

UDC 930.1(73)(092):94(477)“1953/1963”
DOI 10.24919/2519-058X.32.311493

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Bibliographic Description of the Article: Danylenko, V. & Borzov, S. (2024). Khrushchev's "de-Stalinization" in Robert Conquest's interpretation. *Skhidnoieuropeiskiyi Istorychnyi Visnyk [East European Historical Bulletin]*, 32, 90–99. doi: 10.24919/2519-058X.32.311493

**KHRUSHCHEV'S "DE-STALINIZATION"
IN ROBERT CONQUEST'S INTERPRETATION**

Abstract. *The purpose of the article is to clarify the scientific and historical interpretation of M. Khrushchev's "de-Stalinization" by the American scholar Robert Conquest. The methodology is based on an interdisciplinary combination of historical and historiographical approaches. Chronological, comparative historical, linguistic textological analysis of social events and phenomena are core components. The scientific novelty is caused by the lack of articles and monographs on the historiographical contribution of R. Conquest to the coverage of the so-called "Khrushchev thaw". For the first time, the terminology that the scholar used to reveal the political and ideological components of the process of "de-Stalinization" during the years of "Khrushchev's rule" was elucidated. His author's interpretation of concepts and phenomena appears, the difference between them in the context of the era itself. The Conclusions. R. Conquest does not idealize the historical figure of M. Khrushchev and his political activity, it emphasizes his "uncompromising extremism" in the implementation of the USSR foreign policy doctrine. R. Conquest believed that Khrushchev's "anti-Stalinism" had political gains in the struggle for one-man leadership. Criticism of Stalin's "personality cult", the*

beginning of rehabilitation, recognition of the fact of mass terror – had a positive impact on the society. The concepts and phenomena of "thaw" and relative "liberalization" made sense when compared to the terrible consequences of Stalin's political terror. The scholar notes that the "young Stalinist" Khrushchev debunked the "cult of personality", but avoided reforming the authoritarian political system. In 1953 – 1963, the political struggle for power in the Kremlin continued, and the tactics chosen by M. Khrushchev proved to be the most effective. He chose moderate criticism of Stalinism as the main factor in overcoming the resistance of fanatical Stalinists. Rehabilitation freed political prisoners from the camps, and also deterred direct participants in the repressions from attacks. Under such circumstances, it was "illogical and partial", and "liberalization" turned out to be managed and controlled by M. Khrushchev.

Key words: Khrushchev, Khrushchev's "de-Stalinization", rehabilitation, Stalinism, repression, R. Conquest, mass terror, Holodomor.

ХРУЩОВСЬКА "ДЕСТАЛІНІЗАЦІЯ" В ІНТЕРПРЕТАЦІЇ РОБЕРТА КОНКВЕСТА

Анотація. Мета статті полягає у з'ясуванні науково-історичної інтерпретації хрущовської "десталінізації" американським ученим Робертом Конквестом. **Методологія** опирається на міждисциплінарне поєднання історичного й історіографічного підходів. Ключовими є хронологічний, порівняльно-історичний, лінгвістично-текстологічний аналіз суспільних подій і явищ. **Наукова новизна** зумовлена відсутністю статей і монографій про історіографічний внесок Конквеста у висвітлення так званої "хрущовської відлиги". Уперше виявлено термінологію, яку учений використовував для розкриття політично-ідеологічних складових процесу "десталінізації" у час "правління Хрущова". Постає його авторська інтерпретація понять і явищ, відмінність між ними закладена в контексті самої епохи.

Висновки. Конквест не ідеалізує історичну постать Хрущова і його політичну діяльність, підкреслює його "безкомпромісний екстремізм" у реалізації зовнішньополітичної доктрини СРСР. На переконання Конквеста, "антисталінізм" Хрущова мав політичні здобутки у боротьбі за одноосібне лідерство. Критика "культу особи" Сталіна, початок реабілітації, визнання факту масового терору – позитивно впливали на суспільство. Поняття і явища "відлиги" та відносної "лібералізації" мали сенс у порівнянні з жахливими наслідками сталінського політичного терору. Учений зазначає, що "молодий сталінець" Хрущов розвінчував "культ особи", але уникав реформування політичної системи авторитарного типу. У 1953 – 1963 рр. тривала політична боротьба за владу у Кремлі, а обрана Хрущовим тактика виявилася найефективнішою. Він обрав помірковану критику сталінізму головним фактором подолання опору фанатичних сталіністів. Реабілітація звільняла з таборів політичних в'язнів, а також стримувала від нападків безпосередніх учасників репресій. За таких обставин вона була "нелогічною і частковою", а "лібералізація" виявилася керованою і контрольованою самим Хрущовим.

