer look at the most notable attempts at empire-building in the modern times. The third Chapter, by S. Kaspe, examines the theory of empire and the ways it can be applied to modernity. The report concludes with another article by A. Miller, who talks about the role Russia’s imperial heritage plays at the current stage of the country’s development. ■

A. MILLER

EMPIRES, NATIONS AND NATION-STATES IN THE 19th AND 20th CENTURIES – “BLIND SPOTS” AND COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS



The year 2018 marked 100 years since the collapse of the four continental empires in Eastern Europe and its periphery – the Russian Empire, the German Empire, the Ottoman Empire and the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The fall of these major powers at the end of World War I is widely seen as an inevitable historical fact. The proponents of this view like to reason that the empire – by that time, a backward and outdated form of political organization – simply lost its legitimacy and was replaced by the nation-state. In this interpretation, the ones responsible for the death of empires were national movements that sought to liberate their people and create nation-states of their own. Within this narrative, the nation-state is portrayed as the only form of political organization adequate to the challenges of the modern era. In line with this approach, the collapse of the Soviet Union at the end of the 20th century was interpreted as the fall of the “last empire”.

However, when it comes to understanding the nature of the events that ended the First World War, and, more generally, when attempting a political interpretation of how empires, nations and the nation-states are interconnected, there are still many misconceptions that have a profound effect on the way we address key political issues today.

All of the central elements of modernity – a professional bureaucratic apparatus, industrialization, urbanization, universal literacy, complex and tightly packed communications systems, both physical and information-based, etc. – used to develop primarily within empires. It was the empires, specifically the metropolises, like England and France, that introduced early models of parliamentary representation. The idea of the nation as the sole source of political legitimacy also arose in revolutionary France, leading to the first attempt at establishing a European hegemon since the times of the Roman Empire. The 19th and, to a large extent, the 20th century were a time of empires and nationalism. All major European, and later non-European nations formed within the boundaries of empires. We are used to thinking that nations build empires – but in reality, it is empires that build nations. Nations were forged at the core of empires, and the elites of the newly-formed nations felt no urge to turn their empire into culturally homogeneous nation-states, or dissolve them altogether. Instead, they believed that creating, preserving and, when possible, expanding their empires was a prerequisite for successful development of their nations within the empires’ metropolises.

The nationalist elites of the imperial metropolises saw empires as a resource for

nation-building. At the same time, they perceived nationalism not merely as a “challenge from the periphery”, but as a way to increase an empire’s competitiveness – in the cases when nationalist tendencies developed within an imperial nation. They looked for institutional and political solutions to combine nation-building in the empire’s core with a continued sustainability of the empire in a world

All the large-scale nation-building projects were carried out in the empires’ metropolises and were closely linked to the development trends of these empires, as well as their place in the global system of inter-imperial competition.

where confrontation between empires was escalating at increasingly high rate. In some cases (Spain, Portugal, the Ottoman Empire, Denmark, Sweden), nation-building projects at the imperial core had to adapt to the factors related to the empire’s decline and eventual collapse – but even in these cases, the developments taking place within the empire were the cause, rather than the effect. This is why, as they were losing their colonies in America, both Portugal and Spain immediately tried to

compensate for their losses, at least partially, by establishing new dominions in Africa. In the cases of Britain, France, Germany, and Russia, imperial expansion and nation-building were closely interrelated. The same can be said of the Meiji Era Japan, which, while taking cues from the European empires, managed to build a new Japanese state and form an imperial cult, with the Emperor serving as the personification of both the nation itself and the empire’s grand vision, its mission.

When looking at the particular experiences of Germany and Italy, it becomes obvious that “national narratives” dominated their nation-building projects. That said, the process of unification in many regions of Italy and Germany

was viewed as subjugation. Not only did the two newly formed states turn to imperial traditions as a ground for their legitimacy, but they also, almost immediately, jumped into the colonial race – and Germany attempted a large-scale European expansion, as well. In Germany’s case, the legacy of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation was clearly reflected in the name of the unified nation – the “Deutsches Reich”, i.e. the German Empire. The Italian unification, which was

not met with enthusiasm in all of its regions, was legitimized through an appeal to the old glory of the Roman Empire (*romanità*) and the heritage of the Venetian Empire (*venecianità*). German and Italian elites saw imperial expansion as a way to consolidate the nation and join the club of European great powers. In other words, imperial motives were an important component to hegemonic unification.

All this points to the limited usefulness of Ernest Gellner's classic definition of nationalism, according to which the dimensions of political and cultural control must coincide. This view applies only to the peripheral, separatist types of nationalism, which played no significant role in the 19th century. All successful cases of separatist or secessionist movements (mainly in the remote areas of the Ottoman Empire) can be explained by the support these movements received from other empires, notably Russia and Britain. Without active support from outside, separatist forces invariably faced defeat – like in the case of the April Uprising of the Bulgarians in 1876.

A careful look at the European history of the 19th century shows that all the large-scale nation-building projects were carried out in the empires' metropolises and were closely linked to the development trends of these empires, as well as their place in the global system of inter-imperial competition.

Nations were created by states, and empires supplied these states with various resources. Attempting to break the misguided tradition of linking modern statehood exclusively to the nation-state, American historian Frederick Cooper introduced the concept of the "empire-state". In the scenario of building an imperial nation, the nation-state model of consolidation no longer applies – instead, we are dealing with an empire-state that builds itself up in its metropole. The resulting entity is not necessarily a nation-state, but rather an amalgamation of both the imperial and the national projects. One of the key goals of modern social sciences is to give proper consideration to the relationship between the imperial and the national, and finally escape the teleological approach of national narratives that dominated the entirety of the 19th and the first half of the 20th century.

Over the "long nineteenth century", the ideas of nation and empire underwent simultaneous profound transformations, as they were closely interconnected. In Russia, the concepts of empire and nation entered the political vocabulary almost at the same time, during the second decade of the 18th century. For the majority of the 18th century, there was no tension between the two notions – rather, they complemented each other, denoting a sovereign polity. Another way the concept of

nation was used until the early 19th century was to denote the collective nobility, like in Poland, where the nation was identified with the *szlachta* (the gentry), or in Hungary with its concept of *Natio Hungarica*. By the end of the 18th century, the concept of nation, influenced by the French revolutionary experience, came to be closely associated with the ideas of national representation and the constitution. In the 19th century, the concepts of “nationality” and then nation came to be widely used, and, during the reign of the last two Romanov tsars, the monarchy was actively using nationalism to legitimize its power. At the same time, the popular idea of the Russian nation was much broader than just the “Great Russians”, and included all of the Empire’s Eastern Slavic populations, many Finno-Ugric peoples, and was open to the assimilated members of numerous other ethnic groups living within the Empire.

In Britain, the concept of nation became part of the political language as early as the Middle Ages, and by the 17th century the idea of the English nation took root. However, the idea of the British nation emerged only in the 18th century, mostly as a result of the inter-imperial rivalry between Protestant England and Catholic France. Over the 19th century, the English had their national identity dissolved in the collective “Britishness”. As early

as the late 15th century, the Holy Roman Empire started to be referred to as the “Holy Roman Empire of the German nation”. The concept of nationhood was closely linked to the concept of empire, which, by the 18th century, led to the spread of imperial patriotism (*Reichspatriotismus*). Following Prussia’s victory over Austria in 1866, the Prussian solution to unifying the nation (*Kleindeutschland*) was chosen over the Greater Germany solution (*Großdeutschland*). In other words, the design of the German nation was a product of a confrontation between two empires. When the Austrian Germans lost their empire after the First World War, they demonstrated an almost universal willingness to support Hitler’s “Thousand-Year Reich” project.

Once unified, Germany openly showed its imperial ambitions not only in the fight for overseas colonies, but also on the European continent. Moreover, European expansion was in many ways inspired by the concepts of *Kulturboden* (the notion that Germany had a mission to expand its culture to Eastern Europe) and later *Lebensraum* (the idea that the German nation required “living space” in order to survive). The examples of Russia, Britain, and Germany clearly illustrate that, despite all the differences, the concepts of nation and empire were closely interconnected in all three cases.

One of the key elements of nation-building is the act of “appropriating” a certain territory as “national property”. There are multiple ways to do that – through demographic “conquest” by way of migration; by means of discursive appropriation, when the ownership of the land changes within the historical narrative and the local body of literature;

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through symbolic appropriation by changing place names, visual arts and architecture. In expanding empires, national territories also tended to expand, though they never covered the entirety of the empire. The most ambitious empire-building project in terms of expanding national territory was carried out in Russia. It included national appropriation of vast areas on the outskirts of the empire (primarily as a result of agricultural migration of millions of people), from the Volga region and Novorossiya to North Caucasus, Siberia

and the Far East. In some cases, especially in the Caucasus, the inflow of Russians to the region was accompanied by outflows of the non-Russian population, which to this day remains one of the more sensitive issues in Russia’s politics of memory.

In addition to the “Great Russians”, the Russian nation-building project also included the Belarusians and the “Little Russians”, as well as many Finno-Ugric ethnic groups. In Germany, the imperial project also involved the Germanization of a large part of the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth under Prussian rule and, after 1870, the territory of Alsace, including selective

assimilation of the population of these regions. In both the Russian and the German cases, national irredentism bolstered imperial claims to a number of territories outside the empire’s borders. For instance, Russia’s claims to Red Ruthenia and Carpathian Ruthenia, controlled by the Austro-Hungarian Empire, were ideologically substantiated by the idea of “gathering of the Russian lands”. This same reasoning was used for Germany’s claims to Schleswig, Alsace, and later to the Ostsee provinces (the Baltic governorates) of

the Russian Empire. The long and complicated process of turning the famous “hexagon” into France’s national territory, and the population of Languedoc, Provence and Brittany into the French was still not completed by the early 20th century. In time, the French nation-building project even crossed the sea to include Algeria. France’s withdrawal from Algeria in the 1960s ignited a deep internal crisis in mainland France. The creation of the

Isles. It’s easy to see that all four empires that undertook these ambitious projects to build imperial nations belonged to the “top league” of European powers, and had the potential for further expansion.

