

The US Empire is Very Much Over - The Saker Interviews Orlov

The Saker Interviews Dmitry Orlov, 19 April 2019

“I think that the American empire is very much over already, but it hasn’t been put to any sort of serious stress test yet, and so nobody realizes that this is the case”

If I had to characterize the current international situation using only one word, the word “chaos” would be a pretty decent choice (albeit not the only one). Chaos in the Ukraine, chaos in Venezuela, chaos everywhere the Empire is involved in any capacity and, of course, chaos inside the USA. But you wouldn’t know that listening to the talking heads and other “experts” who serve roughly the same function for the Empire as the orchestra did on the Titanic: to distract from the developing disaster(s) for as long as possible.

I decided to turn to the undisputed expert on social and political collapse, [Dmitry Orlov](#) whom I have always admired for his very logical, non-ideological, comparative analyses of the collapse of the USSR and the USA. The fact that his detractors have to resort to crude and, frankly, stupid *ad hominem*s further convinces me that Dmitry’s views need to be widely shared. Dmitry very kindly agreed to reply to my questions in some detail, for which I am most grateful. I hope that you will find this interview as interesting as I did.

The Saker

The Saker: How would you assess the current situation in the Ukraine in terms of social, economic and political collapse?

Dmitry Orlov: The Ukraine has never been viable as an independent, sovereign state and so its ongoing disintegration is to be expected. The applicability of the concept of collapse is predicated on the existence of an intact, stand-alone entity capable of collapse, and with the Ukraine this is definitely not the case. Never in its history has it been able to stand alone as a stable, self-sufficient, sovereign entity. As soon as it gained independence, it just fell over. Just as the Baltics (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania), it had reached its peak of economic and social development just as the USSR was about to collapse, and it has been degenerating and losing population ever since. Thus, the right model for discussing it is not one of sudden collapse but of steady degeneration and decay.

The Ukraine’s territory was stuck together by the Bolsheviks—first by Lenin, then by Stalin, then by Khrushchev. It was Lenin who lumped in its eastern regions (Donetsk and Lugansk specifically) who previously were part of Russia proper. Stalin then added eastern lands, which were at various times Polish, Austro-Hungarian or Romanian. Finally, Khrushchev tossed in Russian Crimea in a move that was unconstitutional at the time, since no public referendum had been held in Crimea to decide this question as was required by the Soviet constitution.

Prior to this Bolshevik effort, “Ukraina” was not used as a proper political or geographic designation. The territory was considered part of Russia, distinguished from the rest by a prefix “Malo-” (small) and called “Malorossiya. The word “ukraina” is simply an archaic form of the Russian word “okraina” (outskirts, border land). This is why the definite article “the” is required: the Ukraine is literally “the outskirts of Russia.” The Soviets endowed this border

land with a make-believe identity and forced many of its inhabitants to officially declare their ethnicity as “Ukrainian” in a successful bid to gain an additional seat at the UN.

This political concoction was supposedly held together by a Ukrainian ethnic identity, which is itself a concoction. The Ukrainian language is some combination of southern Russian village dialects with a bit of Polish thrown in as flavoring. It has a lilt to it that Russians find enchanting, making it well suited for folk songs. But it never had much practical merit, and the working language of the Ukrainians was always Russian. Even today Ukrainian nationalists switch to Russian if the subject matter is demanding enough. Religiously, most of the population has been for many centuries and still is Russian Orthodox.

In my conversations about the Ukraine with many Ukrainians over the years I discovered a shocking truth: unlike the Russians, the Ukrainians seem to have exactly zero ethnic solidarity. What binds them together is their commonality of historical experience as part of the Russian Empire, then the USSR, but this historical legacy is being actively erased.

After the Soviet collapse and Ukrainian independence there followed a campaign to de-Sovietize and de-Russianize the Ukraine, deprecating this common historical legacy and replacing it with a synthetic Ukrainian identity based on a falsified history that is alien to most of the population. This fake history lionizes Nazi collaborators and attempts to rub out entirely all memory of the Ukraine’s once very active role in the larger Russian world.

