Mongol Foundations of the Russian State:
Space, Life Security, Sovereignty and War
from the Golden Horde to the Civil War

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I. Introduction

State formation consists of two processes—achieving sovereignty and increasing security. Sovereignty is an organizational quality, indicating unity and integrity of a government, and its effective jurisdiction over an identifiable territory and population. Security is the measure of protection possessed by and provided to individuals. A sovereign State is constructed and maintained to enhance the security of its Subjects, but is not the sole source. Men in the state of nature or tribal society developed multiple weapons, tools and institutions to increase security before advent of the State. Security has a fundamental meaning—prolonging life, postponing death (PLPD) of the human unit, and will be called “life security.” This definition opens a realm of investigation into how the State induces security, and what other instruments humans have devised or inherited to postpone death. Historically there has been a contradiction between sovereignty and life security. In the case of the Russian State, sovereignty came at the price of negating life security for large numbers of people. I will illustrate this unequal security outcome by examining three event clusters in Russian history—the Mongol conquest, Ivan IV’s expansion into the Volga basin, and the civil war between Reds and
Whites after the October revolution. Each hinging event set tightened government control over population and territory, reducing and excluding external interventions and monopolizing material and human resources for the State.

The Eurasianist school of thought in Russia emphasises the Asian character of Russian development which began in the wake of the Mongol conquest. However, the Bolshevik revolution, hardened in the fires of the civil war, marked a historical departure from whatever Asian roots had survived, and created a new type of sovereignty – a process of fashioning a nation-State by negating the life security of millions of its own Subjects. It was the combination of Bolshevik revolution and war communism which inspired the template of state formation for Maoist China, Kim Il Song’s North Korea, Ho Chi Minh’s Vietnam, and Pol Pot’s Cambodia. The essence of that template was to maximize State sovereignty at the expense of Subject life security. It had a rough resemblance to Mongol State-building – Subjects were divided into three categories – loyalists, useful neutrals, and resisters. This last class lost significant claim to life security because of actual or potential resistance and were treated as internal enemies. They might be tolerated if useful, but had no permanent right to this indulgence. Genghis Khan, Lenin and Mao Zedong subscribed equally to this method of building sovereignty.

II. The Eurasianist debate

The Eurasianist persuasion attempts to explain characteristics of the Russian State occupying a middle position between Western Europe and Asia. The perspective proposes that “that their specific
traits have to do with their culture being a ‘mix’ born of the fusion of Slavic and TurkoMuslim peoples, and that Russia should specifically highlight its Asian features.”¹ A variation of this perspective, Neo-Eurasianism, “maintains that Europe is not in an advanced state of development but represents a specific mode of development that cannot be reproduced: Russia must ‘unlearn the West’ and reject the imperialism of European identity.” The paradigm begins with the Mongol conquest of Russia in the thirteenth century, and its effect on State and society development. Mainstream historians like Riasanovsky considered Mongol impact mostly destructive, while Vernadsky and others find some positive features of the Mongol era which formed the Russian character. Weatherford’s book on Genghis Khan² stressed positive features of the Mongol empire in a way which reinforces the Eurasianist brief. The debate is academic for historians, but can have policy implications insofar as Russian relations with the West are concerned. If Russian leaders pride themselves on a unique civilization, unanchored from Western civilization, they are more likely to have attitudinal shift towards more confrontational engagement with Western Europe and the US, and greater cooperation and involvement with China, Japan, India and smaller powers. Such an attitude would play a part in how Moscow’s leadership views the world.

The present paper seeks to understand Russian State formation from the time of the Mongol conquest to the Bolshevik victory in the civil war. By postulating the essence of any State as security and sovereignty, and examining three event sets, a better picture of State evolution may emerge – a picture not burdened by the Eurasianist
debate, but cognizant of its premises. These three event sets, as turning points in Russian State formation, can be considered as data points suggesting a rudimentary trajectory of historical development. Today, with Russia at another turning point since demise of the Soviet Union, an approach focusing on State security and sovereignty may yield a preliminary understanding of contemporary trends and goals.

