

VOL. 11 ISSUE 4 | FALL 2017

*in*FOCUS

QUARTERLY

RUSSIA: INSIDE THE ENIGMA



Stephen Blank on How Russia Underachieves | **Christopher Caldwell** on Putin's Rise | **Ilya Levkov** on Opposition to Putin | **Nikolay Kozhanov** on Russia's Middle East Policy | **Ariel Cohen** on U.S.-European Relations | **Anders Åslund** on Russia's Economy | **Paul M. Joyal** on the Kremlin's Cyber Capabilities | **Shoshana Bryen** reviews *The Invention of Russia*

Featuring an Interview with Brig. Gen. Kevin Ryan, USA (Ret.)

LETTER FROM THE PUBLISHER

In 1939, Winston Churchill said, “I cannot forecast to you the action of Russia. It is a riddle, wrapped in a mystery, inside an enigma; but perhaps there is a key. That key is Russian national interest.”

And yet, since the collapse of the Soviet Union and the demise of communism in 1991, we in the West have generally considered Russia a “normal” country - with elections, (relatively) free markets, a (relatively) free press, and rule of law. Russian Jews – once the litmus test for Russian accountability to Western norms – come and go, doing business in Moscow while living in Israel, Germany or New York. But Russia evolved from a different place to a different place. Without a merchant class, protected property rights, and the habit of law protecting the people from the government – not protecting government assets from the people – the idea of Russia creating a 21st century Western-style capitalist state in a matter of decades is as odd as imagining creating one in Iraq. Or Afghanistan.

This issue of inFOCUS will bring you Russia well grounded in its own roots, its own history and its own peculiar view of the world. Perhaps then Russian national interest may emerge.



Stephen Blank, Anders Åslund, and Christopher Caldwell put Russian politics, economics, and Vladimir Putin himself, into their historic context. Ilya Levkov brings us up to date on domestic divisions following anti-corruption demonstrations in the spring. Paul Joyal discusses the effectiveness of Russia's cyber warfare capabilities. Nikolay Khozunov considers Russian interests in the Middle East; Ariel Cohen addresses NATO's concerns. Shoshana Bryen reviews *The Invention of Russia* by Arkady Ostrovsky.

And don't miss our interview with Brigadier General Kevin Ryan, USA (Ret.), former U.S. Defense Attaché in Moscow.

If you appreciate what you've read, I encourage you to make a contribution to the Jewish Policy Center. As always, you can use our secure site: <http://www.jewishpolicycenter.org/donate>

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Matthew Brooks".

Matthew Brooks,
Executive Director

inFOCUS VOLUME 11 | ISSUE 4

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inFOCUS is published by the

Jewish Policy Center,

50 F Street, NW, Suite 100

Washington, DC 20001.

(202) 638-2411

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Frozen in Backwardness: How Russia Underachieves

by **STEPHEN BLANK**

“Something else that is an extremely important thing and distinguishes Russia from the other powers is that we have preserved the important resource of our historical heritage. With all the revolutionary changes, its historical matrix was reproduced.” – Vyacheslav Nikonov, Russian politician and grandson of Vyacheslav Molotov

“The dead hand of all the generations of the past weighs upon the brain of the living like a nightmare.” – Karl Marx

Backwardness has characterized Russia throughout its existence. Repeated and often herculean – if not also epically tragic – attempts to overcome this backwardness in a single bound have repeatedly failed, leaving Russia essentially as backward as it was before. This trajectory is the case today and will continue into the future. Thanks to Western sanctions and the structurally embedded defects of Russia’s economy, even if growth is occurring according to Russian officials (whose testimony is of dubious value) Russian economists admit that backwardness will last well into the 2020s ensuring another period of stagnation. Russia only returned to its 1990 GDP in 2008 after the depression of the 1990s and the oil-driven boom after 1998-99, then to enter into what has been another decade of virtually no net growth. We clearly are dealing with a repeated pattern of Russian history and an economy dominated by recurrent cycles of boom-and-bust.

But why does this pattern reassert itself with depressing monotony? This

essay offers a brief answer with the understanding that fully accounting for this phenomenon requires a much longer composition and study. Stated briefly, the answer to this question is that Russia’s political system and the culture based upon it are at fault. Russia’s culture is arguably a “frozen” one, to use the renowned anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss’ term.

■ 21st Century Neo-Tsarism

Both Nikonov and Marx are right. Russia has regressed to a neo-tsarist facsimile with an admixture of Leninism that prevents it from moving forward and escaping its nightmare of autocratic rule. Many foreign and domestic commentators – from Richard Pipes in the 1970s to Ian Bremmer, Richard Hellie,

tsarist and Soviet patrimonialism as described by Steven Rosefelde and Stefan Hedlund. Today’s Russia constitutes the latest replication of the patrimonial state discerned by Max Weber and subsequent Russian and Western historians. Weber wrote:

Russia does not and cannot efficiently operate according to the neoclassical economic principles (democratic free enterprise) claimed by many to assure its eventual entry into West-utopia, a Shangri-la where everyone completely and competitively maximizes his and her utility in the private, public (democracy) and civic (civil empowerment) domains. The institutions which thwart Russian Pareto optimality are – autocracy,

This system actually represents the antithesis of a market economy because there is neither an unconditional right to private property under law, nor any authority answerable to law.