Empires displayed tremendous resilience and potential for mobilization during the First World War, which was a fundamentally new type of conflict – a total war. For the first time, the entire male population was seen as a

resource to mobilize, and for the first time, nations had to transition fully to a wartime economy to meet the rising demands of war. After four exhausting years of conflict, the empires collapsed. The rise of national movements during this period largely resulted from the fact that

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British nation involved uniting the Scots and the Welsh with the English on a mission to manage a vast empire. In the case of Britain, the sea never became an insurmountable obstacle, as well – alongside Scotland and Wales, some included Ireland in their definition of the British nation. Several representatives of the British elites, like John Seeley, advocated for including white-settled colonies into the “Greater” British nation, thus extending British national territory far beyond the British

empires, locked in a state of total war, committed massive resources towards maintaining and developing separatist movements in the enemy camp. But national movements also sought imperial patronage, seeing in it a necessary condition for implementing their nation-building programs to the fullest extent possible. The Great War made empires wield the double-edged sword of nationalism, which dealt the final blow to the macro-system of continental empires that once served

a stabilizing role, and made these empires prey to the changing tide of history. The list of great powers claimed by war includes not only the Ottoman Empire, weakened, shrinking and deprived of economic sovereignty, or the relatively less centralized Habsburg Empire with its attempts at ethnic and cultural autonomy, or the Russian Empire, struggling to keep up with the Western economies, torn by domestic political rivalries, and failing to consolidate new democratic institutions and build an imperial Russian nation. It was also the German Reich that collapsed under the pressure – a country whose imperial national identity and democratic institutions were already mostly in place, and an industrial powerhouse ranking among the world's leading economies. As it turned out, no matter the internal strengths and weaknesses, none of the Eastern European empires were able to survive the First World War and the collapse of the interdependent macro-system of continental empires. However, even the First World War could not become the clear dividing line between an age of empires and nationalism and a new age of nation-states.

Certainly, one of the more significant challenges to the rule of empires was the rise of anti-colonial ideologies, spearheaded by Woodrow Wilson and Vladimir Lenin. Still, in his Fourteen Points, published in

January 1918, President Wilson proposed that the Russian, Austrian, and even Ottoman empires be preserved in some form (see points 6, 10, 12). Wilson understood the principle of national self-determination largely as the nation's right to autonomy. With imperial centers collapsing and the threat of a socialist revolution looming on the horizon, the nationalization of states served as a defense mechanism to the crisis – it was the default option in the absence of a better one. Almost all of the states that emerged from the ruins of continental European empires were nationalizing (rather than national) states, in which ethnic, religious and national minorities were being suppressed with varying degrees of brutality. Czechoslovakia and the the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (SHS) emerged as multi-component, composite states.

In the interwar period, the Soviet Union and the Third Reich constituted two fundamentally different attempts at recreating the imperial structure in brand new forms. Meanwhile, the British and the French empires managed to survive the Great War. Outside of interwar Europe, distinctly imperial characteristics could be observed in the United States and Japan.

The Soviet project was not just fundamentally different from the Russian Empire, but

deliberately rejected it. As early as the 19th century, one of the key elements of the ideology and politics of the Russian Empire was the project of the “All-Russian nation” which was supposed to unite the Great Russians, the Little Russians and the Belorussians into a single nation. In the last third of the 19th century, the ruling dynasty was undergoing nationalization and started to emphasize its Russianness. Assimilation into the Russian nation was welcomed and encouraged. Ethnicity was not institutionalized – instead, the official criteria for classification were religion and language. Unlike the Austro-Hungarian army, the Russian troops were not organized into units on a national basis.

The Soviet project of gathering the lands that previously belonged to the Russian Empire was inspired by fundamentally different ideas: 1) the idea of “Great Russian chauvinism” as the main threat to the Soviet regime; 2) rejection of the concept of an All-Russian nation, recognition of Ukrainians and Belarussians as separate nations and the establishment of their respective Soviet republics; 3) institutionalization and territorialization of ethnic groups; 4) the idea of building nations as a necessary stage in the development of local communities on the path to socialism; 5) positive discrimination (“affirmative action”) against non-Russians as compensation for

the dominance of ethnic Russians within the Russian Empire. This approach manifested in the policy of integrating non-Russian nationalities into the governments of their corresponding Soviet republics (also known as korenization, or “korenizatsiya”) which included efforts to dismantle the achievements of the previous government’s imperial nation-building policies, and led to the creation of a gigantic pyramid of governance, comprising national republics, autonomous republics, districts, etc. At the height of korenization, there was about 10 thousand such ethno-territorial units. In the early 1930s, many elements of this policy, especially the fight against “Great Russian chauvinism”, were scaled down, but the guiding principles remained in force for many more years.

It was only the results of the World War II, which saw the defeat of the “fledgling” empires of Germany and Japan, and the ability of the US to dictate its terms to its Western allies, weakened after the war, that led to the dismantling of the French and British empires and to the end of a period that could be called, as Jürgen Osterhammel put it, an “age of empires and nationalism.”

However, this does not mean that the age of empires ended with the Second World War. One could say that the entire twentieth century was a time of experiments aimed at finding

new combinations of nationalism and imperialism. Among them were the thoroughly hierarchical, race-based Nazi project, the Soviet “affirmative action empire”, which tried, in its final decades, to shape the Soviet people into a “fundamentally new historical community”,

elements of local autonomy. (For further reference, see the text by A. Vershinin)

Outside Europe, the only place to see nation-states form “organically” was Latin America, where the provinces of the Spanish Empire gained their independence in the

1700s. In the 20th century, during the decolonization of South-East Asia, the Middle East and Africa, a number of countries emerged that tried to imitate nation-states with varying degrees of effort. However, only a handful of them could come close to the European model of nation-state.

One could say that it was after World War II, with its genocides, massive forced migrations and redrawing of the borders that the nation-state gained a permanent foothold in Europe. At the same time, following the

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and the American post-war project of a liberal empire, which won the Cold War. Another one of these experiments was the European Union, which relied heavily on the legacies of the Holy Roman Empire and Austria-Hungary, which combined the Imperial model with

war, Western Europe found itself under the patronage of NATO and later (in part) the EU, while Eastern Europe came under the influence of the Soviet Union through the Warsaw Pact and Comecon. For around four decades, the two systems prevented territorial

disputes between their members and legitimized modern borders with the “sanction of time.” After the collapse of the Eastern bloc, followed by the USSR itself, the vast majority of former socialist countries sought protection, patronage and external guarantees of stability – which they found in NATO and the EU. Those who failed to do so have faced hardships that continue to this day. Almost all post-Soviet States, including the new Baltic members of the EU, also fall into the category of nationalizing states, displaying elements of discrimination and practicing expulsion of minorities.

In an attempt to address the limitations of the nation-state model when viewed through the lens of the liberal theory, Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan proposed the “state-nation” model as a better way to describe the situation when two or more major groups, politically mobilised as nations, exist in a given country. According to the two political scientists, if a country of this type attempts to pursue the policies of a nationalizing state, and one of the major groups within it claims exclusive ownership of the state, it could lead to national tensions. A number of examples, including the developments in modern Ukraine and Georgia, attest to this claim. When Russia, as the successor of an empire to which these states were once constituent parts, interfered

in the ongoing crisis (acting in full accordance with a typical 19th century scenario), this prevented the central authorities from suppressing resistance to nationalizing policies within these states. The approach taken by Linz and Stepan is valuable, first and foremost, because it draws our attention to the fact that heterogeneous polities were able to formulate alternative forms of political organization, different from that of the nation-state.

Today, as international relations are becoming less and less predictable, as the wave of globalization which has lasted for 30 years is collapsing under its own weight, and as people treat optimism with respect to the future as a sign of carelessness, many start to behave in a way typical to crisis situations: clinging to the familiar and hanging on to things that seem reliable and time-tested. This, in turn, has helped propagate the misconception that there is a looming “renaissance” of nationalism on the horizon, or that the nation state is going to make a comeback. In reality, this trend is not going to last, because relying on the nation-state cannot produce the desired effect, unless the country in question is large or powerful enough. Soon, we will see for ourselves just how vulnerable and unstable these small nation-states really are, once external stabilizing factors are out of the picture. ■

A. VERSHININ

EMPIRES OF THE 20th CENTURY AND MODERN NATION-BUILDING



The First World War is sometimes called Europe's collective suicide attempt – and rightly so. More accurately, it was a suicide attempt by the European empires. The war clearly demonstrated that it wasn't "domestic" nationalism that posed the greatest threat to an empire's existence – it was other empires. The escalation of national tensions in Russia, Austria-Hungary and the Ottoman Empire was not a pre-condition, but rather a consequence of the crumbling of the imperial power structure. European empires entered into a fight to the death and collapsed almost at the same time. What remained after they were gone?

The fall of empires left Europe's political map in tatters. The peoples that constituted them suddenly gained sovereignty – but not their nationhood, which they had lost or discarded in ages past. And now, with the 20th century in full swing, it was the time to rebuild it on a new foundation. The young elites of the fledgeling countries took the nation-state as their model. It was a bare-bones project – more of a sketch – and not looking very promising, too. In all of the interwar years, there was only a handful of successful examples. The countries of Eastern Europe have entered a period of permanent instability, plagued by domestic ethnic conflicts and burdened by inter-state tensions.

The European colonial powers survived the Great War, emerging victorious. However, even they had to rethink the balance between the imperial and the national in their empires. During the war years, Britain and France strained their economies to their limits, putting extra pressure on their overseas colonies. In the modern age, the French and British nations developed as centers of colonial empires. This nation-building process went parallel to empire-building – in many ways, the two processes were interconnected. The trend towards political emancipation of the colonies, which was already apparent after 1918, put the issue of preserving the integrity of the nation's core on the agenda. The elites did not have a clear answer to that, especially within the context of deep socio-political and economic tensions that divided Western societies and aggravated the entire situation. After the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the entire Middle East was plunged into chaos. The old colonial empires assumed responsibility for maintaining stability in the region, but it quickly became clear that their presence there was just a temporary remedy.

The problem, then, was to find a new mold, a new model of political organization to "wrap" nations into, so they could keep on developing. Past experiences pushed nations towards revisiting the imperial model.

But what shape would this new type of empire take? In which areas could it rely on the legacy of the old empires of the 19th century, and how was it to adapt to the new realities, brought about by the age of mass ideologies? What would be the optimal relationship between the center and the periphery, between the empire's core and the nations that make it up? Over the 20th century, there have been several attempts to answer these questions.

THE SOVIET EMPIRE

Perhaps the most ambitious project was proposed by the Bolsheviks, who were initially planning to build something greater than just a state. The ideology they adhered to rejected statehood itself as a form of political organization. They believed that, once completed and fully mature, the Soviet system would render the state and all of its components redundant: the state monopoly on violence, the bureaucratic apparatus, the legal system, foreign policy, etc. All social classes, nations and ethnicities would be united within the Soviet framework. This was the universalist project proposed by V. Lenin in his work titled *The State and Revolution*. Notably, the first Soviet Constitution, issued in 1918, did not clearly define the state borders of the new republic (RSFSR). The very concept

of citizenship as being affiliated with a political nation was interpreted in a deliberately broad manner: all foreigners belonging to the working class or the working peasantry were granted the same rights as Russian citizens, based on the principle of “solidarity of workers of all nations”.