III. An ontology of war

"States wage wars; armies clash in battles; soldiers fight and die." This statement seems self-evident, but suggests an existential hypothesis. The first four nouns, States, wars, armies, and battles, are collective representations of events, while a soldier is always a real, living being, often dying in service of his State as demanded by duty and honor. The four collective nouns are ideas that summarize multiple actions, while a soldier, a real and tangible human entity, is a measurable statistical unit. For example,

Byzantine sources indicate that Sviatoslav fought at the head of 60,000 troops of whom 22,000 remained when peace was concluded.³

As Stalin allegedly remarked, "A single death is a tragedy; a million deaths is a statistic." He could have been referring to the Russian civil war dead of seven million⁴ or the tens of millions who died unnatural deaths during his regime. The States ruled by Hitler, Stalin, Mao Zedong and other dictators stand as monuments to mass slaughter of Subjects by their own governments. Yet we think that the purpose of the State is to provide protection for a population which occupies its demarcated territory. In a well-ordered and rational world, the State should be humanity’s friend, but the
opposite has frequently been the case. The State should equitably reinforce the life security (PLPD) of humans, a species having a long history of survival before invention of States. British philosopher Thomas Hobbes wrote a treatise on how men in the state of nature came together and created a sovereign entity to rule and enforce the social contract. He would protect them, but they would have to give up some of their right of self-defense. In practice it captured the essence of the State – a cooperative construction for the security of life and property of Subjects at the expense of human freedom. Moreover, the Leviathan stands as the metaphor distinguishing men from animals – we can consciously modify our behavior and create institutions as positive protections for life. We can diminish our natural incompleteness through reasoned and self-interested actions.

In politics, the State has logical priority, society secondary, and individual only a third place. A more scientific approach to politics requires starting from the real, then considering that which is constructed or imagined – an inversion of the political stipulation. The individual is real as provably existent in tangibility characteristics. As Margaret Thatcher famously remarked, there is no such thing as “society.” Nor is the State a “thing” – it is a symbolic aggregation of commands, laws, territory, and identifiable individuals. Therefore the political sequence (State, society, individual) is reversed if we rank these three items in order of physical and mental accessibility. Every living individual is acutely conscious of his own existence. From a living person’s perspective, society consists of other persons with whom he has acquaintance – he sees, hears and can touch them, and assumes they are aware of their existence to the same extent he is of his own. The political
Subject only knows the State through symbols and awareness that laws may be enforced, but it has no empirical presence.

Nevertheless we do not dismiss the State simply because of intangibility. As an enforced idea it has played a crucial part in constructing civil society and civilization. Aware of the concept’s limitations, it remains convenient to speak of the State as a “thing” having actionable qualities – sovereignty and security. Other characteristics include borders, government, subordinate society, organized force, etc. The State consists of individuals who are affiliated within a society which provides the foundation of State construction. The essential characteristic of an individual is mortality, and we can presume that society and State are constructed and maintained for the primary purpose of prolonging the lives of member individuals. We can define “security” as the prolonging of life through protective measures and actions. Life security begins with the individual, is reinforced by kin and tribe, or “life-community,” and is refined by the State. When the State idea has been assimilated into the symbolic and actual behavior of its Subjects, it can provide the foundation for civil society, and individual members can become citizens, with power to guide and modify the State.

Similar to mortal humans, States have beginnings and ends, and undergo transformations and adaptations analogous to species’ evolution to meet survival challenges. For much of the recorded human era, a strong State has been the goal of political action, especially in regions of multiple States where weakness invites predation. State failure is when it collapses or is absorbed by
another State, when sovereignty evaporates, and is always
accompanied by massive loss of security for Subjects and citizens.
State formation and adaptation in Russia illustrate this phenomenon.
In each case there were winners and losers, with the latter paying
the price of defeat in lives, liberty and property. However heavy the
devastation, and replacement of one State by another, defeat did not
necessarily obliterate the idea of a particular historical State. A
Russian State, centered in Muscovy, emerged out of the remnants of
Kievan Russia. The short-lived republic established just before the
1917 revolution may be resurfacing today under a Party-Church-
Army alliance.

As multiple States and empires emerged in ancient and
medieval Eurasia, populations increased and hungered for more
living space. Inter-State conflicts became more intense and the resort
to force of arms settled disputes. Often one of the disputant States
would be obliterated, with its population bearing the brunt of the
calamity. The victorious State would reap the benefits, take the
property of the losers, and keep the remnant in servitude. At the end
of a successful war, the conquering State added to its wealth and
territory – often adding to its security as well. Russian colonization
of former Mongol lands accompanied Muscovy’s territorial
expansion.