Thus we have a mostly Russian-speaking, historically mostly Russian territory where most of the people speak either Russian (some of them with an accent) or a sort of Ukrainian patois called Surzhik, which is Ukrainian-sounding but with mostly Russian words (the overlap between the two languages is so great that it is difficult to draw the line between them). Supposedly proper Ukrainian is spoken in the west of the country, which had never been part of the Russian Empire, but it’s a dialect that is mostly unintelligible in the rest of the country.

In spite of this confused linguistic situation, Ukrainian was imposed as the language of instruction throughout the country. Lack of textbooks in Ukrainian and lack of teachers qualified to teach in Ukrainian caused the quality of public education to plummet, giving rise to several generations of Ukrainians who don’t really know Ukrainian, have had little formal instruction in Russian, and speak a sort of informal half-language. More recently, laws have been passed that severely restrict the use of Russian.

For example, people who have never spoken a word of Ukrainian are now forced to use it in order to shop or to obtain government services.

The artificial, synthetic Ukrainian identity is too thin to give the country a sense of self or a sense of direction. It is a purely negative identity: Ukraine is that which is not Russia. The resulting hole in public consciousness was plugged by making a cargo cult of European integration: it was announced that the Ukraine was leaving the Russian world behind and joining the European Union and NATO. Most recently the intent to join the EU and NATO was written directly into the Ukrainian constitution. In the meantime, it has become abundantly clear that neither EU nor NATO membership is the least bit likely, or necessary: the EU got everything it wanted from the Ukraine by forcing it to sign the Association Agreement while giving nothing of value in return; and Ukrainian territory already serves as a playground for NATO training exercises.

Thus, with regard to social collapse, there really isn't much to discuss, because the term "Ukrainian society" has very little basis in reality. If we drop the conceit that the Ukraine is a country that can be viable if separated from Russia, what can we say about its chances as part of a Greater Russia?

Here I have to digress to explain the difference between a proper empire and the USSR. A proper empire functions as a wealth pump that sucks wealth out of its imperial possessions, be they overseas, as in the case of the British Empire, or part of the periphery, as in the case of the Russian Empire. The latter inherited the traditions of the Mongol Empire that predated it. The Mongol term "tamga" was often used to indicate the annual tribute to be collected from newly conquered tribes as the Russian Empire expanded east. (Many of these tribes were previously Mongol subjects who understood the meaning of the term.)

Here is the key point: the USSR was not a normal empire at all. Instead of functioning as a wealth pump that pumped wealth from the periphery to the imperial center, it functioned as a revolutionary incubator, exploiting the resources of the core (Russia) and exporting them to the periphery to build socialism, with the further goal of fomenting global communist revolution. The various ethnic groups that were grossly overrepresented among the Bolsheviks were all from the periphery—the Jewish Pale, Byelorussia, the Ukraine, the Caucasus and the Baltics—and they thought nothing of sacrificing Mother Russia on the altar of world revolution.

Their revolutionary zeal was hindered by its utter lack of practical merit. As this came to be recognized, Leon Trotsky—the great exponent of world revolution—was first exiled, then assassinated. Later, when it became clear that without appealing to Russian patriotic sentiments the task of prevailing against Nazi Germany was unlikely to succeed, Stalin brought back the Russian Orthodox Church and made other efforts toward the restoration of Russian ethnic identity that were previously decried as retrograde and chauvinistic.

There were significant setbacks to this process as well: in the 1940s a group of communist leaders from Leningrad attempted to promote Russian interests through regional cooperation. They were purged and suffered political repression in what became known as the "Leningrad affair."

Luckily, the idea of Russia as a disposable staging ground for world communist revolution was never fully implemented. However, the tendency to exploit Russia for the benefit of its Soviet periphery remained intact. The USSR's most significant leaders—Stalin, Khrushchev and Brezhnev—were not Russian; Stalin was a Georgian while the latter two were Ukrainian. All the other Soviet republics had their own communist party organizations that developed cadres to send to Moscow, while Russia itself lacked such an organization. The inevitable result was that most of the other Soviet republics were able to suck resources out of Russia, making them far more prosperous than Russia itself.

