

THE RUSSIAN IDEA AND THE IDEOLOGY OF RUSSIAN GREAT- POWER CHAUVINISM AND IMPERIALISM

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Abstract

The paper analyses the concept of Russian Idea used by Russian nationalists. A concept that is at the core of the identity of the Russian people. Accordingly, the analysis is based on a theoretical framework that draws attention to the controversial concept of the Russian idea that is reviewed considering changes in the history of the Russian state. Whether formulated by church hierarchs, statesmen, philosophers, ethnologists, or contemporary politicians, various stages in its conceptualization have helped build patriotism in the country. Moreover, in addition to the theoretical framework, the paper focus on a case study: the February Revolution, known as February Bourgeois Democratic Revolution or the March Revolution (8-16 March 1917).

Keywords: Russian Idea, ideology, post-Soviet, chauvinism, imperialism

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Introduction

It is difficult to speak about the concept of Russian Idea: the adherents of this concept were and are opponents and at times even political adversaries. There has been a period in Russian history when too much attention has been paid to this concept. For many people this concept appears to be associated with Russian, Russians or Russia. The attempts that have been made to provide a definition of this concept have usually been unsatisfactory. The political ideal of the Russian Idea is also syncretistic (*sobornost*, the principle of spiritual unity and religious community based on free commitment based on traditions of the Eastern Orthodox Church). A distinctive variation of the Russian Idea was inherent in the official ideology of Imperial Russia, especially during the reigns of Alexander II and Nicholas III. Among all the different interpretations of the concept of Russian Idea and the various concepts joined together by this notion, the following characteristics stand out: the fact that Russian Idea is seen as a path of development of Russian civilization (of Russian culture and society) are fundamentally different from those of Western civilization, second the fact that Russian culture contains elements that not only distinguish it from the rest of the world, but also contain preconditions for the salutary transformation of the latter, the idea of the Russian people being divinely chosen and divinely sustained, of faith in their world-wide historic mission. And the third aspect that stands under this concept is the fact that political attitudes are not separated into an independent sphere. Politics is seen through a prism of moral-religious views.

I want to present and explain the main components of the Russian Idea as the Russian national ideology and on the other hand as goals of the Russian people as a power in the world, presented as distinct among other nations, with a special character and fate, as well as with a special role in the world. The aspects that contributed to shaping the main characteristics of the Russian identity emphasises the importance of the Russian Idea as the central constituent of the Russian national identity, containing the same role as in the case of the American Dream, it is known as the Russian

Dream, but of course with a few differences. Understanding the Russian Idea is the same with understanding the cultural, philosophical, religious and mental heritage of a nation that defines itself as being opposed to Europe, to West and especially to their main enemy USA. It seems that not only the geographical factor contributed to this defining process through opposition to the others, as the entire Russian national character seems to be built on contradictions, oppositions and various tensions that seems to characterize Russia, Russians and their history, as well as their various political choices. What the Russian Idea represents is first of all this need to achieve supremacy on the international stage, and secondly the fulfilment of the mission of the holy trinity (as many nationalists said): Saviour, Liberator and Leader of the World. The national roots of the February Revolution was extremely ideologized and was interpreted as an exclusively Russian phenomenon.

Theorizing the concept of Russian Idea

When we discuss about the concept of Russian Idea, we need to have in mind few aspects that is at the heart of this rather abstract concept. To better understand the identity and conscience of a people, the analysis of the idea of a people is important to understand the meaning of a historical event. The national idea is closely related to the identity, conscience, dignity, and national unity of a people. This national idea dominates the consciousness of a people is what determines the specific actions, behaviors, and goals in times of war, in this case the February Revolution.