Peter Baker, and Susan Glasser more recently - have noticed this trend and its impact on the state. Not only do we see an autocratic ruler but we also see the trademark economic backwardness of Russian history and state control of the economy vested in leader Vladimir Putin’s entourage. Indeed the state owns about 70 percent of the overall economy. Moreover the structure of the economy bears a remarkable resemblance to

primacy of autocratic freehold ownership, edict over constitution, the supremacy of autocracy over private rights (hence servility), and primacy of command and administratively supervised rent-granting governance over free enterprise, democracy and civil liberty. From the neoinstitutionalist perspective, Russian governance (including the state, politics, economics, and civil society) boils

down to autocratic rent-granting, rent-seeking, rent-creating, rent-controlling, and rent-management rather than individually empowered, complete and competitive utility seeking.

Patrimonialism means the Tsar (Putin) owns the state and national economy, while there are no property rights under law. Rather, property is held only on condition of state service. Therefore there is no market, though there are individual markets, and there is no concept of property rights, human rights, or

...as Dmitry Trenin has said, “Russia is ruled by the people who own it.”

a state under law. Law is an arm of the state and we have rule by law rather than rule of law.

Although some misguided Western analysts believe that Russia has built a market economy, in fact Russia cannot follow China or the West as long as it retains what Nikonov called its “historical matrix,” namely the conjoined system of political and economic power that now firmly grips the country. Indeed, this system actually represents the antithesis of a market economy because there is neither an unconditional right to private property under law, nor any authority answerable to law. Law merely drapes the state’s use of force. The essence of Russia’s continuing autocracy is precisely that the tsar and his minions are not accountable to any law or institution other than their conscience or, as Dmitry Trenin has said, “Russia is ruled by the people who own it.” Moreover, as long as this system prevails, Russia will be consigned to a diminishing position in Europe and to the status of China and Asia’s raw materials appendage. Indeed, this is already happening, according to Trenin. Russia’s control over the countries of the

Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS, also known as the Russian Commonwealth) has long been slipping because it is inherently uncompetitive.

■ **The System is Corruption**

Since power and property are fused, as is the case under feudalism, the system is not corrupt. Rather the system is corruption. Consequently Putin’s cronies from the KGB, FSB, other police organs or other forms of the “old school tie” have been granted or will gain control over lucrative sectors of the economy for their

private control. Furthermore these corporations cannot be privatized and foreign participation is severely restricted. Apart from the defense sector, the state sectors in which these controls are imposed represent the major state-controlled firms in the energy sector, the four largest state-controlled banks, strategic communications companies, the media in television and radio, the new nanotechnology com-

absolutism and breathes new life into Louis XIV’s famous formula “The state is me.” It also brings the principle of a “controllable market” to life: authorized bureaucrats (the new oligarchs) can manage state property almost like private property, whereas private owners (the old oligarchs) must coordinate their actions with the state.

The resemblance of this to the Muscovite service state is obvious.

Thus experts see both rent-granting and rent-seeking elites with resulting political struggles among elites for control over rents, a preference for rent-seeking over investment, massive corruption, asset stripping and corporate raiding, etc. External observers may call this system state capitalism but analysts who know Russian history will recognize in this system an updated and wholly corrupted version of Muscovite patrimonialism and its accompanying service state that therefore bears certain resemblances to Soviet practice. Alternatively we could call it industrial feudalism. Thus Dmitry Furman wrote, “Managed democracies are actually a soft variant of the Soviet system.” And that system in turn was at its heart a new form of Russian autocracy and patrimonialism.

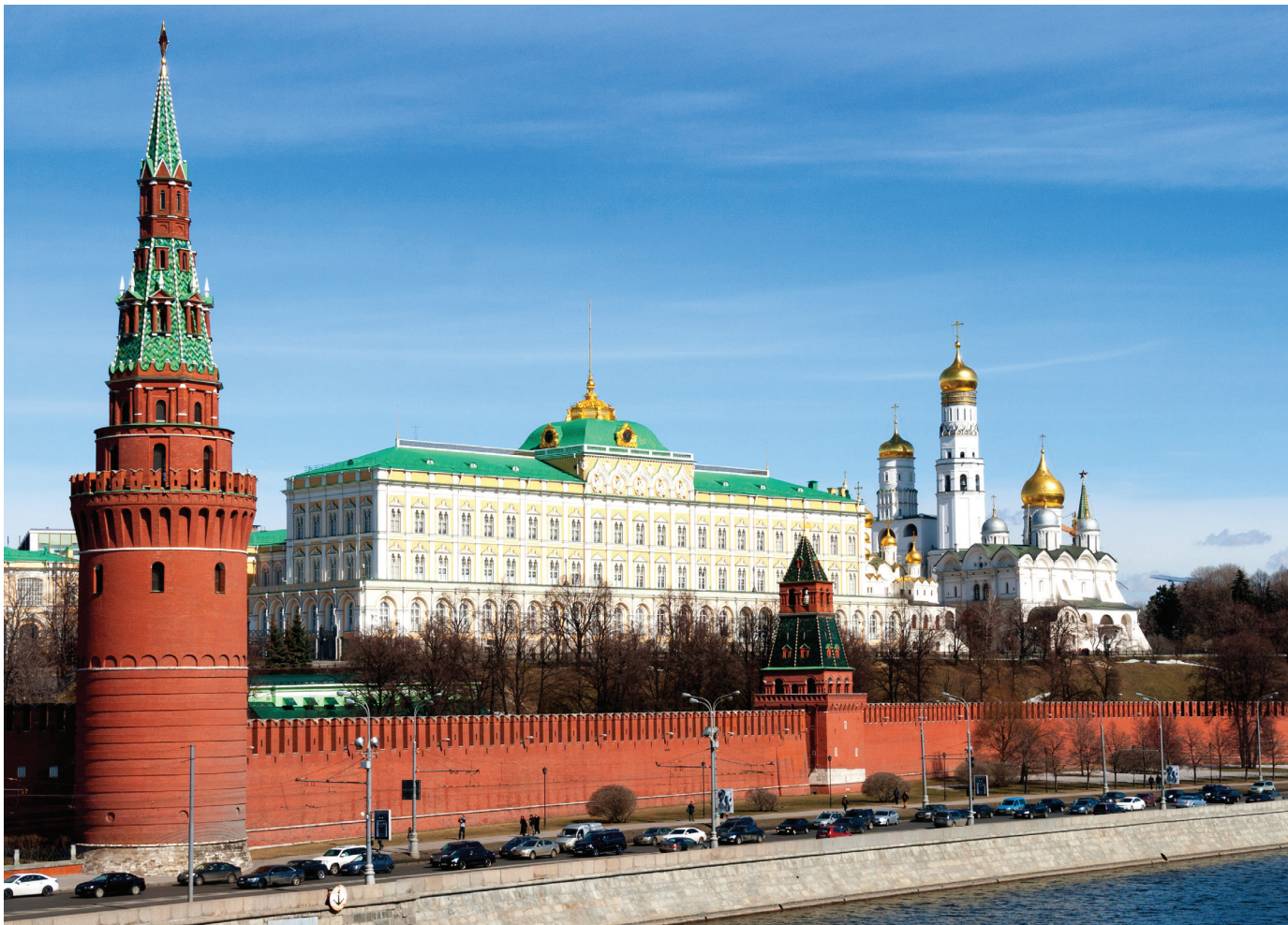
Since power and property are fused, as is the case under feudalism, the system is not corrupt. Rather the system is corruption.

