

# Who's Ruder, Genghis Khan or the U.S. Embassy?

In response to "Was Tatar Yoke Really That Bad?" April 19.

Editor,

I am a third-generation American of Russian ancestry and have been living and working in Russia since 1995. Before graduating from Columbia University in 1981, I spent a semester at Leningrad State University, consulting with the late academician Dmitry Likhachyov on my senior-year thesis project, "Russian National Self-Consciousness as Reflected in Literature Before and After the Mongol Occupation." Notwithstanding the recent historical reassessments addressed in the article, the answer to the question posed in the article's title remains an unequivocal "yes — it was really all that bad."

The few linguistic, political and economic-commercial tricks that the Russian (Rus') peoples learned from their Mongol overlords are insignificant in comparison with the damage the Mongol yoke inflicted on the collective Russian psyche. Although there remains room for debate as to the intrinsic merits of the Mongol Empire as a geopolitical entity unto itself, its ultimate legacy was to turn Russians away from Europe forever. Many Russians want to be European; President-elect Vladimir Putin recently commented that the idea of Russia's not being an integral part of Europe strikes him as "strange." I endorse his statement as an expression of intent (as yet unrealized) to accede to a still largely foreign collective heritage and — more importantly — a world view.

Russians, however, are not Europeans, but Eurasians. To a lesser extent, this applies also to Ukrainians and Belarussians. Eurasians are neither Europeans nor Asians, and ultimately strangers to both East and West. This is a historical circumstance inflicted upon

them by their Mongol occupiers during a crucial period in the development of a Russian national self-consciousness.

The issue of inter-ethnic relations between modern Russians (*rossiyane*) and Tatars is a different matter that should be addressed within the political and social dynamic of a multiethnic federal republic. I imagine that today's Tatars — at least the intelligentsia — are also evaluating the significance of the Mongol yoke to the modern reality of Tatarstan in a post-Soviet Russian Federation.

Vladimir Berezansky Jr.  
Moscow

## Embarrassment to U.S.

In response to "Italy, U.S. Big Losers in Visa Rating," April 11.

Editor,

I have followed with interest — and as an American with some embarrassment — the recent article and follow-up

letters to the editor detailing the U.S. Embassy's rather appalling reputation for lack of service, fairness or common courtesy in administering visa applications. That the embassy is considered the worst of the lot by non-Americans is disturbing enough; that Americans would have an equally low opinion of the embassy is more than disturbing.

Example: My passport is nearly out of space for entry and exit stamps — a minor problem, I thought. After four days of telephone calls that got me only busy signals and no answers, I finally got through to the American Citizens Service Office. I was told it would be no problem to have additional pages sewn into my passport, and was told the days and hours when I should come.

When I arrived at the embassy on one of those days, however, I was told that I could not enter the embassy and would have to go to the end of the line of non-American visa applicants. I showed my passport and explained that I was not

there for a visa, that I was a U.S. citizen seeking American Citizens Services, an office separate from the visa application and interview offices. The Russian guard, in English, told me to go to the end of the line.

Perhaps it was impolitic of me to point out that he was speaking in English when he told me he didn't speak English; still, I thought I deserved more of a response than a cynical smile and to again be told to go to the end of the line.

What I found intolerable was the treatment of another American, holding a just-adopted baby; after trying to explain that he had been given an appointment time to be at the embassy, he was ordered in equally rude terms to go to the end of the line. I left and spent the rest of my day dialing the embassy to again listen to busy signals and unanswered phones.

I have been in Moscow since 1995 and have been in the embassy more times than I care to remember: to swim


in the pool, rent the videos, eat at the cafeteria. I have been there to give a reading of one of my novels for some of the former ambassador's staff. I have had friends who were neither embassy staff nor even U.S. citizens admitted without question for aerobics lessons. If I or others like me have been admitted freely for entertainment and without having to wait in line behind hundreds of visa-seekers, why are we not admitted when we need to conduct legitimate embassy business?

Over the past five years, I have been part of or overheard discussions about "contingency plans" in the event of an emergency. Not once have I ever heard anyone say that contacting the embassy is high on his list, if on his list at all. Isn't it disturbing that the very citizens the embassy is here to serve consider it nearly the last place to turn to in an emergency? If a citizen isn't admitted to his own embassy on a normal day, if he cannot get someone to answer the phone, what might he expect in a crisis?

In the article, an embassy spokesman declined comment on the U.S. Embassy's bottom-of-the-heap rating. Though some of us would disagree, perhaps the U.S. Embassy has no obligation to explain to foreign nationals seeking visas why it chooses to treat them so rudely and arbitrarily. But I think that U.S. citizens in Moscow deserve an explanation of why their embassy refuses U.S. citizens access to their own embassy to conduct the very business the embassy is charged with conducting, and chooses to do so by proxy through Russian guards.

It's no wonder that, when it comes to public confidence and respect, the U.S. Embassy finds itself at the end of the line.

William D. Pease  
Moscow



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*We do edit letters, mostly for spelling and grammar, to bring transliterations in line and for other nitpicky moments. In some cases we also are forced to cut letters to make them fit a space — though we try to take care not to distort or water down the writer's point.*

*We look forward to hearing from you!*