Thus, the underlying idea providing legitimacy to the Soviet socio-political system was supranational in essence. The same general idea could be found in the first political statement of the new government, the *Decree on Peace*. Researchers have long noted its obvious similarity to the Fourteen Points speech given by US President Woodrow Wilson a few months later. Achieving a just and democratic peace without annexations or indemnities, granting all nations the right to self-determination and renouncing secret diplomacy – following through with these goals required a new supranational imperative that would guide the political development of the world. Wilson was one of the first to realize the kind of universalist project Lenin was talking about. While initially sympathetic to the Bolsheviks' cause, he quickly recognized them as a competing force. “The poison of Bolshevism was accepted because it is a protest against the way in which the world has worked. It was to be our purpose... to fight for a new order”, said Wilson.

What the Bolsheviks created could hardly be described as a classical modern state, where the public authority and the civil society exist simultaneously, entering into complex relations with one another. Clearly, the type of relations that existed in the USSR between state and society did not fit into this framework. The peculiarities of this kind of

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relationship can be explained by invoking the concepts of totalitarianism and traditionalist paternalism (both approaches have been used by historians to address this), but there is one thing that remains unchanged: the fact that the USSR constituted a unified political body, held together by a particular set of values and an ideology.

Was there anything that threatened this unity? In fact, there was one major problem the Bolsheviks inherited from the Romanov Empire. By the time of the October revolution, they were convinced they had to solve the national question in order to guarantee

the stability of their universalist project. If implemented, the Bolshevik project promised to eliminate all ethnic tensions and disagreements. However, the First World War showed that nationalism itself was an extremely dangerous mobilizing ideology, capable of forging supra-class solidarity within a given nation. Nationalism was just as dan-

gerous a competitor to Soviet communism as Woodrow Wilson's liberalism. Following the Russian Civil War, a number of Bolshevik party leaders suggested that nationalism in all its forms should be declared an enemy of socialism, and fought

relentlessly. However, the Party took a different direction.

First Lenin, and then Stalin suggested a different approach: if the Soviet government meets the demands of nationalists, it can split the supra-class unity of nationalist movements, thus deepening the class struggle and improving the conditions for the development of Communist ideology. This tactic had another important advantage. It allowed the Bolsheviks to portray the Soviet political project as an alternative to the Russian Empire, which Lenin dubbed the "prison of the peoples." This had an important propaganda

effect, as it helped gain support of the working classes around the world. According to the Soviet ideology, all peoples, one way or another, are supposed to go through a stage of free national development, which is accompanied by socio-political emancipation, and that opens the way for genuine internationalism.

Another fundamental notion held by the Bolsheviks was derived from the history of

the Soviet Union a noticeable edge in the international arena. By fostering local nationalist movements, including those within the Soviet state, the Bolsheviks created pockets of national consolidation that attracted people living outside the USSR (mainly Ukrainians and Belarusians).

The primary goal was to depoliticize local nationalist movements by satisfying a significant

part of their demands, usually at the expense of the Russian political “core”. The policy of “positive discrimination” reached its logical conclusion with the creation of national political entities on the periphery of the former Russian Empire, and with the policy of korenizatsiya

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national relations within the Russian Empire. As it is known, Lenin distinguished between nationalism of the oppressed and nationalism of the oppressor. In the case of the latter, he was mainly talking about the so-called “Great Russian chauvinism”, which was associated with political and economic exploitation of the periphery and, as such, was not to be tolerated. At the same time, nationalism among “small” peoples was supposed to be encouraged and supported. Aside from helping carry out the main ideological imperative, this gave

tion (integration of non-Russian nationalities into local governments). This process was accompanied by the formation, sometimes from scratch, of national elites, national cultures and languages, and the “aligning” of the economic development in the periphery with that in the imperial core by redistributing resources. According to this model, the core nation – the Russians – were to restrain and suppress their own national interests.

The “affirmative action empire” that emerged as a result, stretching over the vast

expanses of the Eurasian continent, constituted a unique political entity, radically different not only from the Romanov Empire, but also from all other empires of the modern age. The USSR was a highly modernized version of empire that developed its own original response to the challenge of nationalism, while retaining a number of traditional imperial features. For centuries, the Romanov dynasty had to deal with the problem of imperial frontiers, or “limes”, as they were called in the Roman Empire. In the 20th century, the Soviet Union inherited this problem. The issue of borders has always played a major role in Soviet politics and ideology. The Soviet elites were obsessed with securing the country’s borders, and saw territorial expansion, with the creation of new “buffer zones”, as the best way of achieving that. However, to the USSR, the borders were not simply a line of defense against external threats, but also a space used to interact with the outside world, and a kind of a “display window” for the Communist system. The image of a border guard protecting Russia’s frontiers became one of the most widely recognized symbols in Soviet propaganda, and this is by no means an accident.

Of course, this model was not static, evolving over the 70 years of Soviet history. In the second half of the 20th century, it was supplemented by a rather loose concept of “the

Soviet people as a new historical community”. According to this idea, all national problems were announced to be non-existent, and any ideology or movement that tried to raise these issues was vehemently suppressed. Going from one extreme to the other in the process of carrying out the korenization policy only harmed the “affirmative action empire”. Particularly harmful was the false interpretation of the slogan about “self-determination of nations” which overemphasised the part about “the right of nations to secede”. As a result, all the potential diversity of the forms of national identification was reduced to the declared ability of a nation to secede from a multinational entity and establish its own independent state, regardless of whether there are any preconditions for that. It was easy to theorize on this subject, not least because the vaunted principle of self-determination (including the right to secede) was nothing but an empty declaration.

THE THIRD REICH

The Soviet model of empire-building was an attempt to integrate all the various ways of organizing a nation practiced across the vast expanse of Northern Eurasia. The Nazi Germany proposed a different approach. While the Bolsheviks saw equality of nations as an

imperative and went so far as to practice positive discrimination in order to achieve it, the founders of the Third Reich were planning to build a complete hierarchy of nations, regulated by the idea of natural, inherent inequality. The Bolsheviks believed that once class struggle reaches its logical conclusion and ushers in an age of universal equality, national and ethnic tensions will cease to exist, and all nations will unite into a single whole. The Nazis proceeded from a different premise. According to them, the “end of history” would be achieved by restoring the “natural” order, where stronger nations dominate over weaker ones, destroying those who have no place in the global hierarchy.

The new German state was conceived as timeless (the concept of a “Thousand-Year Reich”, as proposed by Hitler himself in 1934), consolidated by a common idea – the unification of all Germans (at first) and achieving universal racial unity (as the final stage). The perverse nature Hitler’s project made it no less global. The Fuhrer sincerely believed that the world would only benefit from Germany becoming the “master of all Earth.” In *Mein Kampf*, he reasons that Providence had entrusted Germans with a special mission, and it was the fate of all other European nations to join them. This is how the idea of a European “new order” came exist. The Nazis believed

that the survival of the Old world hinged on the successful implementation of Hitler’s project. They believed they were to open a new chapter in the history of both Europe and the entire world.

The Nazi project was conceived in opposition to both the Western (liberal) and the Soviet (communist) projects, which the Nazis considered to be ultimately one and the same. According to Pierre Manent, from the point of view of the Nazis, communism was not a repudiation of capitalism, but rather its highest stage. To them, communism represented the final and irreversible triumph of the “most despicable man”, described in Nietzsche’s *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* – the so-called “last man”, who lives his life seeking comfort and security, the ultimate “economic man”. There was no third option: as Hitler himself repeatedly said, Germany would either rule the world or perish. This is why Nazi expansion had neither symbolic nor geographical limits.

The destructive potential of the Nazi project was enormous. The Third Reich could only be defeated through military force, and its political and ideological core was systematically dismantled in order to establish a “new Germany”. On the ruins of the Third Reich arose a new, ethnically homogeneous nation-state (notably, this evolution was by no means

an organic process) with a strong civil society keeping the state in check, and a deep-rooted rejection of the idea of expansionism. The new Germany was guided by the idea of forming a single European space. The development and expansion of this unified Europe was in the interest of German society, and was seen as a positive development in terms of preserving peace on the continent.

Faced with the Third Reich and the Soviet neo-empire, old colonial powers were remind-

The founders of the Third Reich were planning to build a complete hierarchy of nations, regulated by the idea of natural, inherent inequality.

ed of their imperial background. As they were losing positions in Europe, the value of their empires was increasing, both economically and symbolically. After the Sudeten crisis of 1938 and the signing of the Munich Agreement which dealt a serious blow to British and French self-esteem, the old empires launched full-scale domestic campaigns glorifying their imperial status. In 1939, British cinemas saw a number of films depicting, in dramatic fashion, the greatness of the British Empire.

All of the country's media was employed in propaganda efforts. Schools received new world maps showing British colonies in a deliberately exaggerated way, colored bright red. As one historian noted, this was "the heyday of imperial mass culture."

In France, this was happening on an even broader scale. The idea of "empire as a source of national salvation" gained wide popularity among the masses. There was a revival of the memory of colonial troops that fought on the

battlegrounds of the First World War. The parade on July 14, 1939, included a column of Senegalese Riflemen passing under the Arc de Triomphe. In their speeches, politicians emphasized the human resources of the colonies as a way to reduce the

demographic gap between France and Germany. State ministers understood the illusory nature of these expectations, but it was the propaganda effect that they sought. Memories of the glorious imperial past, fading but still palpable, were supposed to consolidate the old nations: instill a spirit of unity in the English and the French, neutralise the existing contradictions within their societies and inspire people to great accomplishments. The very future of these empires depended on the

success of this propaganda campaigns: they could not hope to survive defeat (or even another Pyrrhic victory, like in 1918-1919) in the upcoming world war.

AMERICA – AN EMPIRE BY INVITATION

Indeed, the Second World War brought the age of European imperial colonialism to a close. Two neo-empires – the Soviet Union and the United States – now bore responsibility for the fates of the world. The question about the nature of American nationhood has caused many heated discussions among historians and political scientists alike. As a country that has sacrificed so much in the fight against “evil empires”, the modern US finds it difficult to recognize that it is, in many ways, an empire in its own right. Yet, at the turn of the 21st century, American neoconservatives attempted to revise the existing discourse, declaring with confidence that their country was not just the world’s sole superpower, but also an empire guided by the values of democracy. According to N. Ferguson, “functionally, and perhaps even consciously, the United States has always been an Empire.” “The Americans,” he continues, “must recognize the imperial nature of their power and learn from the achievements and mistakes of the empires of the past.” Still,

there are those who do not agree with this assessment (for example, Robert Kagan), but in essence, they are talking about the same things and describing them using different words.