pany, and priority programs in health-care, housing, education, agriculture and the wood processing industry.

Thus Kirill Rogov, cited by Brian Whitmore in *Whither Russia, Inc.?* writes:

By and large, the state corporation is an ideal economic form for a bureaucratic and oligarchic state. It lays the legal foundations of bureaucratic

Obviously in this politicized economy political outcomes trump economic results, rendering the former inherently sub-optimal over the short and long-term. Since this system fuses political and economic power, along with ideological power, all efforts to modify, let alone transform, this system and its accompanying structure of relationships and thought about politics and



The Kremlin, Moscow.

economics are politicized. For substantive economic and political reform to occur, the “mass mind” must change as well. Political, economic, and ideological reform are all inherently and

power in society. The transformation path adopted is not simply a question of common sense (of “market and democracy”); it is inherently political and hotly contested by economic and

becomes how to legitimate a particular path of transformation and make it appear incontestable.

Political, economic, and ideological reform are all inherently and structurally linked as necessary factors of genuine progress, as the Gorbachev years showed us.

structurally linked as necessary factors of genuine progress, as the Gorbachev years showed us. As Maya Eichler wrote in 2005:

Post-communist transformations are fundamentally about conflicts over restructuring political and economic

political actors. Struggles over the form property should take, the control of economic resources, and government policy take place not only at the economic and political level but [also] in the ideological realm. The main issue for those groups seeking power and stability therefore

Absent coherent concurrent reforms in all these areas we get, as we did in 1990-93, systemic breakdown. But this also means that the state and economy exist in a permanent condition of instability, even crisis, whether it be an urgent or a slow-burning, long-term crisis. Yet reform is so contrary to the interests of this deeply entrenched elite that it does not take place absent an urgent, as opposed to slow-burning, crisis.

■ A “Limited Access Order”

Worse yet, Putin’s Russia remains a paradigmatic example in our time of what Douglas North, Barry Weingast, and John Joseph Wallis call a “limited access order” or natural state in their

book *Violence and Social Orders: A Conceptual Framework for Interpreting Recorded Human History*. Such orders are based on personal or personalized norms of rule. They are weakly developed in regard to social organizations

state's structure. Reforms from above and markets, though not A Market, are not ruled out and economic growth can occur, albeit under severely limiting conditions. But those reforms are invariably circumscribed lest they jeopardize

innovate technologically, low productivity and thus a high cost of labor, hostility to foreign technology and investment, as well as massive corruption and diversion of resources to excessive militarization of the economy. Russia cannot presently move from the natural state or limited access order to the modern state and open access order. Only when sufficient steam has generated in the boiler will that happen but it is likely to happen either as upheaval or as a process of further decay and entropy not unlike the destruction of infrastructure and losses of life and capital that characterized the 1990s.

The ongoing demographic disaster presents the clearest indicator of regression and pressure build-up. In the past, many observers of Russia have characterized it as resembling Chichikov's Troika in Gogol's *Dead Souls*, riding off into heavens knows where. But while we cannot predict where and when the long-term consequences of the current regression will manifest themselves in an explosive way, it is quite unlikely that without major change Russia will escape the decay it is so assiduously promoting, whether it is

...the rent-granting state with a rent-seeking elite is not just a major attribute of the system, rather it is an essential precondition of its survival.

and cannot therefore rely on third-person enforcement of legal norms or contracts. Long-term economic growth in such states approaches zero, meaning that for every period of growth there is one of decline in per capita income. The deficiencies of such orders with respect to forming impersonal and binding institutions also mean that they are much more permeated by violence unless potentially violent elements are bought off by rents. As the authors note:

Systematic rent-creation through limited access [to assets] in a natural state is not simply a method of lining the pockets of the dominant coalition; it is the essential means of controlling violence. Rent creation, limits on competition and access to organizations are central to the nature of the state, its institutions, and the society's performance. Limiting the ability to form contractual organizations only to members of the coalition ties the interests of powerful elites directly to the survival of the coalition, thus ensuring their continued cooperation with the coalition.