Thus, the image of the USSR as a typical empire is simply wrong. The right mental image of the USSR is that of a prostrate, emaciated sow (Russia) being suckled by 14 fat, greedy piglets (the other Soviet Socialist Republics). For all his numerous failings, Boris Yeltsin did one thing right: he dismantled the USSR (although the way he went about it was beyond incompetent and verged on treason).

If you are in need of an explanation for why Russia is now resurgent, increasingly prosperous and able to invest vast sums in hypersonic weapons systems and in modernized infrastructure

for its people, this is it: the 14 piglets had been sent off to root for themselves. This bit of perspective, by the way, puts paid to the rank idiocy of Zbigniew Brzezinski's "Grand Chessboard": his theory that Russia wants to be an empire but cannot do so without the Ukraine shatters on contact with the realization that Russia hasn't been an empire for over a century now and has no need or desire to become one again.

In any case, these days empires are a bit retro, you know, and not at all useful except as a way for silly Americans to finish bankrupting themselves. Russia needs reliable trading partners who can pay their own way, not ungrateful dependents clamoring for handouts. Just bringing Crimea up to Russia's contemporary standards after 30 years of Ukrainian neglect has turned out to be a monumental task; as far as doing that for the rest of the Ukraine—forget it!

So, armed with this perspective, what can we say about the Ukraine from the contemporary Russian perspective?

First and foremost, it is a freak show, as attested by the content of Russian talk shows on which Ukrainian experts appear as clownish, indestructible cartoon characters: whenever their risible arguments on behalf of the Ukraine blow up in their faces, for a moment they stand there charred and furious, then brush themselves off and appear in the next segment fresh as daisies. This freak show has certain didactic merit: it helps the Russian body politic develop powerful antibodies against Western hypocrisy, because it was Western meddling that has made contemporary Ukraine into the horrible mess it is. But this was, in a sense, inevitable: deprived of the Soviet teat, the Ukraine has been attempting to suckle up to the US and EU for 30 years now and, failing that, has been carving up and roasting its own loins.

Second, the Ukraine is a rich source of immigrants, having lost around a third of its population since independence. Much of its population qualifies as Russian: linguistically, culturally and religiously they are perfectly compatible with the Russian population. Ukrainians are already the third most populous ethnic group within Russia (after Russians and Tatars) and Russia has been able to absorb the Ukrainians that have been fleeing to Russia in recent years. As the Ukraine's population dwindles, a natural sorting-out is taking place. Those who are most compatible with the Russian world tend to move to Russia while the rest go to Poland and other EU countries.

Lastly, there is a significant amount of fatigue in Russia with the Ukrainian subject. It is currently a major topic of discussion because of the farcical presidential elections currently taking place there, but more and more one hears the question: "Must we continue talking about this?" There just isn't anything positive to say about the Ukraine, and people tend to just shake their heads and switch to another channel. Thus, the final element of the Russian perspective on the Ukraine is that it's painful to look at and they would rather go look at something else.

However, this is not to be. For ample historical reasons, Russia remains the Ukraine's largest trade partner. Russian and Ukrainian economies were conceived of as a unit, based on the same set of plans, standards and regulations. In spite of concerted politically motivated efforts by Ukrainian leaders to sever these links, many of them have stubbornly remained in place, for lack of alternatives. Meanwhile, the Ukraine makes very little that the European Union or the rest of the world would want, and very little of it complies with EU's voluminous standards and regulations. Specifically, the EU has no use at all for Ukrainian manufactured goods, and primarily sees the Ukraine as a source of cheap raw materials and labor.