It is not a secret from anyone that messianism, an important component of any empire, has been inherent in American political culture since the country gained independence. Protestant communities that moved to North America were convinced that they were chosen for a sacred mission – to build the proverbial City on a Hill. This idea was shared by all of the founding fathers, including George Washington, but, for a time, it did not produce any expansionist imperatives. At first, it was believed that the American state should serve as an example of a perfect democracy. In the 19th century, the situation started to change: there was now a powerful narrative that established a link between democratic messianism and expansionism. According to Vladimir Sogrin, “the imperial gene” was part of this messianic culture from the very beginning.

One could say that, historically, there were three distinct American empires. The first put down its roots in the vast North American continent. In 1845, during the war against Mexico, it formulated the key concept of the American Empire – the doctrine of manifest destiny. According to one of its founders, the

rights of the Americans to continental domination stemmed from their “manifest destiny to overspread and to possess the whole of the continent which Providence has given us for the development of the great experiment of liberty and federated self-government entrusted to us.” American expansion gradually covered the entire Western hemisphere. In the 20th century, American messianism was

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bolstered by the fact that the US became the world’s top economy.

The foundational document of the second American Empire, and of America’s imperial ambition as such, was Wilson’s *Fourteen Points*. Henry Kissinger described its importance as such: “America was not content with the role of just one of the many states pursuing their national interests. The Wilson doctrine rejected the moral equality between the United States and other nations. According to Wilson, America has a higher moral mission: to remake the world in its own image.”

The doctrine of isolationism, practiced by the US for many years, was not incompatible with the idea of global domination: American expansion was not so much political as it was economic and cultural. According to F. Voitlovsky, “American isolationism and expansionism have a common nature – both of them have as their goal the expansion of America’s sphere of influence – if not geographical and military, then economic, political and ideological.” America was very well aware of its role as the “guardian of order”, and intervened in European affairs with increasing confidence. In 1918, Wilson led American troops to Europe for the

first time. Twenty years later, Roosevelt struggled to explain to the isolationist lobby in the Congress how important it was for America to participate in global affairs.

The United States finally became a global empire after World War II. From that point on, no other Western power could assume the function of keeping order and helping restore post-war European nations. An alternative to Washington’s dominance could be that of Moscow, but, for ideological and political reasons, it was not even an option to most of the Western elites. The “come, restore order and

leave” model, tested in 1918-1919, could no longer work in the new reality. To “keep the Soviet Union out, and the Germans down” (a formula credited to the first NATO Secretary General H. Ismay) America needed to be “kept in”. But that didn’t seem enough. President H. Truman believed that communism brings chaos, which meant that the United States should be present anywhere on earth

Whereas the empires of the past, as a rule, sought to formally include a particular territory into their own, the empires of the 20th century were content with indirect control, without resorting to force unless necessary.

where there was a threat of Soviet expansion. Thus, defending the Western model of world order turned into a justification for expanding American sphere of influence. The third American Empire was born – and it exists to this day.

In the latter half of the 20th century, The United States acted confidently as an “empire by invitation” (a concept introduced by G. Lundestad). It gained the support of the

people due to its attractive model of social and economic development. The American “empire by invitation” took control of a large part of the world – this time, it was a new kind of domination. Whereas the empires of the past, as a rule, sought to formally include a particular territory into their own, the empires of the 20th century were content with indirect control, without resorting to force

unless necessary. If it had to use military intervention to maintain its hegemony, it meant that the empire was weakening. “Under the umbrella” of global American power, and often under its pressure, the old European colonial powers were able to dismantle their empires relatively painlessly, and set on the path of forming

nation-states. Having received a “vaccine” of American democracy, European nations were able to form stable political institutions and a strong civil society, overcoming many of the problems of nation-building that caused the crisis of the 1930s.

It is important to note that Eastern Europe, which was in the Soviet sphere of influence, went through a similar process – not in form, but in terms of consequences. During

the interwar period, nation-building in Eastern Europe faced a serious obstacle in the form of considerable ethnic diversity. The re-drawing of the borders after 1945 and multiple population transfers essentially solved this problem. Poland, Hungary, Romania, and the Czech Republic became more homogeneous ethnically, which allowed them to embark on the path of building stable social and political institutions. Soviet military dominance put an end to the wars for “ancestral” territories. The only Eastern European country that retained its heterogeneous national composition in the second half of the 20th century was Yugoslavia, which was not directly under Soviet influence. Its model of social and political organization failed to resolve inter-ethnic tensions and ultimately perished, along with the state itself. In the 1990s, the European Union assumed responsibility for bringing order to this area.

The American empire, like the Soviet one, solved the national issue by forming a concept of supranational unity. Its advocates propose a political order in which national contradictions are minimized and fade into the background. From their point of view, America has demonstrated by its own example how different cultures and peoples can come together in a “melting pot”, united by common values. Since the time of W. Wilson,

Americans have openly declared the right of nations to self-determination. Empires built on brute force and domination must disappear in order to give way to the only reasonable form of rule – the rule of justice-based values, which, in turn, leads to national convergence. In any case, this imperative ultimately took the form of military-political hegemony. The adoption of a socio-political model based on the American paradigm was associated with economic growth and an overall improvement in living standards. Indeed, it was this factor that made the “empire by invitation” particularly attractive. In reality, however, it usually boiled down to using the economy as an instrument of expansion. Keeping Europe in the sphere of American influence was the direct goal of the Marshall plan, launched in 1947. A similar mechanism was used in the case of Japan.

S. Žižek has this to say about the nature of American imperialism: “The problem with today’s United States is not that it is a new global empire, but that it is not, i.e., that, while pretending to be an empire, it continues to act as a nation-state, ruthlessly pursuing its interests. Indeed, in a perverse reversal of the old ecological slogan, the bumper sticker for the Bush administration’s foreign policy could well be “act globally, think locally.” The American establishment is indeed inclined to

believe that the national interests of the United States are the common denominator of the collective good on a global scale. As Condoleezza Rice put it in 2008, “An international order that reflects our values is the best guarantee of our enduring national interest, and America continues to have a unique opportunity to shape this outcome.” George W. Bush expressed the same idea in his 2005 inaugural address: “The survival of liberty in our land increasingly depends on the success of liberty in other lands. The best hope for peace in our world is the expansion of freedom in all the world. America’s vital interests and our deepest beliefs are now one. Thus, American values, American national interests, and the creation of an ideal world order are different names for the same phenomenon, and the “expansion of freedom” coincides with the expansion of US political influence.

THE EUROPEAN UNION AS A NEO-EMPIRE

However, maintaining order on a global scale seems to be beyond even America’s power. Over the past decade, it has become increasingly clear that its resources are not unlimited, and that the world is too complex to be ordered on the basis of a single set of values. The Old World, which, during the

Cold war, developed within the framework of the global American Empire, pivoted towards independent development in the format of European integration. Today, there is a lot of discussion about the character this integration. In 2007, President of the European Commission José Manuel Barroso compared the EU to an empire, but clarified that it was the first “non-imperial empire”: The EU is based on fundamentally different values than the empires of the past, and its expansion is non-violent (compared to US foreign policy). Perhaps, the European Union could be called a “soft” empire – after all, even if it relies on non-violent methods of expansion, an empire does not cease to be an empire.

It is not an accident that the modern project of European integration is taking place on the same territory that was once the core of Charlemagne’s empire. Researchers have already noted that, if the EU is to be compared with the empires of the past, then the closest equivalent would be the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation. In both cases, political integration had an axiological basis: Christianity and “the belief in the continuity of the empire in finem saeculi” (E. Kantorowicz) in the case of the Holy Roman Empire, and European values in the case of the EU. Both the medieval empire and the European Union of the 20-21st centuries are fairly disintegrated

political entities whose constituent elements retain largely sovereign. What unites them is the absence of a pronounced political center.

The main goals of European integration are similar enough to the goals of an empire. The key objectives set by the founding fathers of the EU were to organize and regulate the life of countries and peoples, as well as develop a common set of rules that prevent

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chaos and unrestrained competition – factors that lead to destructive wars. The idea of maintaining order, of keeping chaos outside of a defined civilized “universe” is a significant part of the imperial project and was part of the process of European integration. The process of European unification has always had a value component, even if initially the goal was limited to internal stabilization of the European space. European institutions were intended to become example to follow.

However, gradually, expansion also emerged as a motivating factor.

The collapse of the Soviet Empire freed up a vast expanse of land on the Eastern borders of the EU. Its expansion into this territory took form of a mechanism to restore order in a situation of radical change. Countries bordering on the EU now had a prospect of joining the union in exchange for loyalty

and an agreement to follow certain rules. This was of maintaining balance was the same as Soviet military dominance, but much more attractive for the countries of Eastern Europe. Thanks to it, the fires of inter-ethnic conflicts were extinguished, and some potential causes for tension were nipped in

the bud. In addition, the expansion of European institutions played an important symbolic role, confirming the thesis about the universality of Europe’s model of integration. This factor became especially important after the potential for “inward integration” started to be exhausted in the first decade of the 21st century.

The continuous expansion of the EU was seen as a foundation of European self-identification, and in many ways became an end

in itself. The exhaustion of European Union's economic potential and the fact that it reached the natural geographical limits of European cultural area gave rise to certain concerns, but did not lead to a revision of the basic principles. Band-aid solutions like the Eastern Partnership Project were invented, maintaining an illusion of continued expansion. The European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) invited

In the 20th century, the system of imperial domination allowed the nation-state model to take root in different parts of the world. The reformatting of this model in early 21st century requires nation-states to rethink their place in global affairs.

neighboring countries to join the EU in “all but institutions”. The countries involved were part of the European periphery, which guaranteed their political loyalty.

Today, the “soft empire” is facing several existential challenges all at the same time. Eastward expansion, which started in the 1990s, met a number of obstacles that the EU is currently unable to overcome. The very possibility of having to suspend this expansion

scares the European elites, and the reverse process, with nations contemplating the idea of leaving the EU (the possibility became very real with Brexit), form a challenge of historic proportions. The restarting of “inward integration” could compensate for the impossibility of further outward expansion, but even in this case there are questions without clear answers. The potential for integration is objectively limited by the loose political structure of the EU.

objectively limited by the loose political structure of the EU.

The problem of center and periphery in the European Union is something that, in the spirit of political correctness, is not addressed at the official level, but objectively, it is on the agenda. Both exist, and the center (which is mostly represented by Germany) seeks

to consolidate its position at the expense of the periphery. This is an objective process: the tools of consensus used to agree on key decisions are exhausted, and the issue of converting economic and cultural hegemony into a political one is now on the agenda. However, this has not yet happened, and the imperial core of the EU still has not fully formed. Moreover, attempts at formally securing this process through the creation of a special legal

framework are stalling. This is the main obstacle that the European project will not be able to overcome on its way towards becoming a neo-empire.