The other quality of a State is sovereignty – referring to the
unity of its laws and supremacy of its ruler. States have generally
not constructed or defended sovereignty without war. Sovereignty
arrived in the Mongol State in 1206, after Genghis Khan had
defeated his rivals and concluded alliances with other tribes. As last
man standing, he became Great Khan of all the Mongols. At that point he offered the security that Mongols should not kill each other in tribal conflicts. Living on a relatively barren frontier where agriculture was not practical, his large contingent of mounted warriors could not be sustained in their impoverished condition. Relatively wealthy sedentary kingdoms occupied adjacent territories and invited either alliance or invasion. With superb leadership, martial discipline, and lightning attacks, the Mongol troops conquered China, Persia, Korea and penetrated into Eastern Europe. Enroute, they defeated the armies of Kiev. The Golden Horde established an occupation regime lasting two and a half centuries, receding after defeats by Tamerlane and Ivan IV.

The Mongol conquest and occupation of lands which became the Russian State was an Asian intrusion into a Christian State and permanently affected development of the Russian State by submission to nomadic warriors. Referring to the Eurasianist debate, the question is whether the Mongol conquest was a temporary setback or a major deflection of State progress. Every State inherits a legacy from its predecessors – whether tribe or failed State or colonizing power. The Russian trauma of defeat and occupation by the Mongol hordes was removed when Kazan and other lands to the southeast were won and incorporated into Muscovy’s realm from

* A similar question exists regarding modern Japan – whether the war was a tragic though temporary interruption to normal democratic progress, or that the American occupation was a necessary corrective to the fundamental authoritarianism of traditional Japanese society.
1552. This opened the drive to the east and eventual incorporation of Central Asia and Siberia into the Russian empire.

An emergent Russian State in the early reign of Ivan IV (1533-1584) consisted of a heartland centered around Moscow. This heartland remained the core of the Russian State to the present day but was challenged during the civil war following the Bolshevik revolution. At that time the White forces gathered strength from the periphery to attack the core held by the Reds. This heartland had united under Ivan III and Ivan IV, and has remained the geographical core of the Russian State. A major reason the Bolsheviks prevailed over the White armies was that their base contained the largest portion of population of the old empire and had most of the industry and communication/transportation network. For the Whites, capture of Moscow was their overriding goal, for it represented the soul of the nation.\(^5\)

Wars have classical zero-sum characteristics, involving risk, gain and loss. Among the gains are included the winners’ individual acquisition of goods and wealth, removal of enemies, and the charisma of victory. Losses include the losers’ needful things, their lives and their families. No war ends without some damage to winners as well. These three wars were critical in the formation of the modern Russian State and costly in human life to all sides. Slaughter and destruction accompanied the Mongol invasion. Ivan IV lost many men in attacking Kazan, though fewer than the defending Tatars. Both sides suffered in the twentieth century civil war. At a conceptual level, six States were directly involved in these life and death wars: Mongols v. Kiev, Muscovy v. Kazan Khanate,
and Reds v. Whites. These wars were decisive, dissolving the losing side, and consequent loss of security to the losing Subjects who were killed, enslaved or scattered.

IV. The Mongol conquest

A. Fall of Rus

Wars are rarely isolated events and most often the culmination of decades or centuries of institutional evolution. The Mongols had formed a powerful army-State out of warring tribes. The Kievan State emerged in the ninth century, defeated various Eastern Slav tribes, and prospered as the connection between Constantinople and the Baltic region. Prince Sviatoslav and his successors consolidated power and territory, making Byzantine Christianity the official State religion. The later Kievan State fragmented into rival appanages which failed to unite against the Mongol horde, were picked off individually and destroyed or subordinated.

