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U.S. Learns From Russia's Lunatic Science

By Alexei Bayer

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From the Age of Enlightenment onward, ratio — or reason — has been seen as the greatest of human qualities, and science has enjoyed unquestioned authority.

But with the establishment of the Communist regime, Russia unexpectedly veered in the opposite direction. Ironically, it did so even as the Soviets embraced Marxism, a brainchild of the Enlightenment, with its atheism, faith in progress and claim to being the only "scientific" method to analyze history and forecast the future. Having declared that it would reorder society along scientific, efficient lines, the Soviets promptly invented a class-based, intuitive science and rejected conventional scientific methods.

It's hard to believe, but the three most successful branches of science of the 20th century that form the foundations of the modern world — nuclear physics, computer science and genetics — were declared bourgeois pseudo-sciences during Josef Stalin's era. The world's leading geneticist, Nikolai Vavilov, received the death sentence, which was later

commuted to 20 years in the gulag, where he died in 1943. Meanwhile, the work of ignoramuses and lunatics was hailed as true biology.

You would think that it was an aberration, but Russia actually charted the path for the rest of the world. In the U.S., for instance, a large portion of the population believes that global warming and climate change are a hoax invented by climate scientists, despite strong scientific evidence to the contrary, some of which is found in their own backyards.

U.S. Senator Marco Rubio, a likely contender for the Republican presidential nomination in 2016, caused a storm recently when he defended the notion that the Earth is no older than its biblical age of 6,000 years. This episode highlights the fact that Charles Darwin's theory of evolution, an integral part of modern biology, is still a controversial subject in the U.S. Ahead of the Nov. 6 presidential election, a large number of top Republicans ignored scientific opinion polls.

Russia is an ailing country. Its rulers no longer exterminate the people, as they did under Stalin, but since around 1980 it has faced a new problem: an unprecedented population decline. Researchers are puzzled as to why so many Russians have so few children, die so young, kill themselves and each other and emigrate.

The irrational decisions of the past, such as the wholesale destruction of Russian villages, continue to reverberate through Russian society and provide at least a partial explanation for the demographic crisis. In addition, irrationality has survived into the post-Soviet era, manifesting itself in self-destructive behavior such as excessive drinking, smoking, reckless and drunk driving and a reluctance to see a doctor. This behavior even extends to the highly educated middle class.

The rejection of reason and rigorous professional standards are particularly salient in Russian politics and government. Lawmakers don't legislate, ministers are shuffled from one post to another and promoted without regard for their professional competence, and a large percentage of the police, investigators and other members of law enforcement are themselves criminals and embezzlers. Incompetence extends to the highest levels of government, with disastrous results for the country and its people.

Americans once were best-known for their practicality and common sense. Lately, they have caught the Russian disease, rejecting the rational and the scientific in favor of a lunatic, faith-based pseudo-science. Over the long run, the U.S. can expect the same Russian consequences. Last year's Republican presidential primaries were a clear illustration of the irrationality the country is embracing.

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