It is belief of historians and scholars that the idea of a nation is the basis of its identity. The idea exists only within the nation, the nation can control this idea to go through or choose a historical route. This concept dominates the entire nation. The term that I have chosen, namely the Russian Idea (Русская Идея) historically refers to a considerable number of texts that discuss the substance of Russia's national identity. The term took shape in the 19th century, but this concept is currently being used to encapsulate nearly two centuries of controversy whose background is

shape around two main questions: Whether Russia is part of Europe, part of Asia, straddles both worlds is separate from both? And the second question: Whether Russia is a nation-state, an empire, or a multinational federation, with a political nature that is autocratic, democratic, or ideocratic?

The multitude of texts build up an atemporal traits of the nation's substance, combining in various ways:

a) Messianism, including the myth of Moscow as the Third Rome. At present, this messianism reveals that the Russians are not the aggressors, but only those who defend their ancestral land. Fyodor Dostoevsky believed that Russian people were called to save the world because they were the Jesus Christ, the nation of freedom and of social justice: "We Russian have two homelands: Russia and Europe even in cases when we call ourselves (...) the greatest of all the great mission that the Russians realize lies ahead of them is the common human's mission." The author Geoffrey Hosking stated the fact that Russian messianism, the concept of the Russian people as the Chosen People, as the force reconciling the intelligentsia with the Revolution: the God-seeking nature of Russian people would be concentrated in the intelligentsia.

b) *Sobornost*, (literally, spiritual community). A Russian term that has been used frequently in the 19th century by Slavophil Russian writers Ivan Kireyevski and Aleksey Khomyakov and refers to the need for cooperation and spiritual harmony between people based on freedom and unity.

c) The belief in a central role for the state and the autocrat in guiding people.

d) The idea that Russia and its imperial margins constitute a separate world and unique civilization that West do not understand and do not respect.

The Russian Idea was shaped in the form of a purpose, over time, it has a powerful engine and is source of cultural, economic, and especially political demonstrations. As I mentioned at the beginning, this idea represents the identity, conscience, dignity that form the basis of a nation's identity. In

this case, all these elements form the basis of the identity of the Russian people. The Russian Idea has two meanings:

1. The Universal Mission of Supremacy – Russian nationalists believe that they have a special mission, the mission to save, lead and unite humanity under their rule.

2. Identifying the Russian people, culture, and civilization through opposition to the Other/ the Enemy (the Enemy translated as the Western current). For example, the dissociation of the Russian space from the West, an image of evil (Russia and the enemy, the United States).

What Russian Idea represents is first the need to achieve supremacy on the international stage, and secondly the fulfilment of the mission of Saviour, Liberator, and Leader of the world.

Throughout the existence of the forms of political leadership/ organizations: the Duchy, the Empire, and the Republic under which the Russian people lived the Russian Idea had the following performances: first is the myth of the besieged fortress by the Other, this myth arose with the idea of leading the world, but the leaders of the state were unable to carry out this project, to hide their lack of understanding, the best solution was to fabricate enemy and the second performance is the faith in the capacity of the Russian people as the only world actor able to sacrifice himself in the benefit of all humanity. For example: it is believed that it was Russia that saved the Europe and the entire world from the Nazi disease.

As we can see, there is no exact definition of the term Russian idea. It is an abstract term that over time has been attributed several meanings, each Russian philosopher has given this term several meanings. This is what I want to mention in the theoretical part of this term, namely the two dimensions of Russian Idea:

1. The geopolitical dimension: the Russian Idea was the engine of the expansion of the Russian people and the one that brought together at the level of collective consciousness, the goal of winning the world supremacy of the Russian state.

2. The ideological dimension: in this sense, the Russian people are regarded as the chosen one of God and the only state capable of leading humanity on the single path of faith, in the spiritual and/or religious sense; Russia is therefore the tool of Divinity, the only bearer of absolute truth, the orthodoxy. Following the Revolution of 1917, Soviet Marxist-Leninism alone can offer its sacrifice for the salvation of the world.

The February Revolution

The February Revolution (Февральская революция) known as February Bourgeois Democratic Revolution, or the March Revolution (8-16 March 1917) was interpreted as an original Russian phenomenon.

