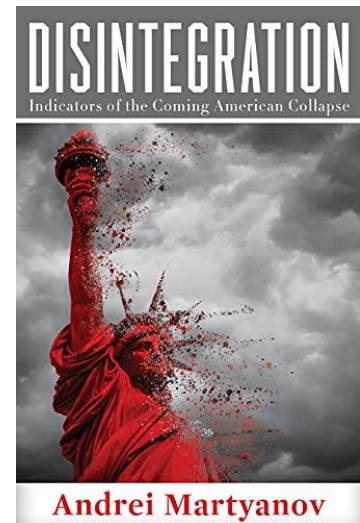


A Nationalist Critique of Western Elites
a review of

Disintegration:

Indicators of the Coming American Collapse

By Andrei Martyanov (2021)



Martyanov is a US social conservative, an aerospace manager hailing from the military establishment of the old Soviet empire (born in Baku, Azerbaijan). As such he knows how raw power works. In particular he knows that military prowess depends on both technology and will, the latter normally the product of a strong nationalism, at least in recent history.

At first glance this might put him on the Right of the political spectrum. But that would be a mistake, since he really takes to task the whole US establishment, both Democratic and Republican, with the Ukraine War as a prime example, even though the book was finished well before the war turned hot. He makes some very good points, except in overly hyperbolic language at times, while he misses the boat on other issues.

On the plus side I finally came to understand the overwhelming importance of missile attacks and defenses in modern conventional warfare. This has been on full display in the Ukraine, where the Russian tank attack fizzled but missiles could reach anywhere in the absence of strong anti-missile defensive systems. Turns out that the Russians are far ahead of the US on both fronts, with their defensive system being highly successfully against the US missile attacks on Syria.

The Russian hypersonic missile is a big thing precisely because the US has no defense against it and will not have such a defense for a long time (it's simply too fast and too maneuverable to target on radar, let alone shoot down). Yet Martyanov appears to have overestimated the Russian will to fight and its organizational prowess, especially as compared to the Ukrainians, who have been defending their homeland. That is, empires rely on both overwhelming military power and weak adversaries. Even then the US has lost or screwed up many foreign ventures in recent decades (Vietnam, Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, ...) against local nationalism, especially when it's allied with a major opposing power.

Martyanov rightly takes the US to task for failing to have a competent foreign policy establishment, let alone a military establishment, capable of debating big strategies. The basic problem is the inability to think outside cultural bubbles. In this respect he comes across as almost leftwing, definitely opposed to both neoliberalism and the neocons.

One of his key failings is his ignorance of limits-to-growth, such as climate change, ecosystem collapse, and resource depletion (especially peak oil and the like). A recent study found that over 99% of scientific papers on climate change agreed that human causation is the dominant factor today. He totally ignores this despite the priority he puts on scientific and engineering (STEM graduates) versus graduates in the humanities and law who, he says, don't understand how the world works.

He has a whole chapter on energy, and certainly understands its fundamental importance. Yet he shows no awareness that the peak of global oil production is nigh, or already past (Nov, 2018), and what that will mean for global economic growth and conflict. To be sure, this will put Russia in the catbird seat, along with the US, the Saudis, and a few other petro states, but only if they don't become big targets. Meanwhile coal is dirty and not far behind in its limits, while natural gas, though

much cleaner, is very expensive to transport globally and a far more potent green house gas when it leaks.

Likewise, Martyanov understands that persistent trade deficits are disastrous for US power: the US “didn’t really have to work or produce much if it didn’t want to” (p 25), resulting in excessive consumerism and “full-bloomed condensation toward the rest of the world” (p 26), otherwise known as “American exceptionalism”. The resulting de-industrialization and financialization has meant hedonism for top echelons but “numerous communities which looked like third world slums, with their dilapidation, dirt, lawlessness, drug usage, and homelessness” (p 34).

Yet he fails to grasp that the underlying “debt financing” is not real debt - it is actually the printing of digital money in such a way that the supposed debts may always be paid back by simply printing more money, as is explained by Modern Monetary Theory. And these purported debts may only accumulate because the US dollar is the global reserve currency, meaning that countries must hold it not only for trading purposes but also as a financial cushion and shield against speculative attacks.

The only real limits on “fiat currency” - the printing of money by a truly sovereign power - are inflation and, in the US case, growing threats to dethrone it’s reserve currency status. In practice another major problem is that the “inflation” that is measured is only the Consumer Price Index, which ignores inflation of financial assets, leading to financial crashes as a primary limiting factor. That’s right – it’s even more ugly than Martyanov realizes.

...He also has chapters on “geoeconomics” and “making things” – the economic equivalent of “geopolitics”; that is, economic warfare, and shows how the US is failing, having let China become our factory. To Martyanov this represents a lack of commitment to US nationalism, it being replaced by a delusional globalism that will fail when confronted with big power politics. He did not realize that Putin’s nationalistic

imperial ambitions, as demonstrated in the Ukraine War, has its own delusions.

Then Martyanov takes Western Elites to task (including European elites): “If the US leaders reveal themselves to be incompetent bunglers, why should foreign powers listen to their advice?” (p 110). Here he is talking “soft power”, not just military power, complaining that “America is a country steeped in extremes, intense ambitions, and grandiosity” (p 112). “We are now little more than the laughingstock of the world, armed with nuclear weapons. And if that does not scare you, nothing will”, quoting Scott Ritter (p 113).

Then Martyanov really goes after Kissinger, Brzezinski, and the neocons, while Russian Studies in the US are “little more than a propaganda machine” (p 125), with no debates on “grand strategy”, only the assumption of US “primacy”. Instead “it is increasingly an Orwellian world in the process of suppressing or getting rid of all of those values ... due to the Age of Enlightenment” (p 132). In particular, the Left is angry and anarchic, but mired in postmodern Critical Race and Queer theories, while the Right is equally angry, while bogged down in “laissez faire economic activity with its financial and corporate beneficiaries” (p 142).

Thus Martyanov’s “indicators of American collapse” focus more on cultural decay, including an economic and cultural globalism that fragments and weakens the homeland. Of course, this looks even worse when limits to growth are added on. But primarily he wants a strong nationalism at the core of US empire, one that would not degrade US workers (a leftist cause) or overwhelm the populace with unassimilated immigrants (a rightist cause).

His basic claim is that “multicultural societies, no matter what ideology or political creed, are always threatened by impulses towards separatism and dissolution” (p 5). However, in practice this statement is something of a tautology, referring only to those societies where cultural

assimilation has not occurred. In the real world many cultural groups adapt to a dual culturalism – one for their own communities, another for the nation. In fact, this is a promising model for an eventual global democracy, where it could become a multi-level culturalism. But to Martyanov, steeped in nationalism, this just means that “nobody is minding the shop” (p 201).