The problems of continuity and parallel developments, always uppermost in the minds of historians, have been brought to the attention of the wider public recently by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn in his pronouncements about the Soviet system. He insists that 1917 was a “fatal fracture of the spine,” that the Bolsheviks have fundamentally altered the course of Russian history, that Leninism was an alien infection in the Russian organism that only was made worse by Stalin and his heirs. The diseased product is totalitarianism, the total suppression of individuality and the human spirit. Further back into history than Bolshevism his considerations usually do not take him, although he has mentioned serfdom. My thesis is precisely the opposite: while Marxism, Lenin, and Stalin may have precipitated some particular developments, the preconditions of modern Russian history were such that in fact one should have been astounded had events turned out much differently since 1917 than they have. (To refer to the ongoing “debate” among Soviet citizens, this position is somewhat akin to that advanced by Roy Medvedev: repression is the legacy of Russian history, not a necessary result of socialism. Regrettably, the “debate” has not been joined by the professional Soviet historians.). Whether my argument is excessively, even frighteningly, deterministic is something I shall leave for my readers to decide. Here, then, I shall point out the central tendencies of modern Russian history, those features which have been crucial in the development of Russia since, say, the time of Ivan III and which explain the presence of most other phenomena. This is portrayed graphically in the attached “Precipitants-Preconditions-Outcomes-Feedback Model.” The result is an heuristic model which seems to express an emerging consensus among many historians about the dynamics of Russian history in the past half millennium.

1. This paper had its origins as a thirty-minute concluding presentation to our staff Russian Civilization course at the University of Chicago beginning in the late 1960s, to which another member of the staff responded at equal length. Some of the notions expressed here were adumbrated in my Enserfment and Military Change in Muscovy, (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1971). I have been encouraged in a number of forums to present this model to a wider audience for broader consideration, and wish to thank Charles Schlacks for offering that opportunity. Since this is a summary piece for discussion, I assume that what is said is largely public knowledge and shall cite only those instances where I explicitly have borrowed someone else’s ideas.
A PRECIPITANTS-PRECONDITIONS-OUTCOMES-FEEDBACK MODEL FOR THE STRUCTURE OF MODERN RUSSIAN HISTORY

Precipitants: Foreign Military Threat, Civil Disorder, Change of Ruler

Preconditions:
- Geography
- International Milieu
- Ethnic Diversity
- Political Traditions
- Legitimacy of Ruling Oligarchy
- Patrimonial Conceptions of the State Order
- Supine Orthodox Church
- Backwardness

Outcomes:
- Autocracy
- Garrison State
- Hypertrophic Government
- Service Class
- Absence of Civil Rights
- Repression
- Forced Labor
- Imitation of Foreign Developments
- Territorial Expansion
- Institutionalized Paranoia
- National Independence

Feedback (Interaction)