

Letter From the Russian Federation

by Wayne Allensworth

A Place Called Home



Kazan was preparing for her 1,000-year anniversary last August when Russian President Vladimir Putin arrived to address the World Tatar Congress in what once had been the center of a Tatar khanate. The goal of the congress was the “spiritual unification” of the Tatars, scattered across Russia and the world. I do not know whether President Putin paused to reflect on the lengthy and bloody history that has bound the Tatars and the Russians to this same land, though his somewhat tense reception at the congress, and the questions it raised about Russian citizenship and the old problems of ruling a multinational state, probably reminded him that all the tactful utterances he could make would not change history or alter the fundamental loyalties of the Tatars.

The Tatars—a Turkic, Muslim people of the vast Russian steppe—succeeded the dreaded Mongols as the scourge of old Rus. Their repeated invasions of Moscow’s realm inflicted heavy losses on what had become the center of medieval Russia. By the middle of the 16th century, the various Tatar khans in Kazan, Astrakhan, and the Crimea began coordinating raids that won them booty and slaves, wreaking havoc and terror on the Slavs. Thus, in 1551, Czar Ivan IV (Ivan the Terrible), launched a sustained offensive against the Tatar khanates. After attacking the Crimean Tatars and the forces of their ally, the Turkish sultan, Ivan advanced on Kazan. After a six-week siege, his forces used gunpowder to blast through the city’s fortifications, storming and conquering it in a swift, bloody battle. Princes Mikhail Vorotynsky and Andrey Kurbsky led the first detachments into the city, winning the bitter battle and themselves a place in Russian history.

Ivan the Terrible would win his own place in history, chiefly for his brutality,

his war on the Russian nobles, and the expansion of both the territory and the administrative mechanisms of the state. Some would later claim that the Georgian bandit Joseph Stalin fancied himself Ivan’s true successor, even as he prudently invoked the symbols and history of old Russia to mobilize the masses in the “Great Patriotic War” (World War II) and to justify his own rule. To this day, the Man of Steel is remembered by some nationalists as the “red czar” and a great Russian patriot.

Ivan had answered the national question the only way he knew how: “If one people must dominate, then it must be mine.” Stalin followed suit, answering Lenin’s political query “*Kto Kovo?*” (roughly, “Who will dominate whom?”) in an unforgettable way. Many Russians still cannot understand the difference.

The thorny problems of history, national identity, and the question of common citizenship for Tatars and Russians would not go away during Putin’s trip to the provinces. Those who did remember their history must have smiled when, during an informal meeting with journalists, Putin noted, without a trace of irony, that Kazan had once been a center of trade for Russians, Scandinavians, Arabs, and Tatars and that the city, now rediscovering its Islamic and Turkic identity, “must serve as an example of religious and inter-ethnic peace, well-being and accord.” It was easy for him to say, since, in this instance, the Russians had been the victors.

In spite of Putin’s shallow sermonizing on peace and accord, the friction between Kazan and Moscow had begun even before his arrival and did not let up during his visit. Tatar President Mintimer Shaymiyev had told the congress that he would fight what he called Moscow’s attempts at recreating a unitary state—that he, as leader of the Tatar people in Russia and around the world, would fight any attempts to diminish Tatarstan’s hard-won sovereignty, including the republic’s right to a separate Tatar citizenship and to be recognized as an autonomous entity within—or, as an earlier version of the Tatar constitution put it, “associated with”—the Russian Federation. The preservation of the Tatar republic, its peculiar statehood, and the controversial provisions of its constitution, Shaymiyev intoned, provided the Tatar nation with the

“structures necessary for developing our language and culture.” The Tatars were, after all, Russia’s second-largest nationality, with about five million people—and the Tatar president complained loudly for the benefit of local media that Moscow’s census-takers were planning to divide the Tatars into various subgroups, artificially diminishing both their numbers and their political clout.