Ключові слова: Хрущов, хрущовська "десталінізація", реабілітація, сталінізм, репресії, Конквест, масовий терор, Голодомор.

The Problem Statement. The concept of "de-Stalinization" was used by Robert Conquest in the monograph "The Great Terror" (1968), and the historical figure of M. S. Khrushchev is mentioned by scholars dozens of times. R. Conquest, a historian, political scholar and professional American sovietologist used the terminology that was formulated by him personally, or borrowed from other sources: "Stalin era", "stalinist Khrushchev", "Khrushchev era", "stalinism", "liberalization", "anti-Stalinism", "rehabilitation", "young stalinist", "essence of stalinism". His evaluative judgments, which related to the general context and M. Khrushchev personally, took their intellectual place in historiography, and proved the theoretical and methodological concept of the researcher of the Soviet political system.

The Review of Sources and Recent Publications. The issue under analysis has not been covered in historical literature widely. Exceptions are several articles that have been published recently. Thus, in particular, the issues of historiographical legacy of Robert Conquest were considered in the studies by Serhii Borzov (Borzov, 2022; Borzov, 2024), and by Oleh Melnychuk, Olha Koliastruk and Pavlo Kravchenko (Melnichuk, Koliastruk & Kravchenko, 2024). Among the recent studies on the era of Mykyta (Nikita) Khrushchev, the following ones should be named: the studies by Oleh Melnychuk and Anna Dolynna (Melnichuk & Dolynna, 2023); Viktor Dokashenko and Viktoria Kontsur (Dokashenko & Kontsur, 2022); Viacheslav Olitskyi (Olitskyi, 2022); Nadia Kindrachuk and Volodymyr Vasylchuk (Kindrachuk & Vasylchuk, 2022). Some epistemological aspects of Ukrainian historiography in the Soviet era are revealed in the work of Mykola Haliv and Vasyl Ilnytskyi (Haliv & Ilnytskyi, 2023).

The purpose of the research is to clarify the scientific and historical interpretation of M. Khrushchev's "de-Stalinization" by the American scholar Robert Conquest.

The Research Results. Scientific historical interpretations of the events and phenomena of the "Stalin era" and "Khrushchev's rule" testify to the scholar's factual priorities. R. Conquest does not demonize Stalin or idealize the period of the so-called "Khrushchev thaw". The verbal and semantic mosaic that R. Conquest resorted to had a cold undertone of academic analysis during the Cold War. Each of the terms he used was adapted to specific political processes historically, accepted and assimilated personally. The terrorist essence of Stalinism and aggressive foreign policy of the Kremlin became a worldview challenge to R. Conquest, because in the 1930s he was fascinated by communist ideas, he visited the USSR even at the height of political terror, i.e. in 1937. The course of World War II, in which he was an active participant, changed his views and spiritual values radically.

The former allies of the anti-Hitler coalition plunged into the vortex of the Cold War. In 1948, R. Conquest worked in the information and propaganda department of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of the UK. The UK's intellectual circles evaluated the domestic and foreign policy of the USSR, the essence of the ruling regime, in different ways. A writer George Orwell turned out to be a ruthless critic of Stalin, who in August of 1945 published the allegorical novel "Collective Animal Farm". In the preface to the Ukrainian edition of 1947, he showed his own way of rethinking socialist theory and practice, because "nothing contributed to distortion of true ideas of socialism as much as conviction that Russia is a socialist country" (Orvell, 2022, p. 10). At that time a famous writer devoted his work to "debunking the Soviet myth", and G. Orwell's journalistic articles were published in the pages of the newspaper "The Tribune", the printed organ of the Labour Party. It should be noted that Etnney government was formed by the Labour Party, and R. Conquest worked in the information and analytical department of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs at the time. His assistant Celia Kirwan turned to G. Orwell for information about active supporters of the USSR in England. Thus, there was an indirect influence of G. Orwell on the professional activities of R. Conquest, a sovietologist. G. Orwell demanded from him analytical abilities, a refined artistic and figurative style in the ideological confrontation of the two political systems.