Historian Richard Pipes described the uprising in Petrograd in the following ways: "The air was thick with that peculiar Russian air of generalized, unfocused violence, the urge to beat and destroy for which the Russian language has coined the words pogrom and разгром (the defeat). It was not really a military mutiny of the kind that broke out during the war in other armies, including the French and German, but a typical Russian bunt, with powerful anarchist overtones." It is unclear exactly how the mass disorders that accompanied political revolutions in other countries are different from the truly Russian pogroms.

On the other hand, the foreign nature and enmity of revolution to the Russian political tradition was and often is emphasized. People of various ideological orientations supported and continue to support describing February as a foreign and non-Russian conspiracy against Russia. A typical example taken from a publicist writing during the Civil War: "Now, however, it is clear to everyone that our entire Revolution is not of Russian origin, that is was both begun and continued by those in Russia who possessed neither Church nor Fatherland, those who from childhood were taught to spurn everything native, to treat everything that carries the stamp of Russian originality with contempt."

The Russian philosopher Nikolai Berdyaev expressed his own views on the roots of the Russian Revolution in 1918: "The Russian Revolution was anti-national in character; it transformed Russia into a lifeless corpse.

Nevertheless, the national peculiarities of the Russian people are reflected in its anti-national character and the style of our unhappy and destructive Revolution is the Russian style." More often, however, the February Revolution which overthrew the autocracy and repudiated the ruling ideology, is interpreted simply as an unsuccessful attempt at modernizing the political and social system of the country along the lines of Westernization (a democratic, bourgeois-democratic revolution) that radically departed from the political tradition of pre-revolutionary society. Alexander Ivanov suggested that the Russian Idea "suffered a defeating defeat in 1917" (he defined Russian Idea simply as theoretical core of the new Russian right). At times the disparity between the February Revolution's ideology and the Russian Idea is thought to be the main reason for its lack of success.

The complex phenomenon of the 1917 Revolution arose from the interaction of several revolutionary trends that at first reinforced and then stifled one another. The February Revolution was without doubt in certain respects both democratic and bourgeois. At the same time, it was also anti-imperial, anti-war, and, to a certain degree, anti-militarist. The ideas inspired by the "state based on a law" inspiring the agents of the Provisional Government, then anti-Western, anti-modernist attitudes were an integral part of the peasant revolution. The various components of the Russian Idea it seems more inherent in several important revolutionary trends.

The Russian Orthodox Church and Religious Revolution

The February Revolution was interpreted not only as a political revolution, but as a total moral revolution as well "the political victory may be understood by many as just a political victory, but it was a general victory for the Russian spirit over passivity and morbidity, which prevents one from living, breathing, and creating." The fall of the autocracy was explained by its sinfulness: "The Russian people forgot the very reason

why it is necessary to live in a union and not alone. And the Russian people forgot this truth for a simple reason, they were divided into rich and poor, into the aristocratic and those without rights. All the tsar's power rested upon this terrible sin." Many contemporaries sincerely thought that after the Revolution lying and stealing, foul language and games of chance, jails and fences would disappear. They happily fixated on both actual and merely wished for changes. "People became more attentive and courteous to one another, an acute, almost intoxicating feeling of general national solidarity awoke among the people." The Russian synthesis of moral-political expectations, however, had its own peculiarities. The Russian Orthodox Church and the autocracy were connected both institutionally and ideologically. Many believers were accustomed to treating the state religiously; the tsar was not only the head of state: an official cult of the monarchy was interwoven with a religious cult. Some religiously oriented contemporaries believed that this was the most important reason for the Revolution. The Russian philosopher Evgenii Trubetskoy wrote: "Why was the tsarist autocracy in Russia destroyed? Because the autocracy became an idol for the Russian autocrat. He placed his authority above the Church, and in this there was both self-adulation and a grave offense to sacred objects...damage to the origin of spiritual life this was the fundamental reason for the autocracy's downfall."