Once united under the banner of Genghis Khan, the Mongol hordes were unstoppable, and the Russians were merely one more people to be destroyed or enslaved by the hundred thousand warriors of the Khan. After defeating the Moslem armies of Central Asia, the Mongols raided southern Russia through the Caucasus passes, defeating Kievan and Polovtsy forces on the Kalka River in 1223. The main thrust later was into Eastern Europe, and defeat of the Rus was undertaken in large part to secure the Mongol flank when Ögedei led his forces into Poland and Hungary. Overwhelming numbers were not the source of Mongol military success. Unit training, mobility, endurance, espionage, discipline and coordinated staffing explained victory in the face of opposing
armies which were often uncoordinated and undisciplined. In 1237 a Mongol force attacked Riazan, and destroyed it after five days of fighting. Its population was massacred, and a winter campaign destroyed Vladimir and numerous towns. Frozen rivers provided highways for the cavalry, and only the spring thaw spared Novgorod. In December 1240, the city of Kiev fell and was destroyed, with many of its inhabitants. A decisive battle was fought at Liegnitz in Silesia, defeating a combined German-Polish-Hungarian force. An advance detachment even reached the Adriatic. The death of Ögedei Khan in the spring of 1242 halted the Mongol advance into Western Europe, and General Batu withdrew his forces but kept control of Russia. He established his headquarters in Sarai on the lower Volga. The Golden Horde, part of the Mongol empire, established overlordship of Russia. Under sovereignty of the Khan, the Horde invested Russian princes and collected tribute. The Mongols also required levies of Russian troops to serve in various parts of the empire. Their aura of invincibility was damaged by defeat in the battle of Kulikova (1380) but they remained in control for another century.

The Kievan State dealt with Byzantium in peace and war, and adopted the Greek form of Christianity. Subsequent Russian concepts of kingship were strongly affected by the Golden Horde. Richard Pipes writes:

The Golden Horde was the first centralized political authority which the Russian princes met face to face. For a century and a half, the khan was the absolute master of their fate. His power and majesty all but erased from memory the image of the Byzantine basileus. The latter was a distant thing, a legend: not one appanage prince had ever set foot in Constantinople; the road to Sarai was only too familiar to them. It was at Sarai that they had an opportunity of observing at close hand the operations of absolute monarchy, of ‘authority with which one cannot enter into agreements but must unconditionally obey’. Here they learned how to
impose taxes on households and commercial transactions, how to conduct diplomatic relations, how to operate a courier service, and how to deal with insubordinate subjects.

Most importantly, perhaps, the Russians learned from the Mongols a conception of politics which limited the functions of the state to the collection of tribute (or taxes), maintenance of order, and preservation of security, but was entirely devoid of any sense of responsibility for public well-being.9

The Mongols were not merely a formidable adversary, but a forceful model for the successor State when Moscow replaced Sarai as the center of authority. Thus far the Eurasianist theory appears valid explanation.

V. Ivan IV captures Kazan

Destruction of the Kievan State delivered lands and people to the Mongols. Establishment of Pax Mongolica over Russian lands created a new sovereignty, enforced by terror, a sense of God’s punishment, and a combination of population and prosperity growth. Replacing Kievan fragmentation with unitary rule had material benefits and offered a model for political order offering a more centralized State. The pattern of divided appanages led to competition for the khan’s charter to rule – the yarluk. During Mongol occupation, Muscovy prospered and expanded at the expense of adjoining principalities, pledging alliance and submission to the Mongols as it accumulated wealth and power. Inviting the Kievan "Metropolitan of All Rus” to take residence in Moscow further added prestige to Ivan III (Kalita), and expanded by Ivan IV.10

A. Religious element

Islam became the Golden Horde’s State religion of at end of fourteenth century.11 The Ottomans had taken Constantinople in
1453, and advanced into the Balkans. Russia became protector of Orthodox Christianity by default after the demise of the Byzantine empire. When the Ottoman Turks occupied Constantinople, the “second Rome,” some claimed Moscow to be a “third Rome” and sole protector of the Orthodox faith. Ivan III usurped the right to appoint the metropolitan, as well as other former Byzantine privileges. But without greater territorial validation of this claim, it was not likely to be taken seriously by other States.