There is another issue that is important for the future of the European project and that has not yet been solved, and that is Europe's liberation from US influence and its transformation into a global center of power. The "shy" European Empire is doomed to lose its status, which means that Europeans will have to re-learn long-lost skills, such as formulating and implementing their own comprehensive foreign and defense policy. The prospect of doing that at the level of the EU leadership is far from certain. It is highly likely that the failure of the European project will lead to destabilization of the entire Eastern European periphery. Even now, the desire of countries such as Ukraine to solve their own nation-building problems using the same model as the old people's democracies bumps against the fact that European institutions have almost exhausted their potential for expansion.

Their degradation will, of course, have even more drastic consequences and may once again turn Eastern Europe into a "battle-ground", where interests of powerful external forces clash.

In the 20th century, the system of imperial domination allowed the nation-state model to take root in different parts of the world. The reformatting of this model in early 21st century requires nation-states to rethink their place in global affairs. This process is developing at an uneven pace and is accompanied by multiple crises. The number of failed states has multiplied. In the absence of a system of order recognized by all, competition between the world's leading players is intensifying. There is a power vacuum that creates a need to rethink the nature of empires and new "quasi-imperial" polities. What form are they going to take in the context of modern development? What will they inherit from the past, and what political know-how will they come up with themselves? Only time will tell. ■

S. KASPE

EMPIRE AS A FORM OF POLITICAL ORGANIZATION: THEORY AND ITS RELEVANCE



EMPIRE: MANY TYPES, ONE PROTOTYPE

Empire is a complex concept, replete with meanings. It is a practical category – empires still exist (or have existed in the past, leaving a mark in history so significant that it continues to influence human life centuries later). It is a category that implies value judgement – the notion of empire produces a strong emotional effect, mostly (but not always) negative. Branding your opponent as an imperialist and calling his country an “empire” has always been a winning strategy in debates. On the other hand, even marketing experts recognize the appeal that the word “empire” still holds (we have “empires” of pizza, sushi, bags, jewels, etc.). Empires are present in countless works of science fiction (Star Wars, etc.), which are humanity’s way of peeking into its own future. The collection of meanings behind the concept of empire can be enticing or off-putting – but it always fascinates us. Finally, empire is an analytical category that requires clarification. In order to do that, we should first put aside value judgments and abstain from spontaneous emotional reactions that sometimes occur at the very sound of the word “empire”. This may not be easy, but the clarification that

we are attempting will remove any need to return to those emotional assessments, and help us have a rational, unbiased discussion. It is a bit more difficult to ignore practical considerations and the historical experience of particular empires – but there is no need to do that, since the categories of practical application and social analysis are intertwined. The same is true, for example, for the notion of democracy, which also evokes strong feelings, both positive and negative, and also claims conceptual status. But, like in the case of empires, it seems impossible to have discussion about it without getting mired in the references to actual democracies, from the ancient times to the modern age.

The first thing that needs to be recognized is that Rome has been and remains the prototype of all imperial projects and the general reference point for all theoretical models of the empire, at least within Western civilization. Russia is no exception in this case, not least because of the shared Christian roots – the same roots that gave birth to the so-called “West” (I say “so-called” because this collective notion hides a fantastic variety of cultures and traditions that are no less original than those of Russia). Strictly speaking, the history of Rome, which was founded in the middle of the 8th century BC, continues to

this day – a statement that seems paradoxical only on the surface.

First, there were the twelve centuries of the First Rome – before the fall of the Western Roman Empire in 476 AD. Then in the East – a thousand more years of the Second Rome (I must emphasise that it was exactly the same empire, and its citizens called themselves Romans). By the time it collapsed in 1453, this Second Rome had pre-

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pared a successor – the Grand Principality of Moscow, dubbed the Third Rome, whose tzar Ivan IV openly announced his claim to the legacy of Roman emperors – claims that were later reinforced by Peter the Great, who accepted the title of Emperor and pivoted Russia towards Europe. Come the 20th century, the Romanov Empire collapsed,

quickly replaced by the Soviet Union, whose internal structure and external behavior led many observers and scholars to call it an empire, as well. Now, years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, some criticize the Kremlin for seeking to rebuild the Russian Empire, while others beseech it to finally get on with the imperial project and “get Russia off its knees”. Whether these criticisms and appeals have any foundation in the real world (and they really don’t), they demonstrate that in this part of Eurasia, the notion of empire is alive and well, at least as an ideal of political organization. And the roots of this ideal go back to Ancient Rome.

However, the concept of empire seems alive in the West, as well. In the Dark Ages, amid war, blood and chaos of the barbarian kingdoms, the belief persisted that a world is incomplete without an empire. Hence the short-lived, but glorious project of Charles the Great, or Charlemagne (crowned emperor of the Romans by the Pope in Rome) that remained in the memory of Europeans for a long time. Then there was the Holy Roman Empire, which

existed from 962 to 1806, when it was abolished by Napoleon Bonaparte (who, despite being called the “Emperor of the French”, received his crown from the hands of the Pope). Following that, the West seemed to have entered an era of nation-states – but among those “nation-states” were the British Empire, the French Empire, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the German Second Reich (which, again, translates to “Empire”) – and the Third Reich, too... In the mid-twentieth century, empires started to fade away, but almost immediately, European nations launched the process of European integration. And again – what a coincidence – one of the first steps was the signing of the 1957 Treaty of Rome, which created the European Economic Community. The rapid expansion of the European Union following the collapse of the Soviet Empire made the “imperial” interpretation of the EU one of the most widely accepted, at least in the academic community (the names of such reputable publications as *Europe as Empire: The Nature of the Enlarged European Union* (Oxford University press, 2006) or *Revisiting the European Union as Empire* (Routledge publishing, 2016) are very telling). A parallel Western branch of the same imperial evolution can be found in the

United States, explicitly described as empire in the very first lines of the Federalist Papers (a document that directly precedes the adoption of the American Constitution and lays down its foundations). In other words, on the other side of the Atlantic, there was another Rome being built. Why do you think the building that houses the US Congress is called the Capitol, its upper house called the Senate, and the stream flowing under the Capitol Hill is called Tiber Creek (the name used to be a joke, but hardly anyone even remembers its original name at this point)? Why are there lines from Virgil on the Great Seal of the United States? This list of nods and references to the Roman, that is, imperial legacy goes on, and none of them are accidental. Throughout the 19th and even in the early 20th century, Americans identified their country as an empire. Then, for a time, calling America an empire went out of fashion. But in the 21st century, especially after September 11, 2001, the imperial nature of the United States was again the focus of research and political discussions. The question asked in 2003 by Michael Ignatieff (Canadian academic and politician, now Rector and President of the Central European University) – “Yet what word but “empire” describes the awesome thing that America is

becoming?” – has been rhetorical all along. There is no other word – America is indeed an empire.

All the systems described above were, of course, far removed from their Roman prototype. Maritime colonial empires, continental empires of the Modern Period, democratic empires of the United States and Europe, the Soviet totalitarian empire, etc. – each has its own specifics. Yet all of them, some more and some less, appealed to the Roman legacy, referred to it symbolically, in their rituals and systems of power, reproduced or at least tried to reproduce Roman political practices and mechanisms, relive the spirit of the Roman Empire. But why should we remember all that, you may ask? This is in order to present, in compact form, the key features of an “ideal” empire, using Roman legacy as the basis. It was Rome that embodied this ideal in its purest form. Finding modern parallels to Rome would be quite easy in most cases. We will talk about the ideal type of empire as an analytical category – so it is not a matter of names and titles. Not everything that calls itself an empire is an empire, and not every empire calls itself what it is (again, the same is true for democracy, republic, federation... and any political phenomenon, for that matter). But

if it is structured like an empire, functions like an empire, and is perceived by others as an empire – then it’s an empire. So, what exactly do we mean when we say the word empire? What political form are we talking about?

EMPIRE: IDENTIFYING CHARACTERISTICS

The ideal empire can be described with a combination of three distinctive features. Their meaning will be more clear if we compare them with a more familiar political form, a modern state – usually, but not necessarily, national and/or democratic. The biggest mistake you can make when talking about the empire is to think of it as a state, just larger, more powerful, belligerent, etc. Of course, an empire is not the literal opposite of a state, it has complex historical relations with it: in the Modern age, empires and states coexisted, with states sometimes creating empires, and vice-versa... But empires are much older than states and, in their essence, are a very different political form, although capable of hybridization.

a) An Empire is a massive entity, both literally (in the physical sense) and, most importantly, symbolically (in the terms of concepts

linked to it). A state can be large or small, but a small empire is an impossibility. It is true that an empire could lose territories, like the Byzantine Empire shrank because of attacks from the East, but ideally an empire remains big. As big as possible, even limitless – to an empire, there is no such thing as a limit. Of course, in terms of real policy, this desire is

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never fully realized – but it forms a distinct worldview. The state is always fundamentally limited, it is a community that emerges by controlling participation based on the “us vs. them” dichotomy. Where one state ends, another begins, although there may be conflicting opinions regarding the ownership of specific adjacent territories, and they may change hands from time to time. Perhaps the most well-known example of such territorial disputes is Alsace-Lorraine, and there are dozens other cases in Europe, let alone in the world at large... The Kashmir conflict alone is

worth several smaller disputes. The empire, on the other hand, is by definition “open-ended”, potentially limitless, and seeks to cover the entire world, or at least its habitable parts. But how do empires manage to grow so massive and remain that way for centuries?

b) It’s not just about the size. The empire is a heterogeneous polity, not least because the larger the space, the more likely it is to be non-homogeneous. However, unlike the state, the empire does not seek to overcome its heterogeneity, and sometimes even encourages it. In contrast, this state gravitates towards cultural and political

uniformity. This is why the attributes of the state are a standardized national language which replaces local dialects and lingos (in the empire, the standard language is built on top of them), an inclusive compulsory education system (in essence, a machine that produces “standardized” citizens), a unified legal system, bureaucracy, etc. The empire allows for a wide variety of cultural and political practices and institutions, caring only for the loyalty of its constituent communities (especially the elites) and their limited participation in the carrying out of imperial policies

that maintain the stability of the empire and ensure its further expansion. But how can such a complex conglomerate of peoples, cultures, traditions, languages and beliefs be assembled into a relatively unified whole – and, more importantly, be maintained in the long term? After all, in terms of survivability, the ability for self-preservation, no other political form can come even close to the empire.

c) The reason why all of the above is sustainable (the size, the heterogeneity) is that the empire is a “universal” polity. It is intended for all, and open to all. It legitimizes its existence by appealing to universal values and translates them into political order. It claims to know the absolute, universal meaning of its own existence, extending it all the lands it can reach – in an empire, the political is inseparable from the sacred, and vice versa. The state can also ascribe to itself a sacred status – in fact, it almost always does, explicitly or implicitly, and if the state is secular, it simply makes secular values its object of worship. The difference is that the state is held together by its “own”, and only its own, unique, particular values, focused on the social structure in the “here and now”, and not in some long-term perspective, or eternity. In contrast, the empire is focused on this “open-endedness”, on limitlessness,

and draws its legitimacy from it (this is why Rome was called the Head of the World, or Caput Mundi, and the Eternal City, or Urbs Aeterna). But how does the Empire manage to tie the political and the sacred together so tightly (and also successfully avoid separating them over long time periods)? And what does that linkage look like in practice, in terms of institutional and functional design of the empire?