Many believers saw the various religious experiments by a portion of the political elite, including even some representatives of the tsar's family as blasphemy. Just as the social crisis on the eve of the Revolution in the religious sphere as well. A contemporary and member of the Irkutsk Public Committee remembered the March days of the Revolution in the following ways: "Together with serious affairs we wasted a lot of time on trifles...along came a synodic archpriest with the question of whom to proclaim at the end of the church service. It was suggested to the Right Reverend Bishop that the clergy conclude their proclamation: for Russian power and the piety of her rulers...so let it be proclaimed."

What this quote demonstrates is just how quickly priests turned to the new power; only Soviet power could find a way out of this situation, could both treat this quote as trivial and at the same time find a quick solution to the problem.

Both, the supporters, and opponents of the Revolution often interpreted his grandiose upheaval not only as a political, but also as a religious experience. From the very beginning, however, the Revolution was also directed against the participation of the Church in political life; the February Revolution was also an anti-clerical revolution. Several contemporaries embraced this current of the Revolution in an extremely way. "Some sincerely think that they overthrew the tsar' means they overthrew the Church, the institution is abolished. They are used to joining them together utterly and inseparably. And logically...amongst the more illiterate this was even clearer: I have seen it written: down with the monarchy. Meaning beat up all the monks."

The fact that the victims of the February Revolution were interred without priests and without services had special significance. Burying them without a burial service aroused indignation from some believers.

The Cossacks from the Petrograd Garrison refused to participate in the ceremony for this reason. Several socio-political experiments were also directed against the Church: for example, already on 25 March the Nicholskii Union of Anarchist Communists decided to send delegates to the Shmakovskii Men's Monastery with the suggestion that they join the union, change their monastic regime, and that those not wishing to live the life of Soviet communism move away to a more remote location.

Rural assemblies often adopted decisions on removing priests from their parishes: further, many such resolutions contained a demand that church valuables be removed to repay emancipation redemption loans.

Many of those who held anti-clerical outlooks, however, continued to remain under the influence of a deep religious tradition, even though they often did not know it. This tradition exerted influence on the politicization of society: the mass consciousness, which in form was

political, was organized as a religious consciousness. Contemporaries compared the Revolution to a revival, a rebirth, a resurrection of Russia and its people:

“Regards to you and greetings, miracle Russia, the steppes,
Greetings to you my wintery, native land!
Everything, everything is before you, Slavic Power, Russia,
Eternal God, has indeed risen!”

The poems of amateur poets are a highly specific kind of historical source. Nevertheless, both in many resolutions and in personal correspondence one can highlight the same motif: faith in the rebirth/resurrection of suffering Russia and its people. As one soldier wrote home: “I wish you happiness on this great holiday, The Resurrection of the Great People of Russia.” The theme of resurrection and rebirth, the rebirth of a nation and of man is present, no doubt, in the self-consciousness of any revolution. In the Russian revolution of 1917, however, one can see a special connection between this theme and religious consciousness. The Revolution led to the mass politicization of society, and this process was both harmful and self-contradictory. In compensating for their lack of corresponding political knowledge and experience, contemporaries sometimes used consciously or unconsciously, customary, and familiar ethical and religious concepts to evaluate events. And such a grandiose revolution as this was compared to an Easter holiday. The rituals of Easter were often used by contemporaries to express their attitudes toward what was happening. Both conscious and unconscious orientations toward the Easter holiday were manifest in people unfamiliar with each other kissing on the streets.

The religious tradition also exerted an influence on the symbology of the Revolution: many flags copied the form of ecclesiastical banners.

In 1917, however, the process of mass politicization merged for a time with both the anti-clerical movement and with religious revolution; political problems were interwoven with religious ones. The mass consciousness was

political only in form, in its essence politics became an ideological surrogate for religion. This process of "sanctification" politics was described at that time by Nikolai Berdyaev: "A new kind of idolatry has begun; many new idols and earthly gods have appeared: revolution, socialism, democracy, internationalism, proletariat." The cult of revolution went on to influence the formation of Bolshevik political culture during the Soviet period.