In 1953, i.e. the year of the dictator Stalin's death, R. Conquest was engaged in poetic and literary work (Conquest, 1953). His interest in the works of the banned B. Pasternak was determined not only by his artistic tastes, but also by the scientific historical and political priorities of the British sovietologist. The novel "Doctor Zhyvaho" was banned by political

censorship during the years of "Khrushchev's rule", the author was dismissed from the Union of Writers of the USSR, the writer was forced to refuse the Nobel Prize (1958) (Herasymova, 2011). In 1961, when the so-called Caribbean crisis arose, which proved Khrushchev's fanatical devotion to the aggressive foreign policy doctrine of the USSR, R. Conquest published a documentary collection about B. Pasternak (Conquest, 1961). Therefore, R. Conquest's intellectual discourse regarding the "Khrushchev era" is not an accident, but a completely logical and natural choice of scientific priorities. The study of F. Dostoyevsky's work can be explained by the suggestion of Western literary fashion, and the interest in O. Solzhenitsyn's work corresponded to the worldview preferences of a Western intellectual and a purely professional interest.

R. Conquest's scientific legacy is mainly associated with his world bestsellers – the monographs "Great Terror" (1968) and "Harvest of Sorrow" (1986) (Conquest, 1968; Conquest, 1986). The rest of the works of the Anglo-American scholar, which related to the interaction of power and politics, the Soviet nomenclature dynasty (Conquest, 1961), features of the Khrushchev era, were overlooked by researchers. They were published in the first half of the 60s, i.e. before the appearance of the book "The Great Terror", which brought its author historiographical recognition. The monograph "Russia under Khrushchev" reveals the totalitarian essence of the Soviet political system, the follower and heir of which was M. Khrushchev (Conquest, 1965). At the beginning of the 1960s, when M. Khrushchev was still in power, R. Conquest worked as a literary editor of "The Spectator" magazine, skillfully combining journalistic activities with scientific and historical studies.

M. Khrushchev's "thaw", even despite the debunking of Stalin's "personality cult", did not melt the ice of the Cold War. Spiritual liberalization of a cultural life, selective rehabilitation and condemnation of Stalinist repressions in the 1930s diverted attention from the authoritarian style of government during the "Khrushchev era". A new ruler adhered to the traditionally tough course of the USSR's foreign policy, which ignored the norms of international law (the "Nazi-Soviet Pact" of 1939 and the seizure of Poland, the aggression against Finland in the autumn of 1939, the occupation of the Baltic states in 1940, the invasion of Hungary in 1956). The list of these actions appeared in R. Conquest's article in 1968 (Conquest, 1968, pp. 733–742), i.e. a few months before the events in Czechoslovakia. During the Caribbean crisis, according to R. Conquest, the "uncompromising extremism" of M. Khrushchev and his nomenclature entourage was revealed.

Western analysts focused on theoretical, ideological and nomenclature aspects of the Soviet political system functioning. R. Conquest, although he belonged to the founders of the totalitarianism theory, focused on historical discourse mainly. He was interested in the issue of a dynastic inheritance of the party nomenclature, starting from its founder Lenin and his "faithful disciple" Stalin. Taking into account the content and number of published author's books, one can fully agree with L. Samuelson's opinion about R. Conquest, the "pioneer", among sovietologists of the Cold War period (Samuelson, 2009). R. Conquest's scientific style was characterized by consistency and systematic analysis of the Soviet political system. The scholar "split" it into structural and functional atoms, considered events and phenomena critically.

Systematicity, as a conceptual and theoretical tool, was used by R. Conquest to reveal a complex phenomenon – M. Khrushchev's "de-Stalinization" policy. Its complexity is due to the presence of a humanitarian factor, i.e. public reception of rehabilitation, condemnation of Stalin's "personality cult" and sprouts of artistic creativity. The definition "Khrushchev's

“de-Stalinization” used by us constitutes a single linguistic historical whole. No one will deny M. Khrushchev’s personal involvement in the so-called debunking of Stalin’s criminal acts. During his lifetime and for several years, no one dared to criticize the deceased leader. M. Khrushchev was the first one. At the 20th party congress, in March-July of 1953, He was courageous to defeat L. Beria. There was a long struggle between them for power, and not for the establishment of principles of social justice and overcoming the system of authoritarianism. In 1957 elimination of a personal influence of V. Molotov, L. Kaganovich, and H. Malenkov, i.e. double stalinists, strengthened M. Khrushchev’s political and nomenclature positions. “De-Stalinization” took place “during the reign of M. Khrushchev”, therefore it was of a completely “Khrushchev” nature (Konkvest, 2009, p. 82). It is connected not only with his name, but also with the political style of government, worldview and ideological beliefs.

