

## *Solzhenitsyn Revisited*

A. I. Solzhenitsyn, not quite uniquely in recent years, showed that a novel can be a serious work of the human mind. A good novel can be a way of thinking deeply about human life—moral, emotional, intellectual, social, immediate: whole. Part of Solzhenitsyn's achievement in *The First Circle*, like Tolstoy's before him in *War and Peace*, was to show Russia whole, and by so doing to recognise a nation great even during the not-quite suicidal self-torment of the Soviet Union. Solzhenitsyn's more prophetic/political writings, coming from the same mind that made the novels, also show knowledge and judgement of a kind that we need. The West would have a better chance of avoiding stupid hostility towards Russia if its leaders read Solzhenitsyn. He would also introduce to their minds a concept that does seem to be lacking there: national community.

A front-page story in *Metro* (3 March this year) quoted the U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry: "You just don't in the 21st century behave in 19th century fashion by invading another country on a completely trumped-up pretext." (The U.S.A. of course never in the twenty-first century invaded Iraq.) This was about the reincorporation of the Crimea into Russia. Did you know before this blew up that the Crimea was no longer part of Russia? It certainly was when we fought a stupid war there in the 1850s. The following Friday Lord Ashdown, interviewed on Radio 4, uttered words to the effect that Russia, a declining and bad-tempered power, had not caught up with the fact that wars are no longer fought about national identity, boundaries etc., but to establish democracy. It is no cause for regret that Russia proved Kerry and Ashdown wrong, and without, thanks to the diplomatic brilliance also shown last year in their rescuing the West from its disastrous inclination to intervene in Syria, having to fight a war.

The relations between the different parts of Greater Russia are complicated, various, but quite real. One might draw a parallel between the relations between the different parts of the United Kingdom, where too the question arises whether some of the parts belong. Even setting aside the fact that they are next-door neighbours, to suppose that Kiev is of no interest to Moscow shows the kind of failure to understand nations that is a disqualification in a statesman. We have noticed related stupidities in the present British premier. Ignorance of history is ignorance of present reality. For example do not we all suppose that Germany invaded Russia in June 1941? Not according to the new wisdom. Germany invaded the parts of the Soviet Union which are now Ukraine and Belarus, though they did get to Russia before they had done.

As to the likely shooting-down of the Malaysian air-liner over East Ukraine: were you aware that civil airlines continue services over combat zones? Or is it only this combat zone? Are flights continuing over the Gaza Strip and Syria? Would you send your children on these flights? And is it realistic to expect combatants to suspend military operations while international observers investigate?

Solzhenitsyn's prophecy, before the final collapse of the Soviet Union, was that "The three republics in the Baltic area, the three in Transcaucasia, four in Central Asia, and Moldavia as well, if it feels drawn to Romania—that these eleven will be *separated off unequivocally and irreversibly*." (*Rebuilding Russia*, transl. Alexis Klimoff, 1990, p. 12) Great Russia, the Ukrainians and the Belorussians need to be treated differently. Read it!