It is Russia that supplies the nuclear fuel for the Ukraine's aging nuclear power plants which provide well over half of all the electricity there, while Russian coal (anthracite, specifically) supplies much of the rest. But, for political reasons, Ukrainian officials are loath to admit the fact that the umbilical cord that connects the Ukraine to Russia cannot be severed. For example, they do not buy Russian natural gas directly but through intermediaries in the EU and at a mark-up (part of which they pocket). On paper, the Ukraine imports gas from the EU; physically, the methane molecules piped in from Russia never leave Ukrainian territory; they are simply diverted for local use.

By the time the USSR collapsed, the Ukraine was its most highly developed and possibly its richest part, and some people expected that, having thrown off the Soviet yoke, its future would be too bright to look at without goggles. It had abundant natural resources (fertile land, coal) and an educated labor force. It manufactured numerous high-tech products such as jet aircraft, marine diesels, helicopter engines, rocket engines and much else that was the best in the world. Instead, what has occurred is several decades of thievery, stagnation and decay.

By now the Ukraine has lost most of its industry and the Soviet-era infrastructure has decayed to the point where much of it is worn out and on the verge of collapse. Industry has shut down and the specialists it once employed have either retired or have gone off to work in Russia, in the EU or in the US. (Some Ukrainian rocket scientists have apparently gone off to work in North Korea, and this explains the DPRK's recent stunning successes in rocketry as well as its unlikely, exotic choice of rocket fuel: unsymmetrical dimethylhydrazine.)

The Saker: What about the Donbas republics? How would you compare the situation in Novorussia with what is taking place in the Ukraine?

Dmitry Orlov: The term "Novorossiya" (New Russia) goes back several centuries, to the time Catherine the Great expanded the Russian Empire to include Crimea and other southern possessions. What Lenin reassigned to the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic were Russian lands, Donetsk and Lugansk regions among them.

There are several other Ukrainian regions that are almost entirely Russian—Kharkov and Odessa specifically—but Donetsk and Lugansk are not Ukrainian in the least. This is why, after the government overthrow of 2014, when it became clear that the intentions of the Ukrainian nationalists who seized power in Kiev were to oppress the Russian part of the population, these two regions decided to strike out on their own. The Ukrainian nationalists reacted by launching a civil war, which started exactly five years ago, and which they have lost. To save face, they have declared their defeat the result of a "Russian invasion" but have been unable to present any evidence of it. Had the Russians invaded, the result would have been a replay of Russia's action in Georgia in August of 2008, which lasted about a week.

The Ukrainians are continuing to lob missiles into the territories of Donetsk and Lugansk, causing sporadic civilian casualties. Once in a while they stage minor skirmishes, suffer casualties and pull back. But mostly their "Anti-Terrorist Operation," which is what they are calling this civil war, has turned into a propaganda initiative, with the mythical "Russian invaders" invoked at every turn to explain their otherwise inexplicable string of defeats.

After some amount of effort by NATO instructors to train the Ukrainians, the instructors gave up. The Ukrainians simply laughed in their faces because it was clear to them that the instructors did not know how to fight at all. It was then decided that the "road map" for

Ukraine's inclusion in NATO should be set aside because the Ukrainians are just too crazy for sedate and sedentary NATO. The trainers were then replaced with CIA types who simply collected intelligence on how to fight a high-intensity ground war without air support—something that no NATO force would ever consider doing. Under such conditions NATO forces would automatically retreat or, failing that, surrender.

Meanwhile, the two eastern regions, which are highly developed economically and have a lot of industry, have been integrating ever more closely into the Russian economy. Their universities and institutes are now fully accredited within the Russian system of higher education, their currency is the ruble, and although in terms of international recognition they remain part of the Ukraine, it is very important to note that the Ukraine does not treat them as such.

The Ukrainian government does not treat the citizens of Donetsk and Lugansk as its citizens: it does not pay their pensions, it does not recognize their right to vote and it does not provide them with passports. It lays claim to the territory of Donetsk and Lugansk but not to the people who reside there. Now, genocide and ethnic cleansing are generally frowned upon by the international community, but an exception is being made in this case because of Russophobia: the Russian people living in Donetsk and Lugansk have been labeled as “pro-Russian” and are therefore legitimate targets.