According to R. Conquest, the “rule of Khrushchev” is limited to the chronological framework of 1961 – 1964, but in fact the party leadership began with the overthrow of Beria in 1953. At the party congress M. Khrushchev’s speech established a one-man leadership with authoritarian powers that lasted for almost 10 years. At the beginning of the 1960s, a relative liberalization of a spiritual life was observed, which seemed to be a certain marker of “de-Stalinization”. The rehabilitation and condemnation of mass political terror of the 1930s strengthened its humanistic essence, although “there was no complete and consistent explanation of the causes of terror” (Konkvest, 2003). Situational criticism of Stalin, which M. Khrushchev resorted to from time to time, fueled his personal authority and restrained the hot-headed stalinists who were lurking in various positions.

M. Khrushchev’s “de-Stalinization” had several tactical and strategic objectives: to shift all the blame for the repressions to Stalin, to use the exposure of “personality cult” for the internal struggle for power after the death of the leader, to compromise Stalin’s closest circle publicly by covering the circumstances of the terror under the conditions of controlled rehabilitation, to make impossible any involvement of the initiator of the leader’s criticism in the repressions, to calm the society after the exhausting war, mass famine and social depression of the post-war years. R. Conquest expressed his own opinion on each of them. Based on the materials of the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, M. Khrushchev’s speech at a closed session, and the participants’ memories, the American analyst carefully tracks the sharp accents in the speech of the “young stalinist” regarding the “capricious tyrant”. M. Khrushchev did not consider Stalin a “crazy despot”, he even tried to find signs of a motivated rationalism in his actions “in the name of protecting the gains of the revolution”. In this he saw the tragedy of the situation, the functional apogee of which was terror. R. Conquest denies such an interpretation, since the tragedy had another social dimension – millions of victims. M. Khrushchev sought to show a negative image of Stalin, emphasizing his “morbid suspicion” and “distrust of people”, even anthropological vagueness and worthlessness. He enjoyed Stalin’s personal intervention in the writing of the “Short Biography”, in the formulation of sentences about his own genius (Conquest, 1999, p. 120). Stalin edited the works of the Soviet writers, film scripts of directors, adjusted them to the Bolshevik ideology and mental representation of the leader. The sophisticated “Stalin school of falsifications” was emphasized by L. Trotsky, the unsurpassed Bolshevik orator of the time (Trotsky, 1989).

In M. Khrushchev’s statements and accents regarding the repressions, Stalin’s personal involvement in them appears. He did not call the former patron a criminal, but cautiously hinted at “a lot of incomprehensible and mysterious” concerning the circumstances of

S. Kirov's death. For the first time, at the party congress, it was announced, albeit secretly. R. Conquest indicates a gradual nature of M. Khrushchev's judgments: in February of 1956, he mentioned the circumstances of S. Kirov's unexpected death, and in 1961, at the 22nd Party Congress, he demanded a public investigation of the assassination attempt. It is no coincidence that on February 7, 1964, the newspaper "Pravda" wrote about a planned and carefully "thought out crime". M. Khrushchev chose a very successful tactic in covering the circumstances of S. Kirov's murder: to maintain a degree of tension, to shift the blame to Stalin. For R. Conquest, who wrote a monograph on the political assassination of S. Kirov (Conquest, 1990), a personal involvement of Stalin did not cause any doubt. Dosing the truth, M. Khrushchev's careful statements regarding the assassination of S. Kirov seemed to be a kind of preventive measure under the conditions of intra-party struggle and dissatisfaction with his rule. M. Khrushchev inherited the forms and methods of political intrigues, and the most importantly the power apparatus of the state security services, but he did not use them in a traditional way of terror against opponents and even conspirators. They were afraid of repression, that is why, Kaganovich appealed to M. Khrushchev not to use Stalin's methods. R. Conquest points at this circumstance, characterizing the peculiarity of "Khrushchev's rule", which suffered from excessive demagoguery and demonstrative determination, but in the fight against collective conspiracy in 1964 he did not use repression against representatives of another political dynasty.

