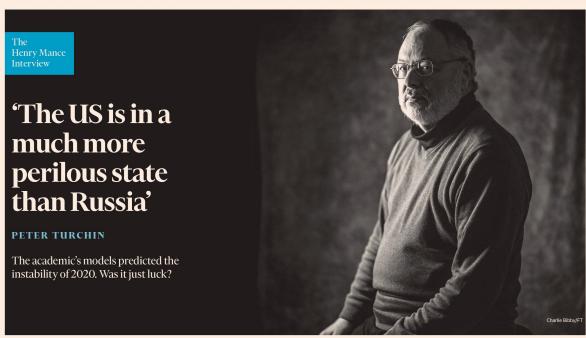
FEATURES



n 2010, the journal Nature asked experts to predict their fields a decade in the future. Google's director of research ventured that, by 2000, most search queries would be spoken, nottyped. Harvard geneticis said nano-memory devices would harness bacteria's ability to navigate the Earth's magnetic field.

Then Peter Turchin came forward. Originally an ecologist, he made perhaps the boldest prediction: the next decade was "likely to be a period of growing instability in the United States and western Europe". His models showed instability could spike "around 2020".

This was February 2010, before

"around 2020".
This was February 2010, before Occupy Wall Street or the Arab Spring, the Tea party was a novelty, Donald Trump was just a TV star. Yet in 2020, rots and demonstrations did rise sharply. Unlike other experts, Turchin seemed to have been vindicated.
Turchin's forecast was not simply a year of unrest, but a prolonged crisis. "These periods of high instability typically last many years. Five years is short; 10 to 15 years is the most typical length," heasys now.

'As societies move [closer to] crisis, individuals probably cannot make too much difference'

Turchin gives Michael Bloomberg and Peter Thiel as examples — compete over a finite amount of political power. Too many graduates emerge from university overqualified. What brings down the states is intra-ellie infighting. Right mow, Trump is "the counter-ellie." The ruling dass. Is "teall of the counter-ellie." The ruling dass. Is "teal out the rule. The ruling dass. Is "teal to the counter-ellie." The ruling dass. Is "teal to the counter-ellie." The ruling dass. Is "teal to the counter-ellie." The question is whether there's going to be a macro-violence, between the ruling the leader of the counter-ellies. The ruling dasset with the counter-ellies. The ruling dasset with the result of the ruling the ruli

like the insect populations he stouers are an ecologist.

The son of a dissident Soviet physicist, expelled by Moscow in 1977, Turchin speaks with a thick Russian accent. His precise methods are often lost in breathless detail. His basic hypothesis is that societies exist on a cycle of integration (cohesion) followed by disintegration,

and 1800.

Wealthy Americans checked their own power between the 1930s and 1960s, accepting income tax rates of more than 90 per cent. But today's elites — by which Turchin means the richest 10 per cent — are unwilling to follow suit. "We are back to very similar attitudes that were prevalent during the Gilded Age."

Which society is closer to macro-breakdown: Russia or the US? "Defi-nitely not Russia" External pressures have unified the country, he argues. Doesn't Russia suffer even worse economic inequalities than the US? No. says Turchin. The ratio of workers to vacancies is "very favourable to workers" since the invasion of Ukraine, after people fled the country or were drafted into the army, fewer immigrants arrived and industrial production increased. Yevgeny Prigozhin's failed uprising was "a good stress test. Everybody was against him. Without doubt, the United States is in a much more perilous state right now." There is something discon-certing in Turchin's willingness to discuss the fate of societies in coldly amoral terms.

amoral terms.

If individuals' choices matter, then Turchin's hope of predicting societies seems doomed to failure. In End Times, he says people "severely overestimate the power of rulers". More recently, he has said that selfless leaders may yet

were prevalent during

save the US from disaster. Which is it?

ending in crisis. The cycle restarts roughly very 200 years. "A couple of generations pass from a previous time of trouble. Elites forget about that and start reconfiguring the economy in ways that favour themselves." To predict distintegration more presented that the properties of the method of the control of the state of the method of the control of the state of the method of the control of but they times that, and in a democrasy why do you want to piss off people?

"Iam convinced that we overestimate the importance of individuals. In the convenience of individuals of the convenience of the

climate effect."
In the past, Turchin has talked of creating a Federal Reserve for societal risks. Given the Fed's cross in forecast-ing inflation, he now favours another analogy.
"One hundred years ago, people could not predict weather. Now we can predict weather a week shead. What we would like is a social weather service that

big model, and the model would tell us, 'We're going to have a social quake several years ahead.' And we would start yelling, 'Political leaders, you've got to take notice.''

take notice."

Except the moisture in the atmosphere doesn't have free will, I say. "No, but we overestimate how much free will affects the movement of populations of millions of people."

Turchin's next project is to build a model for 10 countries "like China, UK, Russla, Germany. Then we run the model for 10 years. We publish the scripts on which the model is based. And we see what happens."
Yet, If crises come on 50- and 200-year cycles, Turchin may never have to predict another one in his lifetime. In his line of work, maybe you only need to be lucky once.



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