Russia has been resisting calls to grant official recognition to these two People's Republics or to provide overt military support (weapons and volunteers do filter through from the Russian side without any hindrance, although the flow of volunteers has been slowing down of late). From a purely cynical perspective, this little war is useful for Russia. If in the future the Ukraine fails completely and fractures into pieces, as appears likely, and if some of these pieces (which might theoretically include not just Donetsk and Lugansk regions but also Kharkov, Odessa and Dnepropetrovsk) clamor to join Russia, then Russia would face a serious problem.

You see, over the past 30 years most Ukrainians have been content to sit around drinking beer and watching television as their country got looted. They saw no problem with going out to demonstrate and protest provided they were paid to do it. They voted the way they were paid to vote. They didn't take an issue with Ukrainian industry shutting down as long as they could work abroad and send money back. They aren't enraged or even embarrassed by the fact that their country is pretty much run from the US embassy in Kiev. About the only ones with any passion among them are the Nazis who march around with torches and sport Nazi insignia. In short, these aren't the sort of people that any self-respecting country would want to have anything to do with, never mind absorb them into its population en masse, because the effect would be to demoralize its entire population.

But the people of Donetsk and Lugansk are not like that at all. These coal miners, factory workers and cab drivers have been spending days and nights in the trenches for years now, holding back one of Europe's larger militaries, and fighting for every square meter of their soil. If the Ukraine is ever to be reborn as something that Russia would find acceptable, it is these people who can provide the starter culture. They have to win, and they have to win without any help from the Russian military, which can squash the Ukrainian military like a bug, but what would be the point of doing that? Thus, Russia provides humanitarian aid, business opportunities, some weapons and some volunteers, and bides its time, because creating a viable new Ukraine out of a defunct one is a process that will take considerable time.

The Saker: What is your take on the first round of Presidential elections in the Ukraine?

Dmitry Orlov: The first round of the elections was an outright fraud. The object of the exercise was to somehow allow president Poroshenko to make it into the second round. This was done by falsifying as many votes as was necessary. In a significant number of precincts the turnout was exactly 100% instead of the usual 60% or so and counted votes from people who had moved, died or emigrated. All of these fake votes went to Poroshenko, allowing him to slither through to the second round.

Now the fight is between Poroshenko and a comedian named Vladimir Zelensky. The only difference between Poroshenko and Zelensky, or any of the other 30+ people who appeared on the ballot, is that Poroshenko has already stolen his billions while his contestants have not had a chance to do so yet, the only reason to run for president, or any elected office, in the Ukraine, being to put oneself in a position to do some major thieving.

Thus, there is an objective reason to prefer Zelensky over Poroshenko, which is that Poroshenko is a major thief while Zelensky isn't one yet, but it must be understood that this difference will begin to equalize the moment after Zelensky's inauguration. In fact, the elites in Kiev are currently all aquiver over their ingenious plan to sell off all of Ukraine's land to foreign investors (no doubt pocketing a hefty "fee").

The platforms of all the 30+ candidates were identical, but this makes no difference in a country that has surrendered its sovereignty. In terms of foreign relations and strategic considerations, the Ukraine is run from the US embassy in Kiev. In terms of its internal functioning, the main prerogative of everyone in power, the president included, is thievery. Their idea is to get their cut and flee the country before the whole thing blows up.

It remains to be seen whether the second round of elections will also be an outright fraud and what happens as a result. There are many alternatives, but none of them resemble any sort of exercise in democracy. To be sure, what is meant by "democracy" in this case is simply the ability to execute orders issued from Washington; inability to do so would make Ukraine an "authoritarian regime" or a "dictatorship" and subject to "regime change." But short of that, nothing matters.

The machinations of Ukraine's "democrats" are about as interesting to me as the sex lives of sewer rats, but for the sake of completeness, let me flowchart it out for you. Poroshenko got into second round by outright fraud, because the loss of this election would, within the Ukrainian political food chain, instantly convert him from predator to prey. However, he was none too subtle about it, there is ample proof of his cheating, and the contender he squeezed out—Yulia Timoshenko—could theoretically contest the result in court and win. This would invalidate the entire election and leave Poroshenko in charge until the next one. Lather, rinse, repeat.