Shaymiyev also mentioned the threat globalization presented to national identity, stating that “we cannot allow the Tatar nation to be dissolved in a globalist flood.” (Moscow was attempting to join the World Trade Organization.) He further appealed to the other non-Russian peoples of the federation—particularly his “brother Bashkirs”—to join the good fight against the encroachments of the “center” and to enhance the national republics’ status. The Tatar leader, who has near-dictatorial powers, prudently did not mention the flow of money from Islamic organizations within Tatarstan to Chechen insurgents, something that has irritated Moscow for years and has stimulated the “center’s” efforts to rein in the overly independent Tatars.

The delegates at the congress were every bit as aggressive as Shaymiyev in stating their complaints: Some raised the census issue; others, the question of quotas for representatives of non-Russian nations in the state apparatus; and another broached the delicate question of whether Muslim women could wear their headscarves for ID photos.

Putin was tactful but did not back away from any of Moscow’s stated intentions concerning non-Russian republics: He insisted that Tatarstan modify the offensive sovereignty and citizenship clauses in her constitution and even politely insisted that Russian ID documents would be difficult to use if faces were obscured by headscarves. He conceded that Moscow should support the efforts of Tatars to institute the study of their native language, but he stated that he would resist efforts to impose any quota system on state appointments. Putin, however, became noticeably irritated by one delegate’s contention that it was difficult to be a Tatar—to be conscious and protective of his identity and to raise his children as Tatars—outside the national republic. Putin sharply replied, “So, it’s not easy to be a Tatar in Bashkor-

tostan. What about a Russian in Tatarstan? . . . A Mordovian in other parts of Russia? How do these people feel? . . . Ours is a multinational state . . . and we must understand . . . that if a representative of any ethnic group . . . does not feel at home in our country, we will not preserve our . . . statehood."

Shaymiyev was not happy and refused to hold a personal meeting with Putin, who left the ancient Tatar capital for the more friendly—and more Russian—environs of Vladivostok.

Samuel Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations* has become a reality, both in America, as demonstrated on September 11, 2001, and in Russia, as shown in the ongoing conflict between Moscow and Islamic militants in the non-Russian republics, especially in Chechnya.

The developing nation-state, dubbed the "integrated state" by Walker Connor, combined expansive administrative bureaucracy with industrial development. New commercial relationships displaced feudal and communal ties, demanding both the destruction of the old order and the creation of new social bonds. Industrialism also demanded a more mobile population. The centralized bureaucratic state served both purposes well, promoting the interests of the new economic classes, while centralized educational systems standardized language and homogenized regional cultures, making Germans out of Bavarians and Prussians, and Frenchmen out of Normans and Gascons.

But the problem of incorporating identity groups that were too racially, religiously, or linguistically distinct became an irritant to the evolving nation-state, which demanded a single administrative, cultural, linguistic, and economic space in order to function efficiently. Thus, as Professor Connor asserted in *Ethnonationalism: The Quest for Understanding* (1995), the "Age of Nationalism" is both a sign of the modern state's development and a reaction to it, in the demands for popular sovereignty and homeland states by minority groups faced with cultural, if not physical, extermination.

I will not attempt to downplay the degree of violence and coercion used to hold the pre-1917 Russian Empire together. The present Chechen war is merely an extension of earlier wars between the empire and the mountain peoples of the Caucasus, who are now mobilized by resurgent Islam. Nevertheless, the traditional Russian assertion that many of the

empire's subject nations were given a considerable degree of autonomy and, in some cases, actually preferred the czar's rule to that of the Turkish sultan or even the Swedes does contain some truth.

By the 19th century, the Russian Empire was a patchwork of grand duchys and national autonomies. The Finns, for example, participated actively in the life of the empire, while retaining a high degree of autonomy at home. As a reaction to the rising tide of nationalism and as part of various czars' modernization attempts, Russification was increasingly used both to absorb troublesome nationalities, such as the Poles, and to advance the administrative reach of the state. In 1899, an order decreeing that Finland, which had been quite loyal to Moscow, must conform to the general administrative system of the state was accompanied by intense Russification programs. As historian Nikolas Riasanovsky wrote, Finland "almost overnight" became bitterly hostile to Russia and a hotbed of revolutionary activity.