Thus in such circumstances, the rent-granting state with a rent-seeking elite is not just a major attribute of the system, rather it is an essential precondition of its survival. At the same time war and militarization are inherent in the

the foundations of the system. These are concentration of power at the top and in the capital, extreme centralization, an unlimited autocrat ruling over and through his chosen oligarchs (Boyars) – who are granted rents on condition of service that allows them to gain rents thereby – the service state, the absence of contractual guarantees of property, and the lack of accountability of officials to the law. These attributes, along with the propensity to violence, are all hall-

marks of the natural state or limited access order and of both Putin's Russia and the classic tsarist Russian service state.

■ **The Problem of Evolution**

Undoubtedly such states can evolve toward "open access orders" that characterize the modern democracies of Europe, America, and Asia. But they can also regress, and indeed North, et. al. state explicitly that Putin's Russia is regressing. We can see that these trends in Russian economic policy all but guarantee stunted growth, the inability to

domestic or geopolitical decay or both. In this respect neither Chichikov's Troika nor contemporary Russia is an off-road vehicle. Barring further change, the consequences of the current path will make themselves felt and Russia will find it ever harder to alight from the road to nowhere that it has all too often traveled in the past and is again traversing in the present.

STEPHEN BLANK, *Ph.D.*, is a Senior Fellow at the American Foreign Policy Council and a former MacArthur Fellow at the U.S. Army War College.

How to Think About Vladimir Putin

by **CHRISTOPHER CALDWELL**

Vladimir Putin is a powerful ideological symbol and a highly effective ideological litmus test. He is a hero to populist conservatives around the world and anathema to progressives. I don't want to compare him to our own president, but if you know enough about what a given American thinks of Putin, you can probably tell what he thinks of Donald Trump.

Let me stress at the outset that this is not going to be a talk about what to think of Putin, which is something you are all capable of making up your minds on, but rather how to think about him. And on this, there is one basic truth to remember, although it is often forgotten. Our globalist leaders may have deprecated sovereignty since the end of the Cold War, but that does not mean it has ceased for an instant to be the primary subject of politics.

Vladimir Vladimirovich is not the president of a feminist NGO. He is not a transgender-rights activist. He is not an ombudsman appointed by the United Nations to make and deliver slide shows

system that seeks to erode sovereignty in general and views Russia's sovereignty in particular as a threat.

By American standards, Putin's respect for the democratic process has been fitful at best. He has cracked down on peaceful demonstrations. Political opponents have been arrested and jailed throughout his rule. Some have even been murdered—Anna Politkovskaya, the crusading Chechnya correspondent shot in her apartment building in Moscow in 2006; Alexander Litvinenko, the spy poisoned with polonium-210 in London months later; the activist Boris Nemtsov, shot on a bridge in Moscow in early 2015. While the evidence connecting Putin's own circle to the killings is circumstantial, it merits scrutiny.

Yet if we were to use traditional measures for understanding leaders, which involve the defense of borders and national flourishing, Putin would count as the pre-eminent statesman of our time. On the world stage, who can vie with him? Only perhaps Recep Tayyip Erdoğan of Turkey.

...if we were to use traditional measures for understanding leaders, which involve the defense of borders and national flourishing, Putin would count as the pre-eminent statesman of our time.

about green energy. He is the elected leader of Russia—a rugged, relatively poor, militarily powerful country that in recent years has been frequently humiliated, robbed, and misled. His job has been to protect his country's prerogatives and its sovereignty in an international

When Putin took power in the winter of 1999-2000, his country was defenseless. It was bankrupt. It was being carved up by its new kleptocratic elites, in collusion with its old imperial rivals, the Americans. Putin changed that. In the first decade of this century, he did

what Kemal Atatürk had done in Turkey in the 1920s. Out of a crumbling empire, he rescued a nation-state, and gave it coherence and purpose.

■ *Why Russians Revere Putin*

He disciplined his country's plutocrats. He restored its military strength. And he refused, with ever blunter rhetoric, to accept for Russia a subservient role in an American-run world system drawn up by foreign politicians and business leaders.

His voters credit him with having saved his country.

Why are American intellectuals such ideologues when they talk about the "international system"? Probably because American intellectuals devised that system, and because they assume there can never be legitimate historic reasons why a politician would arise in opposition to it. They denied such reasons for the rise of Rodrigo Duterte in the Philippines. They do the same with Donald Trump. And they have done it with Putin.

They assume he rose out of the KGB with the sole purpose of embodying an evil for our righteous leaders to stamp out. Putin did not come out of nowhere. Russian people not only tolerate him, they revere him. You can get a better idea of why he has ruled for 17 years if you remember that, within a few years of communism's fall, average life expectancy in Russia had fallen below that of Bangladesh. That is an ignominy that falls on Boris Yeltsin. Yeltsin's reckless opportunism made him an indispensable foe of communism in the late 1980s. But it made him an inadequate founding father for a modern state. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, whose writings

about communism give him some claim to be considered the greatest man of the twentieth century, believed the post-communist leaders had made the country even worse. In the year 2000 Solzhenitsyn wrote: “As a result of the Yeltsin era, all the fundamental sectors of our political, economic, cultural, and moral life have been destroyed or looted. Will we continue looting and destroying Russia until nothing is left?” That was the year Putin came to power. He was the answer to Solzhenitsyn’s question.

There are two things Putin did that cemented the loyalty of Solzhenitsyn and other Russians—he restrained the billionaires who were looting the country, and he restored Russia’s standing abroad. Let us take them in turn.

Russia retains elements of a kleptocracy based on oligarchic control of natural resources. But we must remember that Putin inherited that kleptocracy. He did not found it. The transfer of Russia’s natural resources into the hands of KGB-connected communists, who called themselves businessmen, was a tragic moment for Russia. It was also a shameful one for the West.