A crippling blow to the Golden Horde came from Tamerlane, who launched three campaigns and destroyed Sarai in the last (1395). Part of the final coup came in 1390 when Timur rerouted trade routes to south of Caspian, with staggering economic losses. The remainder broke into several parts - the Kazan, Astrakhan and Crimea khanates. Around 1480, Moscow stopped paying tribute to the successor khanates. By the 1540s, the Kazan Khan was already a puppet of Moscow, but refused to carry out an act contrary to his Islamic faith. Ecclesiastics were calling for annexation of Kazan to convert the resident Tatars to Christianity. New lands were anticipated for profiting the merchant sector. Not only had its former lands and peoples fallen under Islam, but the rulers of the Golden Horde also converted to the faith of the Ottomans. Moscow’s Metropolitan Makarii called upon the Russian people to defend the true faith, and would be led by the tsar. Later, Tsar Ivan the Terrible commemorated the successful victory over Kazan with construction of the Cathedral of St Basil outside the Kremlin walls, with its nine multicoloured domes.
B. The campaign

Ivan III had temporarily conquered Kazan in 1487, and made the khanate subject to his investiture. His ally and semi-client, Mehmet Emin, died in 1518, leaving no direct descendant. Vasily III placed his thirteen-year-old candidate on the throne, but he was deposed by the Crimean Khan, with support of Poland–Lithuania. The Khan of Crimea attacked and reached Moscow in 1521. Peace negotiations followed. Vasily built a fort on Kazan lands at the junction of the Volga and Sura rivers – the start of further annexations.

Ivan IV set out on his fourth campaign against Kazan on June 16, 1552. An army of Crimean Tatars attacked his flank and were defeated. Arriving with artillery against Kazan’s muskets, the army of Muscovy laid siege for seven weeks. Sappers exploded a section of the city wall and the final assault was launched. Heavy casualties mounted on both sides, and large numbers of prisoners were taken. Surviving defenders were forced to convert, impressed into the army, or executed. In 1555, a new Russian governor and archbishop were appointed, and were jointly responsible for government. Lands were distributed to service gentry. Some of the local tribes rebelled, and required the continued presence of troops. Tatars were recruited into the army, and some nobles converted to Christianity and served in the court of the tsar.

C. Motivations and results

By adding to Moscow’s domain, Ivan the Terrible accepted the titles "Tsar of Kazan" and "Tsar of Astrakhan," thus giving greater substance to his claim as protector of the church. Reasons for
Muscovy’s southeastern thrust were more than a Crusader’s holy mission. Kazan was weakened, and it represented the remnant of a power who had conquered and destroyed the Kievan State. Removal of the khanate extended Russian control over the Volga and outlets to the sea.

The end of the Byzantine empire and collapse of the Golden Horde liberated Muscovy from the two imperial powers limiting her sovereignty. As these weakened, Ivan III began calling himself tsar and his grandson, Ivan IV, formalized the practice in 1547 by making "Tsar of all Russia" the title of Russia's rulers. Nonetheless, the Russian frontier remained open and vulnerable. The Crimean khanate remained a powerful military State until 1783. Towns and villages near the borders of Crimea, Poland and Lithuania were constantly subject to incursions. Ivan IV launched a series of reforms in 1565 to unify the independent Moscow State. Resistance from the boyars was met by terror and elimination of opponents (1569-1574). In dealing with peoples of Central Asia, it was useful for the Russian monarchy to defer to the Chinggisid principle and play upon its tentative status as the Horde's successor.18

D. Security and sovereignty

The collapse of the Byzantine and Mongol empires were defining events for Russian security and sovereignty. For Muscovy, subservience to Sarai in military, diplomatic and economic affairs was no longer necessary, and the weakened and diminished khanates were unable to resist onslaughts of Ivan IV. Ivan III and his successors arrogated church appointments to Muscovy. Religious and political sovereignty were mutually complementary, and
increased during the fifteenth century, but while retaining a formal Chinggisid protocol. On security, Tamerlane’s invasion introduced a serious disruption of commercial relations between Asia and Europe. A century later, European exploration and maritime development reduced traffic on overland routes. Central Asia, once a land version of the Mediterranean Sea as both barrier and highway, was succumbing to economic decline brought about by factors beyond its control.19

VI. The Russian civil war

The third event-set t is the Russian civil war – a conflict whose outcome determined sovereignty and security of the Russian State as well as regional and global issues. A victory for the Whites would have smothered the communist revolution and set back political fortunes of millions. According to Lenin, the civil war was not merely a clash between two ideological camps, but a part of anticipated world revolution – an Armageddon of the proletariat against the capitalist bourgeoisie.

