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In My View

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IN MY VIEW

A DISSERVICE TO RUSSIAN DEMOCRATS

Sir:

I am pleased that in his review of my book, *The Russian Presidency* (*Naval War College Review*, Summer 2001, pp. 165–8), Sergei Khrushchev agreed with me (and we are among a very few in the scholarly community who have agreed on this issue) that presidentialism will serve Russia better than the parliamentary alternative. But elsewhere, Dr. Khrushchev disagrees with me, and I am writing not only to clarify to readers of the *Review* the nature of that disagreement but also to take issue with places where I believe he has mischaracterized the book.

First, it is understandable that Dr. Khrushchev objects to my argument that the current state of affairs in Russia is largely the result of the horrific policies of the Soviet era. His father helped to build, and then headed, the Soviet system, and no one can blame Dr. Khrushchev if filial loyalty hampers his objective evaluation of that era. However, he is flatly wrong when he writes that placing the blame on the Soviets is “a usual mistake of Western studies.” Even a cursory reading of Western academic opinion reveals that most scholars (many of whom, ironically, are ardent fans of socialism) think the problem with Russia is the current environment of *capitalism*, not the legacy of Soviet authoritarianism. Dr. Khrushchev may not like the latter argument, but it is in no way a typical one.

Likewise, his assertion that “seventy years of Soviet rule did not change the Russians” is staggering; the Soviet system not only increased levels of urbanization and education but also, let us never forget, murdered tens of millions of people. To say that this did not change the Russians or have an impact on current Russian political culture defies the evidence as well as common sense.

Also, a few matters of fact are worth clearing up. Dr. Khrushchev asserts that I paint figures like Ruslan Khasbulatov in “exclusively dark tones.” I realize—and I say in the book—that Yeltsin and Khasbulatov represent two visions of the future of Russia. But the fact remains that Khasbulatov tried to ignite civil war (he

called on the army to mutiny) and shared a podium during the 1993 standoff with a renegade general who promised to see to it that Yeltsin's supporters would "wash in their own blood." If there is a lighter way to depict such people, it will have to come from a more imaginative author than I.

The review also claims that "Nichols declares it to be well known that [Vladimir] Zhirinovskiy and his party have always been controlled by the government." I said nothing so categorical. I noted, in a footnote regarding the late 1990s, that it is widely believed in Moscow's political circles that Zhirinovskiy had been bought off by the government with special perks and that this had made him a less credible opposition figure.

Finally, Dr. Khrushchev writes that my drawing of a distinction between Belarusian president Aleksandr Lukashenko and Boris Yeltsin was "propagandistic," "used without concrete evidence," and "inadmissible," that it "reduce[d] confidence in the author." (By contrast, he writes that "Lukashenko is the very image of Yeltsin.") If calling Russia democratic and Belarus authoritarian is "propagandistic," then it is propaganda that has been engaged in by the United States, the European Union, and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. As I noted in *The Russian Presidency*, the OSCE said in 1997 that Lukashenko was "constructing a system of totalitarian government" and that both the OSCE and the EU found the voting procedures in Belarus so clearly rigged that they refused to send election observers. In Russia, American and European observers alike certified the voting in both the 1996 and 2000 elections to be free and fair, despite occasional irregularities. If Dr. Khrushchev finds such judgments "inadmissible," I suggest that his quarrel is with the many observers from the Western democracies and not with me.

The real problem in the review is that Dr. Khrushchev, like so many Russians who cast a cynical eye on events after 1991, sweepingly dismisses Russian political life as "merely reflections of a struggle for national power among oligarchic-criminal groups that emerged as a result of fraudulent privatization." That is a disservice to the many Russian democrats who are trying, however imperfectly, to build a new political system. But more disturbingly, if that is his starting point for analysis, then any book on Russian politics, save one that is completely and scathingly critical of every institutional change and political event in Moscow, will inevitably fail to meet his standard of acceptability.

The fact remains that ten years after the Soviet collapse, democracy and its institutions survive and are deepening in Russia. Especially at such a crucial time in history, when it is imperative during our war against terror to separate the civilized nations who might be our allies from the malefactors who are our enemies, the readers of the *Naval War College Review* deserve a more judicious discussion

of events in Russia than the relentless (and unfounded) pessimism represented by Dr. Khrushchev.

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CB IN DESERT STORM: SUFFICIENT CONDEMNATION

Sir:

While I appreciate Lieutenant Commander Pietro D. Marghella's notes on my "meticulous and forthright discussion" of chemical and biological (CB) warfare during the Gulf War (*Naval War College Review*, Summer 2001, pp. 172–3), I take exception to some of his criticisms.

My book did use acronyms extensively and was focused on the Army's contributions to CB defense. The book was written to inform the members of the Army community who do not know that the Chemical Corps had an effective defense capability for the armed forces during this conflict, especially those misled by the media and other critics to believe we had little or no defensive capability during the Gulf War. Frankly, I had no good contacts in the other services with whom to talk about their CB defense efforts. But I will note for the record that in 1990 the Army had the most credible operational and logistics capability in that area; the other services were very unprepared, due to their parochial approaches in developing service-specific CB defense—none more so than the Navy, with its unique chemical detectors, chemical suits, and biodetection research-and-development program, and lack of any decontamination capability. The unpreparedness among the services is the reason Congress directed a joint program approach by the four services in 1994, the services having continued their separate acquisition efforts after the war.

Marghella takes issue with my use of the term "weapons of mass disruption." I contend that CB weapons are mass casualty agents only if used as long-line resources against an unprotected population, as General John J. Pershing noted after World War I. How many people did sarin kill in the Tokyo subways in 1995?

Twelve. How many people has anthrax killed (as of late October) in the terrorist letter campaign that began in September 2001? A very few (four victims to date). How many lives did these acts disrupt? Tens of thousands. Our failure to acknowledge this simple fact has caused the logjams in defense policy and continued failures to model and simulate the realistic effects of CB agents.

I am sorry Marghella takes issue with my treatment of medical topics. I did not mean to imply that the doctors and medical specialists could not recognize chemical and biological casualties (although there was an acknowledged intensive education effort conducted during DESERT SHIELD). What we lacked as a force was the ability to treat and evacuate mass casualties; we had no ability to decontaminate and move contaminated human remains; and we certainly had a very limited biological vaccine capability. The 101st Airborne Division's commander flatly asserted that it would have been better to have no vaccines than enough for only a third of the force. That in itself should be sufficient condemnation of our medical capability during the Gulf War.

Last, Marghella says the United States "never considered the use of chemical weapons in the Gulf War." This is flatly untrue. The Defense Department leadership, with Army Chemical Corps advisors, discussed the chemical option as a counter to Iraq's chemical weapons threat and decided against it. The department's policy envisioning the use of chemical weapons had been negated only by the U.S. signature of the Chemical Warfare Convention. My sources were in the room where the discussion took place and participated in it; I doubt that Marghella's could say the same.

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