Western political scientists provided the theft with ideological cover, presenting it as a “transition to capitalism.” Western corporations, including banks, provided the financing. Let me stress the point. The oligarchs who turned Russia into an armed plutocracy within half a decade of the downfall in 1991 of communism called themselves capitalists. But they were mostly men who had been groomed as the next generation of communist *nomenklatura*—people like Boris Berezovsky, Vladimir Gusinsky, and Mikhail Khodorkovsky. They were the people who understood the scope and nature of state assets, and they controlled the privatization programs. They had access to Western financing and they were willing to use violence and intimidation. So they took power just as they had planned to back when they were in communist cadre school—but now as owners, not as bureaucrats. Since

the state had owned everything under communism, this was quite a payout. Yeltsin’s reign was built on these billionaires’ fortunes, and vice-versa.

■ *Returning Russia to the World Stage*

Khodorkovsky has recently become a symbol of Putin’s misrule, because Putin jailed him for 10 years. Khodorkovsky’s trial certainly didn’t meet Western standards. But Khodorkovsky’s was among the most obscene privatizations of all. In his recent biography of Putin, Steven Lee Myers, the former Moscow correspondent for *The New York Times*, calculates that Khodorkovsky and fellow investors paid \$150 million in the 1990s for the main production unit of the oil company Yukos, which came to

This was the last war in which the United States would fight on the same side as Osama Bin Laden, and America used the opportunity to show Russia its lowly place in the international order, treating it as a nuisance and an afterthought. Putin became president a half a year after Yeltsin was maneuvered into allowing the dismemberment of Russia’s ally, Serbia, and as he entered office Putin said: “We will not tolerate any humiliation to the national pride of Russians, or any threat to the integrity of the country.”

The degradation of Russia’s position represented by the Serbian War is what Putin was alluding to when he famously described the collapse of the Soviet Union as “the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century.” This statement is often misunderstood or mischaracterized: he

Yeltsin’s reign was built on these billionaires’ fortunes, and vice-versa.

be valued at about \$20 billion by 2004. In other words, they acquired a share of the essential commodity of Russia—its oil—for less than one percent of its value. Putin came to call these people “state-appointed billionaires.” He saw them as a conduit for looting Russia, and sought to restore to the country what had been stolen from it. He also saw that Russia needed to reclaim control of its vast reserves of oil and gas, on which much of Europe depended, because that was the only geopolitical lever it had left.

The other thing Putin did was restore the country’s position abroad.

He arrived in power a decade after his country had suffered a Vietnam-like defeat in Afghanistan. Following that defeat, it had failed to halt a bloody Islamist uprising in Chechnya. And worst of all, it had been humiliated by the United States and NATO in the Serbian war of 1999, when the Clinton administration backed a nationalist and Islamist independence movement in Kosovo.

did not mean by it any desire to return to communism. But when Putin said he’d restore Russia’s strength, he meant it. He beat back the military advance of Islamist armies in Chechnya and Dagestan, and he took a hard line on terrorism—including a decision not to negotiate with hostage-takers, even in secret.

One theme runs through Russian foreign policy, and has for much of its history. There is no country, with the exception of Israel, that has a more dangerous frontier with the Islamic world. You would think that this would be the primary lens through which to view Russian conduct—a good place for the West to begin in trying to explain Russian behavior that, at first glance, does not have an obvious rationale. Yet agitation against Putin in the West has not focused on that at all. It has not focused on Russia’s intervention against ISIS in the war in Syria, or even on Russia’s harboring Edward Snowden, the fugitive leaker of U.S. intelligence secrets.



Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow earlier this year. (Kremlin.Ru)

The two episodes of concerted outrage about Putin among Western progressives have both involved issues trivial to the world, but vital to the world of progressivism. The first came in 2014, when the Winter Olympics, which were to be held in Sochi, presented an opportunity to damage Russia economically. Most world leaders attended the games happily, from Mark Rutte (Netherlands) and Enrico Letta (Italy) to Xi Jinping (China) and Shinzo Abe (Japan). But three leaders—David Cameron of Britain, François Hollande of France, and Barack Obama of the United States—sent progressives in their respective countries into a frenzy over a short list of domestic causes.

First, there was the jailed oil tycoon, Khodorkovsky; Putin released him before the Olympics began. Second, there were the young women who called themselves Pussy Riot, performance artists who were jailed for violating Russia's blasphemy laws when they disrupted a religious service with obscene chants about God (translations were almost never shown on Western

television); Putin also released them prior to the Olympics. Third, there was Russia's Article 6.21, which was oddly described in the American press as a law against "so-called gay propaganda." A more accurate translation of what the law forbids is promoting "non-traditional sexual relations to children." Now, some Americans might wish that Russia took religion or homosexuality less seriously and still be struck by the fact that these are very local issues. There is something unbalanced about turning them into diplomatic incidents and issuing all kinds of threats because of them.

The second campaign against Putin has been the attempt by the outgoing Obama administration to cast doubt on the legitimacy of last November's presidential election by implying that the Russian government somehow "hacked" it. This is an extraordinary episode in the history of manufacturing opinion. I certainly will not claim any independent expertise in cyber-espionage. But anyone who has read the public documentation on which the claims

rest will find only speculation, arguments from authority, and attempts to make repetition do the work of logic.

■ Fake 'Scandalous' News About Putin

In mid-December, *The New York Times* ran an article entitled "How Moscow Aimed a Perfect Weapon at the U.S. Election." Most of the assertions in the piece came from unnamed administration sources and employees of CrowdStrike, the cybersecurity firm hired by the Democrats to investigate a hacked computer at the Democratic National Committee.