In the pre-revolutionary empire, a non-Russian subject could become Russian by adopting the Russian language, claiming Russian culture as his own, and converting to Orthodoxy. Citizenship, in today's sense, did not exist. A subject could remain within the national autonomy or do service for the imperial regime without losing his primary identity and could still see his birthplace—or *rodina* as the Russians call it—as his homeland or Motherland (*rod* implies kinship). The non-Russian could adopt Rus as his Fatherland (*otechestvo*). But as modernization was clumsily instituted under the czars, then pursued relentlessly by the Soviets, the thorny problems of identity and primary loyalty within the multinational state were aggravated.

The Soviet regime claimed to have built a union of republics that were national in form and socialist in content, a union in which no one nationality dominated the central state (and, thus, the other nationalities) and national cultures were allowed to flourish. Of course, the Soviet regime suppressed national cultures, hunting down "bourgeois nationalists" wherever it could find or imagine them. At the same time, the Russification programs pursued throughout the Soviet Union were necessarily shorn of Orthodox Christianity, which had been an integral part of the Russian identity under the old regime.

As the Soviet Union declined, it be-

came apparent that Soviet-style Russification had drastically altered the Russian identity: The combination of forced industrialization, urbanization (the village community was the cultural and economic foundation of the old Russia), state atheism, and the rewriting of pre-revolutionary history to conform to Marxist-Leninist doctrine, together with the drive to create an artificial civic identity based on a watered-down version of the dominant culture, had Sovietized the Russians as well as Russified some members of their subject nationalities.

To some extent, treaties made with national republics in postcommunist Russia were Moscow's attempt to hold together the Russian Federation as the Soviet Union collapsed. Thus, the new relations between Moscow and the regions were vaguely like the old arrangements with national autonomies under the czars. "Take as much sovereignty as you want," Boris Yeltsin told the national republics, which resulted in a flourishing of republic citizenship clauses as well as a renewed interest in long-suppressed minority cultures.

The word *rossiyskiy*, a term with civic and political overtones, had come to designate a citizen of the Russian Federation. (*Russkiy*, on the other hand, designates an ethnic Russian and all things specifically related to ethnic Russians.) So, while a citizen of the Russian Federation, a *rossiyanin*, may be an ethnic Russian, a Tatar, or a Bashkir, the term *russkiy* is viewed with great suspicion by minority ethnic groups, particularly when it is used by the country's political or economic elites. On the other hand, many Russian nationalists despise the term *rossiyskiy*, seeing its use by state officials as a threat to the nation's true identity and as an obstacle to both the revival of Russian national culture and the protection of ethnic Russians' rights in national republics.

Was Yeltsin right to grant wide autonomy to the national republics? I believe that a sharp division of powers between the "center," the regions, and local municipalities should be part of any solution to modern Russia's dilemma of balancing the interests of her various ethnic groups. But the fact remains that, under modern conditions, members of various ethnic groups are competing for jobs as part of a highly mobile workforce within the single economic space of the integrated state, while the media continues to threaten ethnic identities with cultural homogenization. National education sys-

tems have a similar effect. And urbanization forces these diverse groups into population centers, where they strive to dominate the workplace, media, and schools, which often results in the institution of quotas. More contact among ethnic groups does not necessarily increase their prospects for getting along. Modernity has not solved the old problems of keeping the peace in a multinational state; in many cases, it has only made them worse.

What can the Russian experience teach us? First, that we can only begin to deal with the reality of identity politics in multinational states by, as the Russians say, calling things by their right names. The Russian distinction between citizenship and nationality recognizes the reality of primary loyalties, cemented by the natural bonds of kinship, shared culture, and common experience. Only when we recognize that a Tatar is different from a Russian and that his loyalties will most likely remain centered on his own kind can we begin to recognize what civic membership—citizenship—can and cannot do. Thus, Russia recently tightened her requirements for acquiring citizenship and began making it difficult for aliens, especially those who are not proficient in the Russian language, to obtain residence cards. At the same time, Moscow is attempting to tighten control over Russia's borders and to work out a new relationship with the national republics.

The Russian experience teaches us that there are limits on the modern state's ability to assimilate ethnic groups: We may be able to create a common cultural space in which Cajuns and Swedes can become Americans, share in a common sense of civic identity, and yet retain many of their cultural distinctions. Absorbing millions of Third World immigrants, however, will strain the capacity of that space to accommodate mass populations who come from vastly different civilizations.