From the instant World War I broke out he denounced pacifist socialists, who demanded an end to the fighting. True revolutionaries did not want peace: "This is a slogan of philistines and priests. The proletarian slogan must be: civil war." Trotsky stated this even more bluntly: "Soviet authority is organized civil war."20

Lenin, Trotsky and their comrades believed that their revolution was the opening shot in world revolution, and that the Great War exposed fundamental capitalist contradictions for all to see. When it became apparent that there was to be no world proletarian revolution, the idea and practice of war communism emerged to defend the revolution in one country. For several years the fate of the country awaited determination by the war outcome.
The Soviet heartland was roughly the area ruled by Ivan III and IV in the fifteenth century before the conquest of Kazan. Opposition consisted of White forces led by former tsarist generals, with some aid from the Allies and various local forces. Their long-term vision was vague but it is possible that victory would have resulted in breakup of post-imperial Russia.*

The Bolshevik attitude towards the civil war went through three phases. The first was a belief that their struggle was the spark to ignite global proletarian revolution, and the Russian base would be secured by uprisings in Western Europe. Thus Trotsky’s territorial giveaway at Brest-Litovsk was only a temporary concession. The second phase was realization that revolutions outside Russia were failing. War effectiveness necessitated installation of former tsarist officers and non-coms to lead the army, with Order Number One cancelled to re-establish discipline. Only a professionally-led Red Army could defeat the professionally-led Whites. The third phase came when the Red leadership saw the need to re-organize its social and economic base along more military lines. War communism then contributed to Stalin’s totalitarian State – with absolute sovereignty reinforced by unforgiving ideology, and a disciplined monolithic party and secret police with precedents in Genghis Khan’s bodyguard corps, or Ivan IV’s Oprichnina.

* An analogous post-empire was China after the fall of the Qing. There, a weak republic broke into warlord-regions, semi-united by Jiang Jieshi’s Northern Expedition, but his military revolution was strangled by Japanese aggressions from 1931.
A. Narrative

In 1917 the Bolsheviks captured the Russian State riding the wave of popular resistance to an unwinnable war, a hunger for land and peace. They were led by a disciplined and determined cadre, and supported by an alliance of soldiers, workers, peasants and intellectuals. In response to what was seen as a coup d’etat, the Whites comprised a counter-State to the Red State - one which did not seek restoration of the monarchy, but which placed the army in a prominent position as backbone of the State, and more oriented to Western Europe. Bolshevik victory over the Whites gave them most of the old Russian empire, and also confirmed their sense of besiegement by foreign powers, resistance in the Ukraine, and continued counter-revolutionary elements within the State. Such lessons strengthened totalitarian proclivities in subsequent years.

The mutiny of the Czech Legion was one trigger starting the civil war. 35,000 Czech POWs were allowed to travel the Trans-Siberian railway to return home via the US. Stopped at the Urals by Red Guards, they fought and captured a number of towns from the ill-trained Guards. Generals Kornilov and Denikin linked up with Cossacks in the Don region and moved to capture the Volga cities, and ultimately hoped to win Moscow.

The ease of the Czech victories made it clear to Trotsky, now Commissar of War, that the Red Army had to be reformed on the model of the tsarist conscript army, with regular units replacing the Red Guards, professional officers and a centralized hierarchy of command.21

Despite opposition from comrades who decried this apparent concession to the old order, Trotsky realized that revolutionary zeal was no substitute for military expertise.
B. War Communism and the reconstruction of sovereignty

The Bolshevik heartland was far more urbanized, industrialized and populated than the peripheral parts of the old empire. Road and rail mileage was much greater than in outlying areas to the south and east, giving them relatively efficient lines of communication and transportation. Despite the revolutionary vision of a Stateless future, the leadership was forced to reconstruct a sovereign State to survive. Without an effective army to defend itself, and a government to administer laws and commands, all their gains would be eradicated. The revolution was transformed into a war, and could only survive if successful in battle. Like Genghis Khan, Lenin and Trotsky had to convert an impoverished and family-oriented society into a fighting force to overcome internal and external enemies. Democracy and total rejection of old ways were tried and failed as bases for military organization. War communism was the principle which resurrected State sovereignty within Russia. Instead of the tsar, Lenin reigned. In place of the ecclesiastical and aristocratic supports, the communist party promulgated a secular vision of the future, insured conformity, and punished non-conformists. World proletarian revolution had failed, and once again Mother Russia was threatened with a new “Time of Troubles.” Poland invaded and took Kiev. While not a major factor, Allied assistance to the Whites indicated their opposition to the Bolsheviks. Finland and the Baltic republics broke away. Siberia and the Ukraine were held by Whites. Kadets and revolutionary socialists formed local governments.