They quote those who served on the DNC's secret antihacking committee, including the party chairwoman, Debbie Wasserman Schultz, and the party lawyer, Michael Sussmann. Then a National Intelligence Council report that the government released in January showed the heart of the case: more than half of the report was devoted to complaints about the bias of RT, the Russian government's international television network.

Again, we do not know what the intelligence agencies know. But there is no publicly available evidence to justify Arizona Senator John McCain's calling what the Russians did "an act of war."

apartheid. What did that have to do with him? Practically: Nothing. Symbolically: Everything. It was an opportunity to talk about the moral question of the day. We have a different *zeitgeist* today.

...when Putin said he'd restore Russia's strength, he meant it.

If there were, the discussion of the evidence would have continued into the Trump administration, rather than simply evaporating once it ceased to be useful as a political tool.

There were two other imaginary Putin scandals that proved to be nothing.

In November, *The Washington Post* ran a blacklist of news organizations that had published "fake news" in the service of Putin, but the list turned out to have been compiled largely by a fly-by-night political activist group called PropOrNot, which had placed certain outlets on the list only because their views coincided with those of RT on given issues. Then in December, the Obama administration claimed to have found Russian computer code it melodramatically called "Grizzly Steppe" in the Vermont electrical grid.

This made front-page headlines. But it was a mistake. The so-called Russian code could be bought commercially, and it was found, according to one journalist, "in a single laptop that was not connected to the electric grid."

Democrats have gone to extraordinary lengths to discredit Putin. Why?

There really is such a thing as a *zeitgeist* or spirit of the times. A given issue will become a passion for all mankind, and certain men will stand as symbols of it. Half a century ago, for instance, the *zeitgeist* was about colonial liberation. Think of Martin Luther King, traveling to Norway to collect his Nobel Peace Prize, stopping on the way in London to give a talk about South African

Today it is sovereignty and self-determination that are driving passions in the West. The reason for this has a great deal to do with the way the Cold War conflict between the United States and Russia ended. In the 1980s, the two countries were great powers, yes; but at the same time they were constrained. The alliances they led were fractious. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, their fates diverged. The United States was offered the chance to lay out the rules of the world system, and accepted the offer with a vengeance. Russia was offered the role of submitting to that system. Just how irreconcilable those roles are is seen in Russia's conflict with Ukraine two years ago. According to the official United States account, Russia invaded its neighbor after a glorious revolution threw out a plutocracy. Russia then annexed Ukrainian naval bases in the Crimea. According to the Russian view, Ukraine's democratically elected government was overthrown by an armed uprising backed by the United States.

■ What Would Reagan Do?

To prevent a hostile NATO from establishing its own naval base in the Black Sea, by this account, Russia had to take Crimea, which in any case is historically Russian territory. Both of these accounts are perfectly correct. It is just that one word can mean something different to Americans than it does to Russians. For instance, we say the Russians don't believe in democracy. But as the great journalist and historian Walter Laqueur put it, "Most Russians have come to believe

that democracy is what happened in their country between 1990 and 2000, and they do not want any more of it."

The point with which I would like to conclude is this: we will get nowhere if we assume that Putin sees the world as we do. One of the more independent thinkers about Russia in Washington, D.C., is the Reaganite California congressman Dana Rohrabacher. I recall seeing him scolded at a dinner in Washington a few years ago. A fellow guest told him he should be ashamed, because Reagan would have idealistically stood up to Putin on human rights.

Rohrabacher disagreed. Reagan's gift as a foreign policy thinker, he said, was not his idealism. It was his ability to set priorities, to see what constituted the biggest threat. Today's biggest threat to the United States isn't Vladimir Putin.

So why are people thinking about Putin as much as they do? Because he has become a symbol of national self-determination. Populist conservatives see him the way progressives once saw Fidel Castro, as the one person who says he won't submit to the world that surrounds him. You didn't have to be a communist to appreciate the way Castro, whatever his excesses, was carving out a space of autonomy for his country.

In the same way, Putin's conduct is bound to win sympathy even from some of Russia's enemies, the ones who feel the international system is not delivering for them. Generally, if you like that system, you will consider Vladimir Putin a menace. If you don't like it, you will have some sympathy for him. Putin has become a symbol of national sovereignty in its battle with globalism. That turns out to be the big battle of our times. As our last election shows, that's true even here.

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Social Unrest in Putin's Russia

by ILYA LEVKOV

Looking at events in Russia's domestic and foreign affairs that have recently created spasms at home and friction with the West, and slowed the development of a new Russian polity, the question arises, "Why, amid it all, does Vladimir Putin enjoy such strong political and popular support, and why has broad social unrest been minimal?"

Social unrest in Russia is not a new phenomenon. It began immediately after the Bolsheviks seized power with the introduction of the secret police known as the Cheka. This state of affairs was called Military Bolshevism. It was followed by the Civil War, forced industrialization, and collectivization. Riots even took place in some cities in the post-Stalin period when workers demanded improvements in their dire existence.

■ *Modern Political Unrest*

The apex of social protest took place on May 6, 2012 in Moscow at Bolotnaya Square, led by Sergei Udaltsov, Boris Nemtsov, Mikhail Kas'yanov, Eduard Limonov, Aleksei Navalny, Chess Master Garry Kasparov, Grigory Yavlinsky, and Vladimir Ryzhkov. Their demands were:

- The resignation of Vladimir Putin;
- Dissolution of a "non-legitimate" Duma (Parliament);
- Immediate release of all political prisoners;
- Annulment of the recent election, removal of the Head of the Election Committee and an investigation of election fraud;
- Registration of all parties of opposition and safeguarding their legal status; and
- New, open and honest elections.