In the Old America, there were citizens who spoke German in Central Texas and Cajun in Southern Louisiana; Catholics who prospered within the common space of American Protestant culture; and patriotic Southern Americans who taught their own version of the War Between the States in local schools. If we are ever to recreate that place, for ourselves and our children, then curtailing Third World immigration is a necessary—but not sufficient—first step. For Middle Americans are being Sovietized in much the same way that the Russians were: A distorted, deracinated Americaniza-

tion—of Wal-Mart and McDonald's, of suburb-speak and microwaved meals, of de-Christianized "civic religion," and "national greatness conservatism"—is crippling our ability to fight the immigration battle, let alone recover our ethnic identities and reconstitute real communities. We cannot even understand the nature of such battles if our own sense of nationality has been distorted by Sovietization, which serves the ruling elite's political agenda of preserving its own power while destroying an authentic American identity. They, like Stalin, are most interested in Lenin's political question.

Wayne Allensworth is the author of *The Russian Question*.

Letter From London

by Andrei Navrozov

The Hole in the Heart



Morphine puts you to sleep, explains a pompous savant in Moliere, because it is a soporific. By this tautology is the great dead void at the core of Western civilization exposed, finally and, I dare say, mercilessly. What vitality, what resistivity, what transcendent stubbornness our spiritual truth once possessed ("Even if it were proven me that there is truth without Christ," wrote Dostoevsky, "I would still take Christ over truth"), they have been all but smothered by that kind of artless and airless scholasticism.

Catch adults in the act of explaining things to children. What an avalanche of arrogant verbosity do we see crashing about those innocent little heads! How shamelessly is the word *because* abused, whether the subject of instruction is volcanoes, onions, or angels! And note, incidentally, the ingenuous way the old have devised to educate the young in the sacred principles of causality: "Don't," they are ever warning them, "because . . ." Don't play with fire because you'll hurt yourself. Don't touch the vase because it'll fall and break. Don't go into the forest because it's easy to get lost there. And, when the child rummages in the hearth without getting burned, when the Chinese vase stands as before, or when a warm handful of wild strawberries is held up to

the skeptical snout, they just shrug. The statistics, they think, are on the side of the house.

Whenever *he* gets it wrong, the gambler has to pay. Not so with our culture, which seems to think it can be wrong as often as it likes, without ever having to pay a forfeit. Didn't you crucify your God? Lose Rome to the barbarians? Kill off half the adult population of Europe in a matter of decades? Ah, yes, well, but it all worked out in the end, because we aren't just individuals, you know. We're not some bunch of crazy gamblers. We are the institution, the corporation, the casino. We can lose without ever feeling the pain. There's always plenty of other suckers out there.

The Aristotelian *organon*, which has increasingly dominated our culture since the Renaissance and found its ultimate expression in the binary code of the computer, has had the effect of reducing Western thought to a game called "20 Rational Questions." Information, fragmented into bits fixed with A-or-not-A certitude, is used to describe the world with the pixel-pat cynicism of a television image. Yet the picture on the screen is but an artless, airless lie, a tendentious fiction, a mendacious tautology of cause and effect that leaves the substance of life almost totally unexplained. For can't a woman be ugly and alluring at the same time? Can't a tall, handsome grenadier behave as a vile coward, despite his manly moustache? Can't a saintly hermit plausibly seduce and then strangle a 12-year-old? Can't a dissident rabbi turn water into wine? Can't a rosy-cheeked Sicilian soprano, without a care in the world to speak of, embody human suffering in Pergolesi's *Stabat Mater*? Can't a person win big at roulette?

The practical applications of science—whence the philistine's concept of miracle is derived, just as his concept of pleasure, generally speaking, is derived from pornography—now have the world to themselves and are the gospels of the religion of rationalism. Which is not to say that the other, forgotten, losing religion, though based on the irrational premise of the transcendent miracle of life, was ever illogical. For instance, while it would be right to say that Abraham was given the Promised Land *because* he had come to believe in the promise, it would not be right to say that the Flood came *because* Noah had started building the Ark.

Apart from being undoubtedly evil—undoubtedly, at least, for those who know