EMPIRE: CORE AND VALUES

These questions are interrelated – and so are the answers. To start modelling an empire, we should first posit that the basis of the imperial project is not just the connection between the sacred realm and the earthly, political realm, but the shape that this connection takes. It arises at the core of the empire, which is, first and foremost, the place where the sacred manifests itself, and only secondly – the place where political power is derived from the sacred realm. You can see this idea articulated very clearly in the legend of the Founding of Rome: first, the future city was outlined in the sky (and called templum, meaning “temple”), and only when the gods mandated it, this outline was projected onto the earth and became

Rome. This is what gave rise to “the realization that Rome is a special, unique... phenomenon, separated from the rest of the world, as if standing at the top of the global hierarchy, and that all other peoples of the world were inferior to Rome, created to submit to it” (Georgy Knabe). It is not a question of how grounded this idea (like any other imperial idea: Byzantine, Russian, British, American, etc.) is in reality. Instead, it all comes down to the famous Thomas theorem: “if men de-

through this connection is filled with meaning. This is what brings law and order into the world: Compare the words of Cicero (“After all, we make laws not only for the Roman people, but for all peoples, honest and strong in spirit”) and Mayakovsky (“The world begins, as is well known, from the Kremlin. Across the sea, across the land, they listen to the Communists”).

Since the imperial project is based on universal values, it is itself universal. The whole world is perceived as the arena for its realization – and, if resources allow, and if there are no objective limitations, it does become its arena. Take Rome itself: it was only at first and only on the surface that it looked somewhat similar to the Greek polis. The Greek city-states held a defensive position in re-

The empire claims to know the absolute, universal meaning of its own existence, extending it all the lands it can reach – in an empire, the political is inseparable from the sacred, and vice versa.

fine situations as real, they are real in their consequences.” This is what creates the material and immaterial reality of an empire, the center of which is always something greater than just a dot on the Earth’s map. The core of the empire is the center of an entire universe, a unique place where “lower”, earthly realms connects to the “heavenly” realm, and

lution to the world, they were no more than pockets of order amid the chaos swirling outside their walls. They fenced themselves off from the world and tried to defend against it. The few attempts at territorial expansion beyond their natural limits were seen as self-contradictory and unnatural, and invariably failed (centuries later, the same mistake led

to the downfall of many modern states). As for Rome, it was never content with being passive, never satisfied with simply existing within its domestic order – instead, it actively transformed and organized the world around it. That was its mission – and the same is true for every empire. The lines from Virgil’s Ae-

Uniqueness of imperial core does not in any way imply that it can be the only core, the only center, or that all other centers should be eliminated, subjugated to the one empire and incorporated into its homogeneous periphery.

neid, considered the purest expression of imperial self-consciousness, are applicable to any empire: “Others, I doubt not, shall with softer mould beat out the breathing bronze, coax from the marble features to the life, plead cases with greater eloquence and with a pointer trace heaven’s motions and predict the risings of the stars: you, Roman, be sure to rule the world (be these your arts), to crown peace with justice, to spare the vanquished and to crush the proud.”

It is very important to recognize that empires do, indeed, promote law, order and justice, and this is not limited to PR and propaganda (and if it does come down to PR and propaganda, then it is not a real empire). There was something genuine about Rome’s promise of a Golden age of peace and justice

that resonated with millions, making the Roman Empire not just possible, but even desirable for the majority of its population. An illegitimate empire (any system of political domination, for that matter) cannot survive for centuries, but, having achieved legitimacy, empires have to invest heavily in its maintenance. The absolute

belief of the empire’s core in its own supremacy in relation to other cultures and communities, which easily takes form of arrogant chauvinism, curiously has a flip side, and one that is impossible to ignore: the equality of all before imperial law and impartial, unbiased justice for all, regardless of language or faith. To a gentleman, all savages are equally savage (or rather, they differ only in the extent they are removed from “civilization”). This is why Rome (like any other imperial core) was able

to add them into its orbit without any unnecessary reflection or hesitation, without being particularly interested in the details of their cultures, and without seeing them as competitors, let alone rivals. It did incorporate them on its own terms, yet it also granted them a great deal of rights. A good illustration of this idea is the Roman ritual of *evocatio* (evocation), conducted after or sometimes before a military campaign, and consisted in a formal address to the foreign deities, inviting them to join the Empire's pantheon. Submission to the Empire thus guaranteed recognition and honors.

EMPIRE: CORE AND INSTITUTES

The institutional design of the empire, through which the imperial project is carried out and by means of which imperial resolutions are fulfilled, is directly determined by its values. The idea that values are more important than institutions is something that was clear even to Saint Augustine of Hippo: "Justice being taken away, then, what are kingdoms but great robberies? For what are robberies themselves, but little kingdoms." We can trace this thought back to Cicero: "...in the majority of nations, many pernicious and

mischievous enactments are made, as far removed from the law of justice we have defined as the mutual engagements of robbers"... "For law is the just distinction between right and wrong." Augustine, like Cicero, was a Roman citizen, and by "state which has justice" (what he called "*regnum*", meaning "governance"), he meant Rome – the Roman Empire.

The institutions, as derived from values, are what makes the empire something greater than just a big "robbery". Of course, the imperial core (whether it was Rome or something else) is unique. But its uniqueness does not in any way imply that it can be the only core, the only center, or that all other centers should be eliminated, subjugated to the one empire and incorporated into its homogeneous periphery. To the contrary, Rome built a multi-layered and asymmetric hierarchy of sub-centers – colonies and municipalities, city-states and even pre-Hellenistic cities, traditional centers of semi-independent kingdoms and chiefdoms. The same is done by other empires, much less obsessed with uniformity than nation-states. Take the British Empire: at its core was the asymmetric arrangements of England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland; around it – crown lands, settlements and colonies (one of which, namely India, eventually transformed into a vice-kingdom),

“native principalities”, protectorates, dominions and subordinate territories (the specter of this once grand structure is now called the Commonwealth of Nations). Let us think back to the Russian Empire, which integrated indigenous peoples of the North, Central Asian khanates, the Kingdom of Poland, the Grand Duchy of Finland, the Cossack, Jewish and Muslim self-governing authorities, and many other political forms, adapted to their specific contexts and situations. Let us remember the Soviet Empire, which included Russia itself, the autonomous republics and districts, the union republics, and – going beyond the formal “state” borders of the USSR, which were never really an obstacle to the rulers of Soviet Empire – the socialist bloc, all the satellite states beyond its borders, and even a global network of legal, semi-legal and completely illegal client organizations, like the South African “Spear of the nation” or the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front in Salvador. Better yet, let us recall that the US includes not only its constituent States and the district of Columbia, but also 14 territories of different status (including the “Freely Associated States”, three of which have full membership within the United Nations), Indian reservations (about 300 of them, covering more than 2% of US territory), removed

from the authority of their respective States and managed by traditional tribal authorities and local courts (within the broad limits of Federal Law) Not to mention the global network of America’s “clients” and quasi-independent client states that far exceeds that of the former Soviet Union, both in scale and efficiency...

The main function of these numerous and varied sub-centers is, in most cases, to serve as intermediaries. These sub-centers are governed by local sub-elites – naturally, only those of them who have agreed to serve as sub-elites and have taken an oath of loyalty (in one way or another) to the imperial core. The majority of social and political interactions are carried out in the “sub-center – periphery” chain, and a significant part of them remains completely unaffected by the empire’s superstructure, allowing them to preserve their traditional ways. This is the principle of “indirect rule”, described by Charles Tilly as a constitutive feature of the empire. Its two major elements are:

- a) Retention or establishment of particular, distinct compacts for the government of each segment;
- b) exercise of power through intermediaries who enjoy considerable autonomy within their own domains in return for compliance,

tribute, and military collaboration with the center.

However, it does not stop with tribute. The movements of material and symbolic resources between the imperial center, sub-centers, and peripheries are not a one-way street. Contrary to the popular misconception, they are not always reduced to predatory extrac-

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tion of the wealth of the periphery in favor of the imperial center. Naturally, this upward flow of resources did take place; however, there are also down-flows, which keep the exchange of resources within an empire from turning into outright pillaging. Of course, the periphery suffers a lot of material and moral damage in the process of forced (in all but a few cases) incorporation into the empire. One of its burdens is having to make regular contributions to the “free-floating resources” (a

concept introduced by Shmuel N. Eisenstadt) fund at the disposal of the imperial center, which is used both to maintain the empire and finance its further expansion. We should also add the resources lost on self-serving initiatives of the imperial administrators – no one is perfect, and no empire is perfect, too. But the empire is just as far removed from the ideal of absolute impartiality as any other political form, and attempts at power abuse in an empire are neutralized at least as often and punished at least as severely as in any other polity.

While they do lose a lot, the peripheries are always compensated in some way. It is difficult to say if

this compensation is commensurate to the damage, but it cannot be ignored. Of course, almost always there are incorruptible heroes who fundamentally reject any compensation and fight against the Empire to the last breath. But neither is it uncommon to see nations welcome their imperial overlords. In 1986, Geir Lundestad called the United States “an empire by invitation” that arrives when it is called and when it is expected to show up; however, more than once in its history, the

same role has been played by Russia. To avoid any unproductive discussions, I will not list any specific peoples and territories affected by Russia's role as "empire by invitation", not least because the idea of being "invited" or "welcome" in almost all these historical cases has been and continues to be subject of heated disputes. And the more it is disputed, the

there is nothing uniquely Russian about it – all empires operated according to this logic. Empires are taken to the "court of history" not when they are at the zenith of their power and glory, but rather when their power and glory has faded away to nothingness. Again, this is not something that is true exclusively for empires.

By submitting to universal imperial authority, a resident of the empire can significantly expand the limits of his freedom. Compare that to the kind of life he would lead within a closed community, under the heel of a local ruler, unconstrained and unchecked.