Back in 1968, R. Conquest reached an important scientific conclusion: the "stalinist" Khrushchev seized power through political intrigues and condemnation of Stalin's "cult of personality", but he did not reform the totalitarian system of power, he did not get rid of warlordism. The epithets "stalinist", "a prominent young stalinist" addressed to M. Khrushchev by an American researcher contradicted the self-proclaimed title of "anti-stalinist". The scholar recognizes positive effects of rehabilitation, the release of thousands of political prisoners, but it turned out to be "illogical and partial", "inconsistent and random" (Konkvest, 2009, p. 799). Selective rehabilitation in 1956 – 1967 looked strange: the "shot stalinists" Postyshev, Kosior and the others "received honour", while the party's "favourite" M. Bukharin continued to be considered convicted justly (Konkvest, 2009, p. 788). M. Khrushchev did not deny the use of torture to obtain "confessions", which the victims later refused later. For some reason, the image of unconquered stalinists appears in the political "confessions" of M. Khrushchev. The repressed, who returned, did not condemn Stalin, and Commander Ya. Yakir even shouted before the execution: "Long live Stalin!". Why did M. Khrushchev pay attention to similar phenomena of the tragic fate of the doomed? The initiator of the all-Union amnesty cried for his "friend" S. Ordzhonikidze, who died of a heart attack in 1937 under strange circumstances, but he cursed the "fascist agent". P. Postyshev and the "despicable Trotskyist" H. Piatakov. And the very "Khrushchev version" of Sergo's death surprises with an undisguised cynicism: suicide out of despair. Declaring it, M. Khrushchev, according to R. Conquest's conviction, psychologically put pressure on the former stalinist entourage, kept them in awe. The preservation of loyalty to the leader by the prisoners of Stalin's camps seemed an absurd interpretation, which seeped into M. Khrushchev's speeches. Life in Stalin's camps, is covered by R. Conquest in the book "Kolyma" comprehensively (Conquest, 1978), refutes the "Khrushchev version" about the fanatical devotion of the repressed, although there were exceptions.

The merit of R. Conquest, which demonstrated a critical interpretation of the "Khrushchev era", consists in its systematic assessment. He was the first to draw attention to the "political

dividends” received by M. Khrushchev from “his anti-stalinism”, because he “pushed away many potential competitors from power” (Konkvest, 2009, p. 799). The conclusion is quite original, which combines the skills of an experienced political scholar and a professional historian. The reformer M. Khrushchev, as noted by R. Conquest, carefully monitored the “liberalization” of a spiritual life and public space, especially the preparation for publication of archival documents about the party purges, in which he may have been involved. Stalin punished some people, pardoned the others. M. Khrushchev’s rehabilitation justified the outspoken stalinists who participated in the organization of terror, but left thousands of innocent victims, even dead, in the camps. In October of 1964, when M. Khrushchev’s “fall” took place, to R. Conquest’s deep conviction, the “rehabilitation process” started by him actually stopped, and discussions about “delicate problems of the stalinist past” were also curtailed (Konkvest, 2009, p. 800). The Holodomor should have belonged to them, but M. Khrushchev did not mention it in his report at the 20th Congress.

In the monograph “The Great Terror” M. Khrushchev’s surname is mentioned about seventy times, but never once in the context of the causes, circumstances and consequences of the Holodomor. The mysterious silence of the fact of Stalin’s personal participation in the organization of the mass murder of Ukrainian peasants by artificial starvation, which could really expose his involvement in the genocide of the Ukrainians. The “young stalinist” in the embroidered coat and wide-brimmed hat, in which M. Khrushchev appeared in public, did not dare to take this bold step. In “Harvest of Sorrows”, R. Conquest returned to this problem, emphasizing that “in the time of Khrushchev” they began to mention the “famine” of 1932 – 1933, but not the politician. At the same time, there was an intellectual emancipation of individual writers and historians who tried to look at the tragic past critically. R. Conquest mentioned the Soviet historian V. Danilov, who was the first one to recognize forced collectivization, but was oppressed during the “post-Khrushchev period” (Konkvest, 2007, p. 199). In fact, M. Khrushchev avoided public recognition of the historical fact of the Holodomor, i.e. a strong argument for the real accusation of Stalin. In the 1950s, when Western analysts came to the conclusion about the genocidal component of the Holodomor, M. Khrushchev reflected on the agrotechnical reasons for the decline in grain production, on the fallacy of the “biological” yield method.