The "Russian" Revolution

The February Revolution provided an impetus for movements in non-Russians regions of the Empire, movements for reform in those areas, for autonomy, and in several cases even for leaving Russian Empire. At the same time, several contemporaries saw the February Revolution as a revolution for Russian liberation:

"We soldier, fearless and brave.
Against the tsarist lackeys went!
For the great Russian cause!
For a land's great joy!"

The Revolution was sometimes interpreted as a particularly Russian phenomenon without analogue in world history, as proof of Russia's special mission. S.L. Frank believed that the Revolution manifested an "instinct for national self-preservation." Many contemporaries tenderly saw in the Revolution a confirmation of the special unique character of Russians.

In his article "The Russian People's Revolution" E.N. Trubetsky wrote "this revolution in the only one or almost the only one of its kind. There have been bourgeois revolutions and proletarian revolutions. But up to now there have been no national revolution in the broad sense of the word like the Russian revolution."

Many people believed that the greatest accomplishment of the Revolution was the creation of a truly national government. The future ideologue of the smenovekhovstvo N.V. Ustrialov wrote: "from now on in

Russia there will be no border between power and country. From now on the Russian government and the Russian people are one, and this unity is the Russian nation." The Revolution was seen as a signal to fulfil the historic mission of Russia, M. Fenomenov, who described himself as a socialist, declared: "our Russian patriotism is very different than crude German chauvinism...the liberation of people is the historic task of the great Russian people."

That anti-Germanic sentiments that is emerging from this Revolution permeated an important part of post-revolutionary attitudes cannot be disputed: the Revolution was sometimes interpreted as a patriotic anti-German revolution, and pre-revolutionary anti-monarchist agitation was marked by features of Germanophobia and rumours about a charge of religion. Anti-German sentiments were also manifest during the February Revolution: appeals were made against the Empress-German, and many officers, bureaucrats, and simple civilians who had German surnames were arrested and even killed. The newspapers wrote about this anti-German sentiment: "a strong anti-German mood predominates in the population." Foreign newspapers (English and German) reported on the persecution of people with German surnames.

An anti-German sentiment predominated among the supporters of renewing the Church "the regime of the German police state established in Russia during the so-called imperial period of its history could not help but exert its deadening chilling influence on ecclesiastical life."

The question of presence of xenophobia in the ideology of the Russian Revolution is one that needs special attention. In 1917, such attitudes had an even more immediate source: chauvinistic and militaristic agitation during the World War I influenced many interpretations of February. In the patriotic literature of the war period victory over the external German. The logical construction "Germans are our enemies; our enemies are German" influenced the political struggle after the February Revolution. The political leaders were accused of Germanophilism. Before February Revolution many authorities pointed out that unrestrained anti-German propaganda represented

a danger for security. After the revolution anti-Germany propaganda was supported in all kinds of ways by the army command. A Letter to the Motherland, printed and distributed by a sailor said: "Germans living in Russia and the old government committed a great treason...but one should not forget that even now in our country there is a German for whom Russian freedom is nauseating." It should be pointed out that Russian soldiers and in a number of cases Russian workers, were sometimes the initiators and conduits of the radicalization of revolutionary movements in the non-Russian outlying areas at the same time that local social activists were assuming more moderate positions. That would be an impression on perceptions of the Revolution as a Russian revolution.

Anti-bourgeois Revolution

Neither the religious revolution nor the patriotic revolution was a fundamental current of the Revolution. Socialist parties of various persuasions played a most active role in this process, the Russians were the ones who exerted the greatest influence on the formation of the language of the Revolution and on the origin of its symbols. In this view, the bourgeois February Revolution was from the beginning also an anti-bourgeois revolution. The internationalist ideology of socialists would oppose the Russian Idea. The red flag became the state flag, and even the liberal press viewed attempts to demonstrate under the national banner as monarchist demonstrations. Nikolai Berdyaev wrote about the socialists and their lack of patriotism: "International social democracy is completely German in spirit. It is, in fact, one of the German influences that is preventing the Russian people from comprehending that there is a great world-wide historic struggle taking place between the Slavic and the Germanic peoples, between two hostile forces of history, that the Slavic race will repel the pretensions of Germanism and fulfil its mission in history, or it will be degraded and pushed aside."

