

Russia today is the result of 4 centuries of Imperial dictatorship followed by 70 years of Communist dictatorship, yet is supposed to have discovered democracy 25 years ago! France has been a democracy since its revolution 225 years and it is still far from being perfect. The UK's democracy has been evolving since 1215, but it still has an hereditary head of state and legislators. Democracy is more than elections, such as those that put Putin back into the Russian Presidency.

Russia is not yet ready for a European-style democratic political model. I am sure that Putin is, for Russia, a normal/inevitable step toward an inescapable democratisation of the country, writes Alexis Beresnikoff. We should stop trying to give instructions to countries which do not have neither the same culture, the same history, the same level of progress, nor the same mentality. Just give the country some time!

Russians were knocked back when the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact disintegrated. They considered, which is of course the reality, that USA were the main "person responsible" but that it was a very good thing. Nevertheless, the acronym NATO was wrongly preserved instead of changing or disappearing as it should have, given that the original objective had disappeared. For Russia, NATO is a now "red flag" being shaken aggressively in front of them. Of course, Putin wants his country to recover and to be again considered as a big nation and a Great Power, but I do not see that as a matter of condemnation.

We should understand Russian anxiety seeing NATO progressing all around its border in spite of the promise given in 1991 during the German reunification. NATO is for the Russian people the symbol of their collapse and of the following dangerous drift of moral standards in their country as a result of economic forces unleashed (explosion of prostitution, mafia, etc) As I have already said, Russia wants to be again considered as a great nation and I think they have all the necessary assets. But they also want to maintain a safe and stable environment, not only from an economic point of view but also on an influence point of view, especially in its region of the world. Is that not the case for all great nations, beginning with the USA and its Monroe Doctrine? Remember the Cuban crisis in April 1961 and the American reaction

It is also well known that the American Government played, in the name of democracy, an important role after the Soviet Union collapsed to help nationalisms' political parties burst out in the different areas of Russia or its legacy Empire: the Baltic states, Georgia, Ukraine (all of which had had in the past some brief periods of independence) but also Belorussia which had never been independent before. The United States, under NATO cover, has tried to install missile launch platforms in countries bordering or within range of Russia, and Russia is afraid of that.

HISTORY LESSONS

Having been invaded by European nations four times in the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries, they fear encirclement and all their strategy, now and during the Soviet period, relies on trying to keep a "friendly" belt around them ♦ they refer to it as their "near abroad". Georgia and Ukraine are well known as two American objectives (cf "Strategic Vision" of Zbigniew Brzezinski) and a NATO military base in Sebastopol would have probably appeared if Russia had not intervened. And of course, European nations which have joined the NATO organisation, considered as the US military leg of which they are the majority funder, appear as docile American vassals.

A few historical facts can help to explain the Russian attitude to Crimea and Ukraine, and maybe the reaction of some Ukrainians:

♦ Kiev is the historical birthplace of Russia. There is an emotional attachment of the Russian population with the "Russian land" which is, with the Orthodox Church, the foundations of Russian culture, of Russian spirit (cf "rodina"). Ukraine, in their mind, is part of that "Russian land". All the most ancient Russian families (the "Rurik" families) who built Russia came from Kiev Principality which was named "Rous" (the origin of the name Russia) and none of them say to-day that they

are Ukrainians.

◆ Ukraine was linked to Russia before Brittany was to France. Before becoming Russian, Ukraine was Tatar, Polish, etc and before 1990 had not independent for more than 60 years in all her history. Ukraine is a country but not yet a Nation. The argument is presented, quite correctly, that Russian wants to keep Ukraine in its sphere of influence. Unlike other East European countries, Ukraine has not yet been admitted to the EU or NATO, which is also taken as a signal.

◆ Crimea is, of course, a very touchy point but anybody can understand, after the Maan revolution, the Russian concern of a possible Ukrainian Parliament/Rada decision (which had just eliminated Russian as the second language in the country) to reassess the agreements which had been signed on Sebastopol Naval Base. This fear was not at all absurd and they decided to preempt that possible decision based on their strategic interest of access to the Mediterranean Sea ◆ an objective since Peter the Great - but also knowing that the population was mainly, without contest, pro-Russian.

◆ Going back in history, Crimea was ceded by the Ottoman Empire to Russia by a Treaty of 1783, and became autonomous within the USSR in 1922. It had been transferred in 1954, without the population's agreement, to the Socialist Soviet Republic of Ukraine. At that time, this "Oblast", as a few others, were no more than a Russian province which could be compared to a "State" in the United States or a "Land" in Germany. Furthermore, Crimea kept a special status in Ukraine.

◆ Ukraine, consciously or not, is in some way looking for an identity. This can be easily understood if you look at its geographical situation and at its population inherited by history:

◆ Many different ethnic groups (Tatars, Polish, Russians etc) and a virtual partition between the East part of the country with mainly a Russian origin and speaking population which is pro-Russian, and the West part with a mainly Ukrainian speaking population, more looking westwards and seeing themselves as separate

◆ A border with Europe across which flow ideas including "European democracy"

◆ Different religions: even so the majority are Orthodox, the Polish domination explains the presence of an important and very active Catholic community ("Uniates").