In the “Death Register” section, R. Conquest used a quote by M. Khrushchev from his memoirs regarding the number of victims: “No one counted them” (Konkvest, 2007, p. 343). Personally he knew that “people were dying in huge numbers”, but he remained silent at the critical moment of Stalin’s condemnation, because he himself participated in the organization of grain procurement in the 1930s and the 1940s. R. Conquest, as a great humanist, assumed that M. Khrushchev intended to “declassify this issue”, but during the “thaw” the circumstances of the Holodomor had been never “entered into the history books” (Konkvest, 2007, p. 393). It’s a pity, because otherwise History teachers could quote M. Khrushchev’s testimony about “a train at Kyiv station loaded with corpses” of famine victims (Konkvest, 2007, p. 370). M. Khrushchev avoided highlighting the causes of the postwar famine of 1946 – 1947, because he was personally involved in its organization personally, as evidenced by published archival documents (Smolii, 1996). He constantly consulted with Stalin about the methods and volumes of seizure of Ukrainian bread, informed him about the tragic consequences.

The Conclusions. Therefore, it should be noted that the interpretations expressed by R. Conquest (“de-Stalinization”, “stalinist Khrushchev”, “political dividends”) became the property of a new historiographical discourse. There is a contradictory syllogism

between a theoretical concept and a historical fact (event, phenomenon). We do not doubt the origin of the expression "Khrushchev's "de-Stalinization", because M. Khrushchev was its initiator and representative. It corresponded to his ideological beliefs and mental preferences, political thinking and nomenclature reception of stalinism. M. Khrushchev's personal participation in debunking Stalin's "personality cult", R. Conquest believed, helped to strengthen the political positions of the new party leader. He managed to discredit Stalin relatively and temporarily, but not to overcome the phenomenon of the "cult of personality" in the political system of the USSR, which was based on authoritarian leadership. It lasted for 10 years of "Khrushchev's rule", partially limited by the principles of collegiality and intra-party democracy. The announced and selectively implemented rehabilitation of the repressed inhibited the possibility of a new wave of political terror. It did not disappear, but only acquired other forms of implementation. Political censorship, which limited the activities of creative intelligentsia, which felt the breath of the "thaw" did not go anywhere. The dramatic fate of B. Pasternak, who suffered moral, psychological and administrative oppression, is an additional proof of ideological pressure. R. Conquest, who deeply studied the political system of the USSR, knew the totalitarian origin of the communist regime perfectly, was right when he wrote that "in the era of Khrushchev, "de-Stalinization" did not go beyond clear boundaries and was limited to the condemnation of certain manifestations of Stalinism". Stalin was carried out of the mausoleum with due honours, but no further than the Kremlin wall to watch the rest.

Terminologically and chronologically, the "Stalin era" and "Khrushchev's rule" differed, but they were parts of a single structural and functional whole, i.e. the Soviet political system. In fact, the Stalinist institutions of power were preserved, and instead of fanatically loyal stalinists, their trustworthy disciples, mentioned by an American scholar (D. Korotchenko, A. Suslov, L. Brezhnev), appeared. They worked in the party bodies of the 1930s, so they were well trained in the methods of coercion and terror. The essence of Stalinism, to R. Conquest's deep conviction, is not in its external manifestations – the number of victims, but in the functioning of a totalitarian "political system" of a dictatorial type. It consisted in an organic combination of specific institutions: "a totalitarian party is a totalitarian state". The functional twins are inseparable, deeply twisted by the doctrinal foundations of the Bolshevik ideology, which absorbed society at that time. It was Russia, to R. Conquest's deep conviction, that gave "the model of modern totalitarianism". The conclusion, expressed 25 years ago, has not lost its scientific and theoretical relevance and worldview insight of an outstanding Western analyst, who R. Conquest was and remains.

Acknowledgement. We express sincere gratitude to all members of the editorial board for consultations provided during the preparation of the article for publishing.

Funding. The authors did not receive any financial support for the publication of this article.

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The article was received December 18, 2023.

Article recommended for publishing 30/08/2024.