**The end of empire: Russian and Soviet imperial development and decline**

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**Abstract**

The purpose of this research is to analyze the development of the Russian/Soviet empire (1917-1985) and its decline during Gorbachev's regime, from both political science and comparative history perspectives.

In Chapter One of this study an outline of the major theoretical frameworks for understanding imperial development and decline will be presented on the basis of available literature.

By applying the methodologies featured in Chapter One to a study of the Russian/Soviet imperial past, Chapter Two of this work will show that Russia/the USSR developed as a classic contiguous multi-ethnic empire which underwent several stages (Muscovy, Westernized Empire of Peter the Great and his heirs, and Stalinist/post-Stalinist) before entering its terminal crisis under Gorbachev. As was the case with its predecessors, it will be argued, such an empire historically possesses certain characteristics and follows certain patterns of development that ultimately lead to its disintegration.

Chapter Three will concentrate on Gorbachev's Soviet Union as an empire in decay and will address the inability of the nomenklatura to deal effectively with the collapse of the state system. The evidence used in this chapter includes unpublished archival materials of the Central Committee and testimonies of members of the top USSR leadership. It will also examine the attitudes toward the question of empire among various parts of the Russian and non-Russian elites and the general population.

The Conclusion of this work will synthesize the approaches elaborated in Chapter One and will discuss their application to the Russian and Soviet cases. The Conclusion will address the centrifugal processes which led to the collapse of the USSR as another instance of the imperial disintegration of a multinational empire. It will also point out the importance of the "imperial" framework of analysis for both prior and current US policymaking on Eurasia.