Anarchy appeared to be the future unless drastic measures were undertaken. The Bolshevik vision of a Stateless future was
abandoned in favor of constructing a new sovereign State – one which would pretend to be a federation of republics, but in fact was an absolute and centralized dominion. The essence of war communism was a group of dedicated revolutionaries against some of Russia’s social sectors, even though the Bolsheviks claimed to represent them. Peasants had little surplus grain. But Moscow’s Food Levy took what it needed and did not calculate peasants’ requirements for food and seed.

War Communism began with a grain monopoly. But it broadened to include a comprehensive range of state controls on the economy. It aimed to abolish private trade, to nationalize all large-scale industry, to militarize labour in essential industries, and at its height, in 1920, to replace money with universal rationing by the state. Because it was a model for the Stalinist economy it is important to explain its origins and decide where it fits into the revolution’s history.22

C. Life security

A State is not only a set of institutions, army, government and officials, but must control territory and people. The State which exercises significant control over its population consists of rulers and Subjects. The designation “citizen” is reserved for persons subject to laws, but having considerable freedom of movement and property, as well as formal means of influencing government. Where institutions exist for citizens to exert some control on government, emergence of civil society follows. When a State fails or dissolves, like imperial Russia in 1917, most Subjects will seek protection and security in their original life-communities – families, clans or tribes. This phenomenon was visible with soldiers and workers abandoning their units and work places to be closer to rural roots and food supply. Later, when the advantages of war communism were apparent to the Bolsheviks, destruction of long-standing rural life-communities became policy, replaced by
collective farms. Engineered famine and mass relocation of ethnic
groups significantly contributed to the dissolution of life security
props.*

VII. Conclusion - Conundrum of the State

Asia and Europe have been at war since the Greco-Persian
wars in the early 5th century BC. The Battles of Marathon and
Salamis were hinge events avenged by Alexander’s victory over
Darius III in 331 BC. Emperor Diocletian divided the Roman Empire
into East and West in the late third century AD, Byzantium
remained the major power in the eastern Mediterranean and
Constantinople remained the gateway and buffer between Europe
and Asia until 1453. An alliance with the Mongols had protected the
Byzantine empire from the onslaught of the Golden Horde after
invasion of the Middle East, Russia and Eastern Europe. As the
States of Western Europe entered an age of global exploration and
maritime expansion, dangers of Asian threats receded, and invaders
became the invaded. Ivan IV’s expanded control of the Volga region
down to the Caspian Sea was a continental counterpart to European
maritime imperialism. Subsequent expansion across the Urals
through Siberia to the Pacific defined the Eurasian territory of the
Russian empire, and set the stage for southern and western
expansion.

In the twentieth century, Asian elites abandoned traditional
State-forms and sought to re-create either a liberal or a Bolshevik

* In post-liberation China, the rural people’s communes sought to accomplish the same purpose.
State in their own country. In China, Sun Yat-sen and Jiang Jieshi led bourgeois revolutions based on a program of military unification and democratization, followed by economic development and integration into global markets. The other route was inspired by the Russian revolution and its instrument of a highly disciplined communist party with radical program and adaptive ideology. The Nationalist revolution might have succeeded if the international system of trade and commerce had not collided with protectionism and tariff walls, and had the Japanese not intervened and tried to force China into a subordinate and semi-colonial status. Expectations of continued prosperity and political order under the Western European umbrella did not materialize, and the Bolshevik model, adapted to China’s peasant society, and combined with appeals to anti-Japanese patriotism, fueled the success of Mao Zedong’s guerrilla forces. During the nearly three decades after 1949, the Soviet model of proletariat dictatorship, and imitations of war communism dominated the Chinese approach to State-building. Soviet central planning was rejected as the Chinese communists became more radical.\(^*\) Mao’s death and Deng Xiaoping’s reforms marked partial departure from the Bolshevik template.