The authorities perceived this as a Russian variation of the Ukrainian call for freedom – Maidan – and responded harshly. More than 400 demonstrators were detained and 30 held on criminal charges. Sixteen demonstrators received sentences from 2.4 to 4.5 years in prison camps; two were incarcerated in psychiatric institutions.

■ *The Present Challenge*

The two more recent events that might have caused friction for the regime were the Winter Olympics and the annexation of Crimea. To what extent – if at all – did they move the needle of Putin's popularity?

1. Staging the Winter Olympics in Sochi in the spirit of national glory was a master stroke by Putin despite scandals concerning the costs, corruption, and revelation of participation in the systemic state-sponsored doping of Russian sportsmen. The International Olympic Committee demanded the return of 23 medals; the sportsmen refused. The result was to raise Putin's popularity.

2. The details of the occupation of Crimea and incursions into eastern Ukraine are well documented. Less well understood are three political frameworks put in place by the Russian government to help move Russian opinion to favor military action:

- a. A Human Rights slogan/organization "World Without Nazism" was created in several countries in Europe and in Israel as a springboard to accuse the Baltic States and Ukraine of being fascist. This idealistic-sounding movement found many adherents.
- b. Creation of a politicized youth

movement called "Nashi" (Ours), designed to be against "strangers," borrowing "the enemy of the people" from Stalin. It is a tactic to divide people and a dog-whistle to loyalists who oppose strangers, foreigners, and those "not like us." Because of their zeal and blind loyalty to Putin, they are sometimes called "Nashisty," echoing the Russian term "Fashisty."

c. A call to defend the cultural and linguistic rights of ethnic Russians in the near abroad (the former Soviet Republics). Putin has candidly stated that the Russian language should become an instrument of Russia's influence abroad. He is aided by the nationalist Organization of Russian Bikers. Dressed in traditional biker leather, they crisscrossed several states with huge flags projecting their might and making explicit threats.

The reverberations of military action in Crimea – and the documented deaths of Russian soldiers – divided Russians despite the efforts of the government. The intelligentsia, which had begun to pride itself on being an integral part of the European cultural heritage, was particularly appalled to find itself occupying a neighboring country. At every social and cultural gathering there was an unspoken question, "Are you for or against the occupation?" This poisonous trauma was intensified because the state, and to a lesser degree prominent businessmen (oligarchs) heavily subsidize the world of art and culture. And the oligarchs are tightly integrated with the government.

It might have been predicted that this schism would translate into lowering

Putin's popularity and energizing his political opponents, perhaps making them viable in the forthcoming elections.

But it didn't happen.

The questions asked by reputable pollster VTsIOM All-Russian Research Center of Public Opinion in August 2016 provide a clue as to why: the concerns of average Russians may be different from those of the intelligentsia.

1. "Our state needs stability, which is more important than reforms and the changes they promise" – 63 percent agreed.

- "Our state needs change, new reforms, even when they might present a risk of losing stability" – 30 percent agreed.

2. "Russia's policy should be oriented to strengthen sovereignty and development of native Russian civilization" – 72 percent.

3. "Russia must be a great power with

military might and influence all political processes in this world" – 58 percent.

- "Russia shouldn't strive toward its super-power might, it should pay attention to the wellbeing of its own citizens" – 33 percent.

4. "Russia needs an iron hand, which will ensure order in it" – 66 percent agreed.

- "Political liberties and democracy must be retained under all conditions" – 25 percent.

5. "I identify with this statement: 'It is highly important for a person to live in security. He tries to avoid anything that might harbor danger. It is important to him to follow traditions and customs practiced in his family or religion. He should behave correctly and not behave in the manner which wouldn't have been approved by his circle.'" – 58 percent.

- "The following sentence is close

to my view: 'It is important for a person to offer new ideas, to be a creative personality, to follow his own path. Adventures and risks are important for him, since he strives toward a life full of engrossing events.'" – 35 percent.

This indicates what kind of a leader the majority of Russians are inclined to support, it seems, regardless of the general decline in the quality of life for a growing number of people. The following points appeared in Russian newspapers this year, but have led to no open opposition to the government.

- Real income declined 19.2 percent from 2014-2017. Prices for basic food staples, clothes, medication, and household items all rose by more than 20 percent in the same time frame. The price for meat, fish, fruits and vegetables have risen by more than 35 percent.

- The real rate of inflation is triple the official rate.

- 10 percent of Russian citizens report they can barely meet their monthly expenses.

- Movie director Andrey Konchalovsky said recently, "I am eager to be proud of my Motherland, but I am ashamed of it. Our nation is on the path of self-destruction." He went on to list grievances: "In the past decade we lost 11,000 villages and 290 towns in Siberia alone. We have dismembered our families, and the result is that 8 of 10 elderly people living in institutions have relatives that could support them... Thirty thousand people die annually from drugs and 70,000 from overdrinking vodka."

Surprisingly, none of these realities moved the masses to demand that the regime keep its eye on improving the life of millions of average Russian citizens.

The present leading candidate of the opposition, Alexei Navalny, is a one-issue candidate – focused on corruption. His additional appeal is to Russian nationalism, albeit not the most radical form. The other potential outsider for leadership is Sergei Udaltsov who just was released from prison.

*The banner of the Ukrainian resistance to occupation was a poem by 23-year-old Ukrainian poet Anastasia Dmitruk that became the battle cry of young Ukrainians.
(Translation by Andrey Kneller)*

We will never ever be brothers -
not by motherland, not by mothers.
Your souls aren't free, they're crippling -
we won't even become stepsiblings.
Our "big brother," - we don't believe you -
we'll be younger, but not beneath you.
You are many, but faceless of late,
you're enormous perhaps, we're – great.
But you smother... orbiting zealously,
you will choke one day on your jealousy.
Freedom's foreign to you, unattained,
from your childhood, you've been chained.
...
They are sending new orders, devising,
we are lighting the flames of uprising.
From your Tsar, our Democracy's severed.
We will never be brothers ever.