Another option would be for Poroshenko to cheat his way past the second round (in an even more heavy-handed manner, since this time he is behind by over 30%), in which case Zelensky could theoretically contest the result in court in win. This would invalidate the entire election and leave Poroshenko in charge until the next one. Lather, rinse, repeat. Are you excited yet?

None of this matters, because we don't know which of the two is the US State Department's pick. Depending on which one it is, and regardless of the results of any elections or lawsuits, a

giant foot will come out of the sky and stomp on the head of the other one. Of course, it will all be made to look highly democratic for the sake of appearances. The leadership of the EU will oblige with some golf claps while choking back vomit and the world will move on.

The Saker: Where is, in your opinion, the Ukraine heading? What is your best “guesstimate” of what will happen in the short-to-medium term future?

Dmitry Orlov: I believe that we will be subjected to more of the same, although some things can't go on forever, and therefore won't. Most worryingly, the Soviet-era nuclear power plants that currently provide most of the electricity in the Ukraine are nearing the end of their service life and there is no money to replace them. Therefore, we should expect most of the country to go dark over time. Likewise, the natural gas pipeline that currently supplies Russian gas to both the Ukraine and much of the EU is worn out and ready to be decommissioned, while new pipelines being laid across the Baltic and the Black Sea are about to replace it. After that point the Ukraine will lose access to Russian natural gas as well.

If the Ukrainians continue to surrender unconditionally while placating themselves with pipe dreams of EU/NATO membership, the country will depopulate, the land will be sold off to Western agribusiness, and it will become a sort of agricultural no man's land guarded by NATO troops.

But that sort of smooth transition may be hard for the EU and the Americans to orchestrate. The Ukraine is rather highly militarized, is awash with weapons, full of people who have been circulated through the frontlines in Donbas and know how to fight, and they may decide to put up a fight at some point. It must be remembered that the Ukrainians, in spite of the decay of the last 30 years, still have something of the Russian fighting spirit in them, and will fight like Russians—until victory or until death. NATO's gender-ambivalent military technicians would not want to get in their way at all.

Also the dream of a depopulated Ukraine to be turned into a playground for Western agribusiness may be hindered somewhat by the fact that the Russians take a very dim view of Western GMOs and wouldn't like to see GMO-contaminated pollen blowing across their border from the West. They would no doubt find some least-effort way to make the attempt at Western agribusiness in the Ukraine unprofitable. Orchestrating a smallish but highly publicized radiation leak from one of the ancient Ukrainian nuke plants would probably work. Rather weirdly, Westerners think nothing of poisoning themselves with glyphosphate but are deathly afraid of even a little bit of ionizing radiation.

The Saker: What about the EU and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe? Where is the EU heading in your opinion?

Dmitry Orlov: The EU has a number of major problems. It isn't fiscally or monetarily healthy. As a whole, or as its constituent nations, it is no longer capable of the exercise of its full sovereignty, having surrendered it to the US. But the US is no longer able to maintain control, because it is internally conflicted to the point of becoming incoherent in its pronouncements.

Overall, the structure looks like a matryoshka doll. You have the US, as a sort of cracked outer shell. Inside of it is NATO, which is an occupying force across most of Europe right up to the Russian border. It would be useless against Russia, but it can pose a credible threat of violence

against the occupied populations. Inside of NATO is the EU—a political talking shop plus a sprawling bureaucracy that spews forth reams upon reams of rules and regulations.

Since none of this military/political superstructure is actually structural without the key ingredient of US hegemony, we shouldn't expect it to perform particularly well. It will continue as a talking shop while various national governments attempt to reclaim their sovereignty. British referendum voters have certainly tried to prod their government in that direction, and in response their government has been experimenting with various methods of rolling over and playing dead, but a different government might actually try to execute the will of the people. On the other hand, the governments of Hungary and Italy have made some headway in the direction of reasserting their sovereignty, with public support.