The high point of Soviet-Bolshevik influence on Asia occurred during the 1960s. Variations of war communism occurred in China, Vietnam, and North Korea, adapted to their predominantly peasant societies. The two and a half millennia conflict between Europe and

\(^*\) Mao’s Cultural Revolution in the 1960s was a renunciation of the Soviet top-down command structure, and an experiment in applying the guerrilla experience on a nation-wide scale.
Asia decidedly tilted in favor of Western Europe and later the US, since the early 1500’s. A combination of Russian imperial presence in Asia and the revolutionary success of the Bolsheviks seemed to introduce a shortcut to modernization.

Communist movements in east Asia misread the lessons of Bolshevisms. It was most successful as a State-building enterprise, creating a new sovereignty for its Subjects’ by making war on those who either opposed or failed to support. However, Bolshevisms did not enhance life security of Subjects, relying more on terrorism and intimidation. Economic development tended to stagnate after initial high growth of industry, and only facilitation of market incentives seemed to stimulate growth conducive to economic security.

To summarize, ample evidence for an early Asianized Russian State can be derived from the hinge events of Mongol conquest and Ivan IV’s thrust into the Volga region. By the eighteenth century, initiated by Peter I’s “Window to the West,” the Russian empire ruled lands as far as the Pacific, and became part of the European State system. The 1917 revolution and subsequent civil war were a departure from Russian history and a creative new phase that provided a model of State-building for parts of Asia. That model has proven its limitations, and now those States (except for the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea) have incorporated elements of capitalism into their economies, but stop short of granting democratic citizenship to their Subjects. Bolshevisms and war

* Members of the Soviet population were not accurately “citizens” since most had no say in government.
communism pointed the way to achieving sovereignty, but at the expense of equal life security. Some are more equal than others.

The Mongol intrusion and occupation of Rus was the high tide of Asianization. Ivan IV’s capture of Kazan and expansion to the Caspian Sea was a military counterattack against the Asiatic State but was accompanied by incorporation of some of its features. Peter I sought to diminish Asian influences and make his country a major Western power. Russian inversion of Asianization occurred in the twentieth century, as Bolshevik war communism’s policies of terrorism, repression of resistance, secret police, control of economy, and food confiscation were adapted in postwar communist regimes. Sponsorship and success of communist takeovers in Mongolia, China, North Korea and Vietnam convinced Lenin’s heirs that the chief Russian product – communist revolution and a highly centralized State – could transform Asian societies according to the Bolshevik template created by Stalin and his fellow revolutionaries. Moreover, global organization of national communist parties demonstrated the “market” for a Soviet model of political action. The imposition of Soviet hegemony on countries of the cordon sanitaire was more successful than in Asia in terms of integrating economies and armies with Moscow. By the time of Gorbachev, the defects of the Soviet system were plain for all to see, and the Chinese market reforms under communist rule offered an alternative model. In conclusion, the Bolshevik revolution and its offspring in war communism established the sovereignty of the Soviet State, created a pattern for East Asia, but failed to relieve the life security anxieties of most people subject to that sovereignty. With regard to the Eurasianist theory, the civil war and its aftermath began an era of
Euro-rejection in Russia and of an experiment in political russification in selected Asian countries. The experiment failed, but its effects are still visible in one-party States. Passive Eurasianism was followed by active russification abroad. Rejection by East Asia and dissolution of the Soviet Union may have stimulated Moscow to enter a new era of State consolidation – hegemony over the Ukraine and Crimea, and primacy over the Black Sea and eastern Mediterranean.


4 2518 Mawdsley, *RUSSIAN CIVIL WAR*, 286-7


6 Riasanovsky, 69


8 Ivan III of Moscow renounced his, and Russian, allegiance to the khan in 1480, and the Mongols failed to challenge his action seriously. Later yet, Russia expanded to absorb the successor states to the Golden Horde: the khanate of Kazan in 1552, of Astrakhan in 1556, and, at long last, that of Crimea in 1783. Riasanovsky, 71.

9 R. Pipes, *Russia under the Old Regime*, 74-75.


13 Halperin, 23.

14 Pipes, 72.


16 Madariaga, 95.


18 Halperin 1420, 102.


22 *Ibid.*, 111