In any case, it is difficult to argue with the following reasoning, proposed by the French political scientist Maurice Duverger: "For an empire to maintain stability, it is necessary that its integrity remains beneficial to the peoples making it, and that each of those people retains its identity... so that each community and each individual is aware that they

more obvious it becomes (at least if we don't outright bend facts) that Russia was, indeed, invited – a large part of both the elites and the masses of many Russia's neighbors have repeatedly, even systematically, made conscious choices in favor of joining the Russian Empire. There is absolutely nothing surprising in the fact that some opposed it (and continue to oppose it to this day, "in hindsight"). And

benefit more from being part of the imperial whole than from leaving it." Empires are stable; therefore, all of the above is true, at least for as long as they remain stable. And this is usually a very long time.

Naturally, most of the "empire's gifts" go to sub-centre elites (again, nothing fundamentally imperial about that – no pie is ever divided equally). It is them that get a chance

to enter the central imperial elite, which, in turn, gradually becomes indifferent to the ethnic, cultural, racial and any other background of the newcomers, taking into account only objective criteria, such as loyalty and efficiency. Under certain conditions, an empire can even be led (and successfully, at that) by someone whose affiliation with the empire's titular nation, is, by the very least, questionable. There are many examples of this: from the Roman emperors: Septimius Severus (a Numidian African Moor) (by the way, his son Caracalla gave Roman citizenship to all free inhabitants of the Empire regardless of their origin), Elagabalus (a Syrian), Maximinus Thrax (a Thracian) and Philip the Arab to Catherine II (a German), Benjamin Disraeli (a Jew), Joseph Stalin (a Georgian) and even Barack Obama (a mulatto grandson of a Kenyan witch doctor). It is sub-central elites that get the reins over the material and symbolic "free-floating resources" – this way, the empire gives them additional "gravitas" to oppose the competing local elites and counter-elites and, more broadly, to maintain relations with the subject population, strengthening traditional and local mechanisms of legitimization with their own absolute authority. It is the sub-central elites who ultimately benefit from the genuinely impartial arbitration

provided by the powerful imperial core, indifferent to local feuds, as they are insignificant by core's standards. There are always those who voice discontent; but in the long run, this arbitration protects local elites from destroying one another. The principles of justice and rule of law maintained by Rome were the main guarantee of imperial stability; the stability of other empires directly correlates with how successfully and convincingly they imitate Rome in this respect.

But the wider population also receives its share of the "empire's gifts". It's not just the elites that enjoy the benefits of its markets, of cultural exchange, and the prospects of horizontal and vertical social mobility. In addition, imperial centralization, at least to some extent, "liberates peoples from local tyrannies that are seen as especially intolerable due to how close they are and how little control there is over them" (Duverger). By submitting to universal imperial authority (even if one does not obtain full imperial citizenship), a resident of the empire can significantly expand the limits of his freedom. Compare that to the kind of life he would lead within a closed community, under the heel of a local ruler, unconstrained and unchecked. "Let's not forget about the sense of security. While they eliminate clan wars, feuds, and clashes between

city-states, principalities and kingdoms, empires cannot completely prevent riots, civil unrest and bloody repressions. But they can restrict them. Their power also lets them resist external invasions more effectively” (Duvrger). The early Christians recognized this advantage of Rome, even back when it was still pagan, and even in spite of regular persecutions to which they were subjected: as St. Irenaeus of Lyons wrote around 185 AD, “the world enjoys peace through them, so that we may walk without fear on the roads and sail wherever we wish.”

Not all of these “empire’s gifts” are equally desirable, and not all accept them. No one is without enemies, and the empire is no exception. In fact, especially the empire – the grander the ambitions, the higher the number of the dissatisfied. But empires arise when its gifts are accepted by the majority, whether it is the majority of the elites or the majority of the masses. And in so far as these gifts are accepted – by one majority or the other – more and more communities join in, and the empire demonstrates its capacity for potentially unlimited expansion. Nations may even have to wait in line to get a chance to join an empire – despite all the talk about the crisis within the European Union, as of right now, there are at least five countries (Albania,

North Macedonia, Serbia, Turkey and Montenegro) that are candidates for future membership of the EU – and that’s discounting Ukraine and Georgia. Moreover, seeing the chaos that Brexit inflicted on Europe, it appears that most member-states will be discouraged from experimenting with attempts to leave the EU, at least for a time – and that is true even for those who, until recently, either seriously considered that or used the prospect as a tool of bargaining and blackmail. And even if countries do at some point line up for a chance to leave the union, as was the case with Austria-Hungary, the Ottoman Empire and the Soviet Union during its decline, this would mean that the gifts of the empire have run dry or simply lost their value.

EMPIRE: FACTORS OF STABILITY

The dynamic stability of the empire model is provided by one of the characteristic features of its design, described in a metaphor by Alexander Motyl (who built on the ideas of Johan Galtung): “In the empire, core-periphery relations resemble an incomplete wheel, with a hub and spoke but no rim... meaning there are no direct relations between and among the peripheral units or between and

among them and non-imperial polities.” All the sub-centers of the empire are in an indirect relationship with its center. All the sub-centers represent the center and dictate its will to the peripheries. The center (and with it, the entire system) receives strong guarantees of structural security that are almost unaffected by anyone’s personal loyalty or good judgement. “First, that peripheral elites (ideally)

The center (and with it, the entire system) receives strong guarantees of structural security that are almost unaffected by anyone’s personal loyalty or good judgement.

interact via the core means that their capacity to communicate and thus to band together against the core elite is limited. In particular, no one peripheral elite can halt the flow of resources and information from the periphery to the core and back. Second, because all peripheries are simultaneously contributors and recipients of resources, peripheral elites are, structurally, competitors and not cooperators. Their dependence on the core, and their

resulting independence of each other, aligns them with the core and against the rest of the periphery. Third, empires are extraordinarily good deals for peripheral elites.” (as is explained above) We can add two more advantages of the imperial mode, that overall meet the criteria of Tilly’s “indirect rule”:

a) The terms of the deal concluded with each of the peripheral elites are individual.

They are determined by local specifics and a constellation of various factors, the course of the negotiation process, individual characteristics and interests of the negotiators, etc. The terms are not permanent and can vary according to the current needs of the empire.

No one deal becomes a template for other deals with other participants, which gives the empire a lot of freedom in the management of the diversity that inevitably accompanies large imperial constructs. Any given peripheral unit of the imperial “mosaic”, identifiable in terms of geography, ethnicity, language, religion, etc., may, if the needs of the empire require it, find themselves in a significantly privileged position – even more privileged than the population of

the empire's core (something that researchers have observed a lot in the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union). The practice of "affirmative action" was invented and successfully put to use by empires long before it was adopted by the advocates of modern "political correctness".

b) Since imperial justice is not egalitarian, but differentiates between people (Plutarch

Few countries have done as much for the formation of modern parliamentary democracy and to spreading democratic values, institutions and practices as the British Empire.

credits Caesar with the words: "Honours must be yielded to the strongest, but necessities to the weakest"), the above-mentioned "positive discrimination' does not lead to internal tensions within the empire – at least until a different idea of justice replaces the existing one. This means that the internal organization of both the imperial core and the sub-centers of the empire can take any form. There is no reason why some of the empire's sub-centers

(or even all of them) or the imperial core itself would not be governed in a republican or even democratic manner. In terms of structure, Rome took shape of an empire after the Second Punic War (at the latest), when it was still a republic and almost two centuries before the Roman Principate. Few countries have done as much for the formation of modern parliamentary democracy and to spreading

democratic values, institutions and practices as the British Empire. Suffice it to mention the world's largest democracy, with over 800 million voters – the Republic of India. "Imperial Britain is not merely a combination of democracy with empire in a fortuitous association. Their union is organic; the whole is

a democratic empire. Not only has the home country, England, become in the last twenty-five years a highly democratic community, not only is the same thing true also of Australia and Canada; but also in ways which, though not quite so obvious, are not less real, it is becoming true of India, of the African colonies, and of the lesser dependencies." This prediction, made in 1900 by the American sociologist Franklin Giddings, did not come true in every

case; still, a century later, the British historian Niall Ferguson could rightfully say: “Indeed, nearly every country with a population of at least a million that has emerged from the colonial era without succumbing to dictatorship is a former British colony.” Or take the United States – it is not by chance that they are accused today of “exporting democracy” and of having “imperialist ambitions” – there is a direct link between the two. Democratic values, conceived as universal, may well take on an imperial meaning – if there is an Empire willing to promote them. Of course, it is not democracy (or anything opposite to democracy) that creates an empire. What makes an empire is, firstly, its willingness to regard its values as universal, and secondly, a certain type of relationship between the core, the sub-centers and the peripheries – a relationship that has nothing to do with the content of universal values, so long as they remain universal.

EMPIRE: LIMITS OF VIABILITY

The architecture of an empire is thus fully scalable – adding new elements requires no restructuring of the existing links, and there is no need to “reboot” the system, as it operates in “plug and play” mode. Building

on this metaphor, the possibilities of scaling are limited by the power of the CPU (central processing unit), to which all new “devices” are connected. This power can be immense, sometimes staggeringly so, like in the case of Rome. Immense, but not infinite. Real empires face real difficulties, real adversaries. Most importantly, we cannot assume that empires and their “management” would be able to always stay on top, following their set of values and maintaining faith in them in the wider population. It is the value crisis that pre-determines the collapse of an empire much better than any military or economic defeat. Because values are the built-in software (firmware) of the CPU, without which the core of the empire cannot function. It simply cannot “boot” without it.

In terms of meaning, these values can include almost anything. Sometimes they can be self-contradictory. Liberal and totalitarian, democratic and authoritarian, capitalist and socialist, individualist and communitarian, conservative and progressive, religious and atheistic... These “non-empirical... notions of what is desirable, used in moral discourse and influencing behavior” (Jan Van Deth, Elinor Scarbrough) are strengthened by the fact that values are “seen as something fundamental, irrevocable, even sacred” (Wolfgang

Jagodzinski, Karel Dobbelaere) – and, to a certain extent, “regardless of the specific instrumental benefits” (Talcott Parsons). And sometimes even in spite of those benefits and against self-interest – when people sacrifice their lives to protect the values they hold.