But nothing has really happened yet. Once the political elite of any nation has been thoroughly emasculated by the surrender of its national sovereignty, it takes a while for it to grow back its chest hair and to start posing a credible threat to transnational interests. Even in Russia it took close to a decade to thwart the political power and influence of the oligarchy. We can see that the empire is weakening and that some countries are starting to balk at being vassals, but nothing definitive has happened yet.

What may speed things up is that Europe, along with the US, appear to be heading into a recession/depression. One effect of that will be that all the East European guest workers working in the west will be forced to head back home. Another will be that EU's subsidies to its recent eastern acquisitions—Poland and the Baltics especially—are likely to be reduced substantially or to go away altogether. The influx of returning economic migrants combined with the lack of financial support are likely to spell the demise of certain national elites which have been feasting on Western largesse in return for a bit of Russophobia.

We can imagine that this swirling tide of humanity, ejected from Western Europe, will head east, slosh against the Great Wall of Russia, and flood back into the west, but now armed with Ukrainian weapons and knowhow and entertaining thoughts of plunder rather than employment. There they will fight it out with newcomers from Middle East and Africa while the natives take to their beds, hope for the best and think good thoughts about gender neutrality and other such worthy causes.

These old European nations are all aging out, not just in terms of demographics but in terms of the maximum age allotted by nature to any given ethnos. Ethnoi (plural of "ethnos") generally only last about a thousand years, and at the end of their lifecycle they tend to exhibit certain telltale trends: they stop breeding well and they become sexually depraved and generally decadent in their tastes. These trends are on full display already. Here's a particularly absurd example: French birth certificates no longer contain entries for father and mother but for parent1 and parent2. Perhaps the invading barbarians will see this and die laughing; but what if they don't?

No longer able to put up much of a fight, such depleted ethnoi tend to be easily overrun by barbarians, at which point they beg for mercy. In turn, based on the example of the late Roman Empire as well as similar ones from Chinese and Persian history, granting them mercy is one of the worst mistakes a barbarian can make: the result is a bunch of sexually depraved and generally decadent barbarians... to be easily overrun and slaughtered by the next bunch of barbarians to happen along.

What will spark the next round of Western European ethnogenesis is impossible to predict, but we can be sure that at some point a mutant strain of zealots will arrive on the scene, with a dampened instinct for self-preservation but an unslakable thirst for mayhem, glory and death, and then it will be off to the races again.

The Saker: What will happen once Nord Stream II is finished? Where is Europe heading next, especially in its relationship with the USA and Russia?

Dmitry Orlov: The new pipelines under the Baltic and the Black Sea will be completed, along with the second LNG installation at Sabetta, and Russia will go on supplying natural gas to Europe and Asia. I suspect that the fracking extravaganza in the US is entering its end game and that the dream of large-scale LNG exports to Europe will never materialize.

The nations of Europe will gradually realize that its relationship with Russia is mostly beneficial while its relationship with the US is mostly harmful, and will make certain adjustments. The Ukraine, its natural gas pipeline system decrepit and beyond repair, will continue to import natural gas from Europe, only now the methane molecules will actually flow to it from the west rather from the east.

The Saker: How do you see the political climate in Russia? I hear very often that while Putin personally and the Kremlin's foreign policy enjoy a great deal of support, the pension reform really hurt Putin and that there is now an internal "patriotic opposition" (as opposed to paid and purchased for by the CIA & Co., which is becoming more vocal. Is that true?

It is true that there isn't much debate within Russia about foreign policy. Putin's popularity has waned somewhat, although he is still far more popular than any national leader in the West. The pension reform did hurt him somewhat, but he recovered by pushing through a raft of measures designed to ease the transition. In particular, all the benefits currently enjoyed by retirees, such as reduced public transit fees and reduced property taxes, will be extended to those nearing retirement age.