One of the features of the Russian idea, the messianism was manifested in the creation of symbols for the new Russia, on many of the

banners and emblems of that time one encounters representations of the earth, where the planet was sometimes decorated with the figure of a Russian worker carrying a red flag. Representations of the globe also appeared in the drafts of a new state coat of arms for Russia. This also had an influence on the formation of coats of arms during the Soviet period. In characterizing these kinds of attitudes many publicists began to speak of Slavophilism “when you see how the ignorant proletariat up to 80% of whose members are illiterate and whose remaining part is just barely able to read and write Russian being under the hypnosis of revolutionary phraseology, seriously begins to think that he is indeed the vanguard, the most enlightened and best detachment of the International when you see all this, it involuntarily reminds one of the Slavophiles and Dostoevsky’s Russian schoolboy.”

Both xenophobic ideas and extreme forms of anti-bourgeois ideology shaped a similar mentality at the center of which one finds the idea of a powerful conspiracy of the so-called dark forces, in one case a conspiracy of the internal enemy, in the other, a conspiracy of the bourgeoisie. P.B. Struve wrote about this phenomenon: “the essence both white and Black Hundredism consists of an educated minority of people being contrasted to the people as an evil force, a force that was, is and should be culturally alien to it. Just as Marxism is the study of the class struggle in societies, Black Hundredism of both colours is its own kind of study of cultural struggle.”

Conclusion

The paper focuses on the term Russian Idea in accordance with the February Revolution. Here appears several elements of the Russian Idea that I presented in the second chapter. The concept of Russian Idea encompasses a set of concepts which expresses historical uniqueness the special mission and status of the Russian people on the global stage.

Throughout history, the Russian idea has sounded like a call to the rebirth of the Russian people who, as I said, are the one chosen by the divinity. What lies within the concept of the Russian Idea is this special purpose considered as the career of the Russian people sent by the divinity.

Over the years, it has been considered that behind the Russian idea are strong ambitions to conquer as many territories as possible. This idea being correlated with chauvinism and imperialism.

These elements were presented in both program and propaganda and of course in the mass consciousness. Few elements were used frequently by officials' Soviet ideology at various stages of its development. Anti-bourgeois attitudes were shaped not only by class conflicts, but also by socio-cultural aspects: some Russians with anti-Western attitude used the term bourgeois for any opponent. Anti-bourgeois and anti-imperialist agitation were directed against the French, British who oppressed the Russian people (Anglophobia and Francophobia). One of the causes of the outbreak of the February Revolution was the defeats suffered by Russia in World War I. Russia's economy has been isolated in the European market. It was a troubled time for the Russian people during and after the February Revolution. Both economic problems and the abdication of the tsar were a combination of factors that contributed to the growth of xenophobia and chauvinism.

The Russians considered themselves deprived of national identity and the fact that they are viewed from below by other states. Also, in Viktor Pelevin's novel, the importance of the Russian idea in the development of the Russian people is accentuated, the fact that the Russians are considered poorly developed, and nobody compared to the West, and it is recommended to propose a clear idea. What I want to point out here is the fact that Russians accuse other nations of each failure of their own.

An unjustified fear of foreigners (of other nations) is induced. Given that it has not been possible over time to bring a clear definition of this concept of Russian idea. Each philosopher came up with his own explanations to bring an understanding of this abstract concept. Overall,

I concluded that the Russian idea plays a decisive role in this special mission of the Russian people on the global stage. This crisis of Russian identity can be explained by the simple fact that even after 200 years Russia does not know its mission and blames other nations for its own failure.

And the fall of the Soviet empire put an end to the Russian idea.

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