◆ It is obvious that the main and comprehensible motivation of all the Ukrainian population was to throw out a corrupt regime, and they were ready for that to gain, if necessary, international support by trying to join the European Union, thereby increasing prosperity and security. Unfortunately for them, the European Union had no intention to integrate them nor to meet their whole financial deficit. On one side, the European countries were ready to give \$600mn to help Ukraine, while on the other side, Russia proposed to cancel its \$13bn debt: Ianoukovitch made a choice and ended the "honeymoon" with Europe.

◆ Of course, Ukraine has every right to be independent but surely it is preferable to be a link, and not a wall between Europe and Russia, which I am sure Putin would be ready to accept. If good relations are maintained between all three (Europe, Ukraine, Russia), by osmosis, the democratic rules in Europe will infect the Russian Government.

◆ In addition:

◆ Putin has too many examples in the recent past of infringement of international laws to answer attacks on his policy: it is obvious that United States has violated such laws itself e.g. Cuba, Panama, Kosovo, Iraq, Syria !

◆ Putin has no intention to invade neither Ukraine, nor any Baltic Republics, nor, of course, Poland. If so, he would have already tried it earlier when no effective resistance could have been mobilized in time.

◆ Disinformation (on all sides : Russian, European and American) is hard at work and my recent discussion with a former head of an Intelligence Service told me that all "services" were asked to obtain credible pictures of Russian activity in Ukraine ... but they have nothing! For instance, information on 32 Russian tanks entering Ukraine (with even a picture in a French newspaper) is completely false.

◆ I think that Putin, realizing the

possible option of a Ukraine "suicide attack" to force the EU/US hands on economic and military assistance, put important military forces at the border and deployed some on the ground to support ethnic rebels in order to dissuade and contain the Ukrainian Government, military forces that "disinformators" presented as an imminent attack by the Russians. (Beyond this sort of expeditionary action, it can be argued that Russia does not have any significant offensive forces ♦ see footnote)

CONCLUSIONS

I believe that the United States Foreign Policy relies on three principles:
o their economic interests (for a long time it has been oil before the US became self sufficient),
o industrial military lobbies (it became difficult to sustain or increase the military budget after the collapse of the Warsaw Pact)
o keeping Russia isolated (avoiding, among others, any possible agreement with
European Union ♦ this entity would be able to compete with their hegemony).

But the United States has every reason to remain a friend of the European Union. It may happen that friends do not have the same point a view on some issues but they remain friends nevertheless especially when bound together by mutual interests.

On the issue of the relations with Russia, Europe does not the same interest as the United States (pre Trump presidency): Russia has the same Christianity-derived values (which is not the case, for instance, with Turkey) and it is a great potential economic market: the Germans and the Italians did not take long to realise that.

2. It is in their mutual interest that Russia and Ukraine reconsider their relations: Ukraine must certainly "put a bit of water in its wine" because most of its economy is inter-dependent with Russia. Russia will accept the Donbass area staying Ukrainian with a special status (as Crimea had before) because they also have economic interests in that area which are important for them.

3. Strategist Sun Tzu (the subject of my NWC thesis) says give one's adversary an honorable way out (build a golden bridge across which they can retreat) The EU and the USA can start by engaging with Russia in areas where they have established a strong claim to be treated as equals ♦ such as the Arctic and Syria. Better links between all three could probably also be a deterrent posture against a possible future aggressive strategy of China.

FOOTNOTE : Russia's forces

Naval forces: Offensives forces are aircraft carriers linked with amphibious ships able to launch and land men, tanks, artillery. Russia has one old aircraft carrier (the US 10 nuclear Fleet carriers and 9 conventional LHDs) currently off Syria with its aircraft reported deployed ashore because it is incapable of sustaining sorties from the sea. In early December 2016 its arrestor gear failed and a Su-35 crashed. Its two new French-built amphibious LHDs, initially impounded in St Nazaire, were sold to Egypt in 2015 instead of being delivered. (If these two amphibious ships were strategic for the Russian Naval Forces, they would never have been built outside Russia. I think that placing the order abroad was a diplomatic gesture by Putin toward Europe.)
They still have a submarine fleet of about 60, which is mainly defensive in nature - the 4th largest fleet of the 40 nations who own around 540 submarines altogether.

Ground and air forces: They are very numerous but not so well equipped except the air forces (see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_active_Russian_military_aircraft) but with no reliable logistic forces seem unable to support a long campaign away from their internal supply lines. Others have argued that their expeditionary capability scarcely exceeds a division, out of 1 million plus 2 million reservists. The European armed forces number around 2 million.

Nuclear forces are of course an evident defensive/deterrent weapon (partly carried by Russia's 13 SSBNs)