It is becoming clear that Putin, although he is still very active in both domestic and international politics, is coasting toward retirement. His major thrust in domestic politics seems to be in maintaining very strict discipline within the government in pushing through his list of priorities. How he intends to effect the transition to the post-Putin era remains a mystery, but what recently took place in Kazakhstan may offer some clues. If so, we should expect a strong emphasis on continuity, with Putin maintaining some measure of control over national politics as a senior statesman.

But by far the most significant change in Russian politics is that a new generation of regional leaders has been put into place. A great many governorships have been granted to ambitious young managers with potential for national office. They are of a new breed of thoroughly professional career politicians with up-to-date managerial skills. Meanwhile, a thorough cleaning out of the ranks has taken place, with some high-ranking officials doing jail time for corruption. What's particularly notable is that some of these new regional leaders are now as popular or more popular than Putin. The curse of gerontocracy, which doomed the Soviet experiment, and which now afflicts the establishment in the US, no longer threatens Russia.

The Saker: You recently wrote an article titled “Is the USS Ship of Fools Taking on Water?” in which you discuss the high level of stupidity in modern US politics? I have a simple question for you: do you think the Empire can survive Trump and, if so, for how long?

Dmitry Orlov: I think that the American empire is very much over already, but it hasn't been put to any sort of serious stress test yet, and so nobody realizes that this is the case. Some event will come along which will leave the power center utterly humiliated and unable to countenance this humiliation and make adjustments. Things will go downhill from there as everyone in government in media does their best to pretend that the problem doesn't exist. My hope is that the US military personnel currently scattered throughout the planet will not be simply abandoned once the money runs out, but I wouldn't be too surprised if that is what happens.

The Saker: Lastly, a similar but fundamentally different question: can the USA (as opposed to the Empire) survive Trump and, if so, how? Will there be a civil war? A military coup? Insurrection? Strikes? A US version of the Yellow Vests?

Dmitry Orlov: The USA, as some set of institutions that serves the interests of some dwindling number of people, is likely to continue functioning for quite some time. The question is: who is going to be included and who isn't? There is little doubt that retirees, as a category, have nothing to look forward to from the USA: their retirements, whether public or private, have already been spent. There is little doubt that young people, who have already been bled dry by poor job prospects and ridiculous student loans, have nothing to look forward to either.

But, as I've said before, the USA isn't so much a country as a country club. Membership has its privileges, and members don't care at all what life is like for those who are in the country but aren't members of the club. The recent initiatives to let everyone in and to let non-citizens vote amply demonstrates that US citizenship, by itself, counts for absolutely nothing. The only birthright of a US citizen is to live as a bum on the street, surrounded by other bums, many of them foreigners from what Trump has termed “shithole countries.”

It will be interesting to see how public and government workers, as a group, react to the realization that the retirements they have been promised no longer exist; perhaps that will tip the entire system into a defunct state. And once the fracking bubble is over and another third of the population finds that it can no longer afford to drive, that might force through some sort of reset as well. But then the entire system of militarized police is designed to crush any sort of rebellion, and most people know that. Given the choice between certain death and just sitting on the sidewalk doing drugs, most people will choose the latter.

And so, Trump or no Trump, we are going to have more of the same: shiny young IT specialists skipping and whistling on the way to work past piles of human near-corpses and their excrement; Botoxed housewives shopping for fake organic produce while hungry people in the back of the store are digging around in dumpsters; concerned citizens demanding that migrants be allowed in, then calling the cops as soon as these migrants set up tents on their front lawn or ring their doorbell and ask to use the bathroom; well-to-do older couples dreaming of bugging out to some tropical gringo compound in a mangrove swamp where they would be chopped up with machetes and fed to the fish; and all of them believing that things are great because the stock market is doing so well.

At this rate, when the end of the USA finally arrives, most of the people won't be in a position to notice while the rest won't be capable of absorbing that sort of upsetting information and will choose to ignore it. Everybody wants to know how the story ends, but that sort of information probably isn't good for anyone's sanity. The mental climate in the US is already sick enough; why should we want to make it even sicker?

The Saker: Dmitry, thank you so much for your time and for a most interesting interview!