If someone professes to believe in such values, if he believes these values to be abso-

It is the value crisis that pre-determines the collapse of an empire much better than any military or economic defeat.

lute, valid for the entire world, and if he holds that being loyal to these values requires the creation of a corresponding political order (and not just meditation, prayer, or individual and community piety), then the most logical conclusion would be to build an empire. An empire he might have to die for – or rather, the values that this empire would embody. In empires that combine the sacred and the political, it is the sacred that lies at the heart, and not some primitive thirst for violence and profit – the Huns and the Vikings never created empires. Therefore, attempts to construct an imperial political order, more or less

successful, are made all the time –wherever a certain critical mass of material, human, organizational and, most importantly, symbolic resources is achieved. These, in a sense, are resources of faith. This is what may give rise to an “empire of evil”, but also to an “empire of good”; people’s opinions on the two will differ, as human opinions generally differ on mat-

ters of good and evil. Again, choosing a position in this case is a matter of faith.

However, the opposite is also true. Without faith in absolute values, there cannot be an empire. And if this faith has been eroded

and has run out (for example, if the belief that the empire is the best embodiment of absolute values is lost), then attempts to preserve or restore the imperial political form, using what remains of its ruined imperial institutions and practices, or produce makeshift imperial “remakes”, would all be futile. Historically, empires left the global stage either as a result of external “force majeure”, or when they ceased to be the one true, legitimate and accepted embodiment of the “world order” (the very ideal of imperial world order could live on, but the gap between this ideal and reality was unbearably wide, so that, devoid of

values to support its reality, the empire would unravel at the seams). This is how the Russian Empire fell – in March 1917, the throne of the Orthodox Tsar was carried out of the meeting room of the Holy Synod by metropolitan bishops, cheerful and triumphant. This also how the Soviet Union fell – in its final decades, the vaunted Communist values gradually turned into background noise, neutral and hardly

noticeable, sometimes even becoming an object of ridicule. And when the Soviet Empire was finally put to rest in December 1991, not one political force, not even a single person came to its defense – not even the ones who started screaming and flailing their arms after the fact. A true empire is not a fake or a simulacrum – and this is something we should be reminding ourselves about. ■

A. MILLER

THE LEGACY OF EMPIRES AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE FOR CONTEMPORARY RUSSIA



We are dealing with a very complex and controversial legacy of two empires, from the ruins of which modern Russia emerged. This situation is in many ways unique. It was a result of 70 years of Communist policies aimed at implementing an imperial project founded on principles that were directly and deliberately opposed to Russia's pre-revolutionary imperial design. It was also a result of Russia's defeat in the Cold War and of a "nomenclature revolution", which saw much of the Soviet legacy survive. Russia was in a fundamentally different position, compared to post-WW II Germany and Japan, which saw their imperial legacy leveled to the ground by the victors. It would have been wrong to assume that the collapse of the Soviet Union would be followed by a complete termination of imperial heritage and a "cleanup" of anything that remains of it, similar to what happened in Germany and Japan. The situation of Russia is unique, as it remains (at least for now) protected by its status as a nuclear power, and the dynamics of the transformation of its imperial heritage is also unique – it cannot be predicted by way of comparing it to similar historical cases.

1) The Soviet legacy has survived in many Russian institutions, especially in national

autonomies. As a result of the Soviet policy of institutionalization and "territorialization of ethnicities", a number of "titular" ethnic groups have been growing more and more aware of their own nationhood, and starting to feel ownership over the territory they inhabit. These national republics have a number of institutions they inherited from the USSR. Belonging to the "correct" ethnicity remains an important factor, as it provides access to decision-making offices. This makes it extremely difficult, or downright impossible, for Russia to create a classic "single-nation" nation-state. This does not mean, however, that the territorial organization of Russia cannot change. But even if it does, the process would take a long time, and it is unlikely that it would lead to the formation of a typical European-style nation-state.

Any changes in this area can cause major complications. The reduction of national privileges in the autonomous republics after the collapse of the USSR means that the politically active parts of these peoples see the trends in the field of "national rights" as negative. Meanwhile, it is known that the level of discontent of certain groups is determined not only, and not so much by the volume of available rights, but by the perceptions of the way the situation is changing – whether the

scope of rights and privileges is expanding or shrinking.

At the same time, many ethnic Russians, who make up about 80% of Russia's population, consider the current situation with respect to the autonomies as unfair, as something inherited from the anti-Russian Soviet policies. The current Russian nation-

appeals to the image of Russian national territory from before the dissolution of the Romanov Empire.

It is worth mentioning that almost no one looks at the institutional heritage of the USSR in terms of national policies in a positive light – all ethnic groups have formed their own narratives of oppression. Thus,

the Soviet heritage that exists today in Russia's institutional landscape satisfies no one. And the appeals to the imperial heritage are nothing but an attempt at “raising the Atlantis”, because the legacy of old imperial institutions was buried by the Soviet project.

2) Dealing with the lega-

cy of empires is a very complex challenge, and an obstacle that cannot be easily overcome. First, all attempts at revanchism – at restoring the Soviet Empire – are doomed to failure for obvious reasons. However, a slice of Russian population is clearly tempted by the idea, and Vladimir Putin's famous line, which his critics often depict as revanchist, was actually a warning against this sentiment – when he said that “anyone who doesn't regret the passing of the Soviet Union has no heart”,

The attempt to turn Russia into a nation-state comprising a single Russian nation is, in today's context, an attempt to deny the significance of the imperial heritage.

building project reminds them of the old Soviet project of creating the “Soviet man”, who has his “Russianness” dissolved in the collective “Sovietness”. At the same time, appeals to the pre-revolutionary Russian Empire as the “correct” Russian legacy are very popular among Russians. It is no accident that A. Solzhenitsyn's essay *Rebuilding Russia* gained so much popularity at the time of its publication in 1990, and has enjoyed it since then. In the essay, Solzhenitsyn openly

he followed it with “anyone who wants it restored has no brain”.

The second option is the straightforward desire to create a Russian nation-state – to pretend as if there is no imperial legacy, or that it can be easily overcome. Meanwhile, Russia inherited more than 20 autonomous national republics as a consequence of Soviet national policy. The titular ethnicities of at least part of these republics are politically mobilized, meaning they possess a special national identity and the idea of their republic as their “own” national territory. Sometimes, this image of the national territory goes beyond the borders of the republic, creating inter-ethnic conflicts and tensions. (See, for example, the developments in North Ossetia, or recent attempts to regulate the border between Chechnya and Ingushetia.) But in a nation-state, there is only one group that is mobilized as a nation and that perceives the state as its own. Other groups may be treated better or worse, but they are considered minorities, and do not claim the state as their “own”.

Political science offers a whole range of models trying to describe state structures characterised by the presence of two or more politically mobilized nations. The most famous of them was the “nation-state” vs

“state-nation” dichotomy, proposed by Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan. Even before that, Arend Lijphart wrote about “consociational democracy”. In any case, claiming that there is a specific Russian nation in Russia that includes all the country’s citizens is a simplification that could lead to some major problems. These problems could be exacerbated even further if the country carries out active nationalization policy, aiming to reshape the actual reality so that it aligned with the declared reality, in which there is no conflict between the “Russian nation” and the mobilized ethnic nations of the autonomies.

Also, we must acknowledge that there is a conflict between the concept of Russian nation and the supporters of the Russian national identity who see the “Russian nation” as a new rendition of the “Soviet man” concept. The attempt to turn Russia into a nation-state comprising a single Russian nation is, in today’s context, an attempt to deny the significance of the imperial heritage. Meanwhile, the degree of “acuteness” of the described contradictions can be limited if we recognize that the imperial legacy is meaningful and requires Russia to search for a more complex form of state structure than the “nation-state”.

3) The legacy of the Russian Empire is reflected in our approaches to a number of

important issues, and even in our approaches to politics in general. For example, we can confidently say that the Russian elites have historically given priority to foreign policy over domestic policy. This is typical of the elites of the great powers, who in the mid-19th century were spending more than half

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of the money in the state's coffers on military needs, even in peacetime. Russia's foreign policy is still guided primarily by considerations of prestige and the need to defend its status as a great power.

Is it possible to take a different approach to foreign policy – one where its design is determined primarily by the needs of domestic

development? Russia's place in the league of great powers is determined by the legacy of the Soviet Empire, like its seat on the UN Security Council, and by its military – primarily nuclear – potential. Is it possible to maintain this status in the long run without a qualitative improvement in the dynamics of

domestic development? This answer to this question will become clearer if we assess the dynamics of post-Soviet development, which has led not only to the loss of Russian influence in the vast majority of countries that emerged after the collapse of the USSR, but also to the disintegration of the Slavic core of the three republics that signed the agreement that declared the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

The transition from the priority of foreign policy to the priority of domestic development implies a significant reassessment of the country's role in the world and its share in international relations. This is part of the bigger problem that has to do with the country's political elites lacking awareness of the changes in Russia's standing and power. As

of today, this problem is very far from being solved.

4) Another important example of how difficult it is to understand the changing role and place of the country in the world, or in this case in the “near abroad”, is the attitude to the fate of those Russians who found themselves outside of their homeland after the collapse of the Soviet Union. In a number of cases, Russia tried to keep Russians from moving to the newly-formed Russian Federation, not because it was in their interests, but because it considered Russian communities an instrument of projecting its influence on the former Soviet republics. This position reflected a hope that the general trend towards disintegration could be reversed and turned into post-imperial reintegration. Today, we can state with confidence that integration efforts have failed and will never be able to change this general trend. It could be argued that the unwillingness to recognize this fact is largely due to the influence of the imperial heritage and the intellectual inertia stemming from this heritage.

One possible answer to this challenge is irredentism. This concept is used to refer to the policy of the state or some other political actor aimed at uniting a people, a nation or an ethnic group within a single state. Italy

and Germany demonstrated examples of irredentism combined with imperial territorial expansion in the 19th century. Another example is Germany in the first half of the 20th century. For Russia, this type of irredentism is fraught with unpredictable serious consequences. So far, Russia has shown very modest success in the model of irredentism showcased by Germany after the Second World War, when it “gathered” Germans that had no home.

With the reunification of Crimea with Russia and the developments in a number of unrecognized republics, we can say that Russia still is inconsistent in its irredentist policies – which is directly linked to the controversial approach to the legacy of empires.

5) The post-imperial state of modern Russia has a number of important political consequences:

A) There is no going back to the old imperial status (whatever “golden age” is chosen as a reference point).

B) It is necessary to rethink the scale of the country, its potential for development and its future, as well as Russia’s place in the world.

C) Post-imperialism means that the legacy of empires – or the “ruins” of former empires, if you will – can still be felt in our modern life, in its intellectual, institutional

and other dimensions. Ignoring this legacy or trying to “clean up the ruins” will not lead to any positive results.

D) The goal is to create a design of the future in which its creators will be able to look at the legacy of empires “from the outside”,

freed from inherited intellectual restrictions and deep rooted habits, and, at the same time, be able to fit imperial legacy (for example, the consensus on sovereignty as an immutable value) in the future image of post-imperial Russia. ■