Demonstrators at anti-corruption protest in Russia earlier this year. (Photo: Alexei Zatevakhin)

■ Accidental Unrest?

It seems that most of the (limited) social unrest in Russia today is being initiated and provoked not by those two opposition leaders but by the government itself! It was not planned that way.

The forthcoming 100th anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution is being dominated by the government's decisions on four issues that have generated a quantity of measured social protest and unrest.

First is the rehabilitation of Joseph Stalin. While 40 percent of the population considers Stalin to be directly responsible for millions of victims of repression, in 2009, the chief architect of Moscow approved the return of Stalin's bust to the vestibule of the "Kurskaya" subway station. This year, new monuments to Stalin are being created, most in peripheral areas, including North Ossetia, taken by Russia from Georgia, and Kaliningrad between Lithuania and Poland. And Stalin's bust stands at the Central Museum of the Great Patriotic War.

Some 53 percent of Russians consider the reintroduction of monuments to Stalin to be problematic, but the unhappiness has not risen to a level that could be called social unrest.

Second is the first monument to Ivan IV, the first Tsar of Russia – also known as Ivan the Terrible – erected in the city of Orel last summer. The initiative came from a governor who believes the tsar was a great sovereign and reformer whose historical importance has been unjustly denigrated.

Opponents view Ivan IV as the tsar who rode Russia into darkness. For them, Ilya Repin's historic painting of Ivan IV embracing the bleeding head of the son he just killed is the best representation. Ivan IV established special military repressive units – Oprichniki – that served numerous tsars and became the initial secret police – Cheka, headed by the infamous Feliks Dzerzhinsky – under the Soviets. The former Duma Deputy representing Orel, Yury Malyutin, filed a suit against the monument that is still under deliberation.

In July 2017, a full sculpture of the Tsar Ivan was placed in the front of the "Alee of Russia's Sovereigns" in Moscow.

This trend of writing Russia's history of glory and achievements in monuments may have reached its apex with a monument on a street where Anton Chekhov, one of Russia's most

prominent writers, once lived. But the 15-foot monument on a 6-foot pedestal will not be Chekhov, but rather Mikhail Kalashnikov holding his eponymous invention.

Unexpectedly, a third source of unhappiness comes from Putin's staunch defender, the Russian Orthodox Church. At issue is a film called *Matilda*, which received state financial support and license to be screened across Russia. *Matilda* was a ballet dancer of Polish heritage who "dated" Prince Nikolai in 1892. What raised the ire of the Church and others is that the tsar's family is presented in an undignified light. These groups see dark forces set to undermine Russian heritage and the forthcoming 100th anniversary of the forced abdication of the royal throne.

This has created unrest within Putin's circle of friends and supporters. Opposing the film are the Head of the House of Romanov; the head of the Department of Foreign Relations of the Moscow Patriarchy; the head of the Church's Council on Cultural Affairs; and a Duma Deputy who asked the attorney general to verify the proper moral contents of this film. A wealthy

Christian donor to the Russian Orthodox Church has shot a counter film titled *Lies of Matilda*. Channel 1 – a pro-Putin channel – has refused to show it.

Fourth is the odd case of film director Kirill Serebrennikov, accused of stealing over 66.5 million rubbles from the state and today under house arrest in Moscow. Serebrennikov, gay and Jewish, is held in high esteem in Europe as well as Russia, and is known for radical productions including full nudity, pedophilia and homosexuality. As a director of Gogol Center, he received a generous state salary and made only mild and cautious political statements. He told an Italian journalist in 2008: “Yes, there is a dose of censorship on (Russian) TV, but I prefer to work, rather than to become a basement dissident. There are pragmatic people at the top who are striving for Russia’s Western model of development.”

Asked if he would vote for prime minister and former president Dmitri Medvedev, he replied: “Yes, I hope that he will act more on his liberal views. He is a capitalist and felt the power of money. But all other candidates are not serious. I do not like that others decide for me.... The roots of our problem are not so much in the leadership, as within the nation. The problem is that contemporary Russia wants this regime. We should not criticize Putin – the problem is within us.”

Such an establishment and prominent person could not be arrested and charged with theft without and against the wish of Vladimir Putin. Why would he?

It is possible that Putin has just moved his first pawn in the 2018 election to test its effectiveness in garnering popular support. Serebrennikov expressed lukewarm support for the dual leadership, but he praised the “good cop” Medvedev rather than Putin. Not since the occupation of Crimea in 2014 has the Russian intelligentsia undergone such a social-political rift, wanting to support Serebrennikov, but wary of losing the freedoms they enjoy. But social media on the event revealed waves of deep public anger against the cultural elite and support for the regime, suggesting Putin knew what he was doing.

■ *Potential Challengers to Putin*

Finally, a few words about the most prominent politicians considered potential successors to Putin. Most are insiders and the top five are:

- 1 – Prime Minister Medvedev;
- 2 – Mayor of Moscow Sergey Sobyenin;
- 3 – Governor of Tula Alexey Dyumin;
- 4 – Minister of Defense Sergey Shoigu;
- 5 – Chair of the Federation Council Valentina Matvienko.

The highest-ranking outsiders were head of the Chechen Republic Ramzan Kadyrov (13) and Alexey Navalny (19).

Navalny, who has spearheaded a popular movement against corruption, represents the new generation of Russian politicians who have achieved national attention. At 41, he has personal experience and familiarity with Western and American political thinking. He identifies with the national-church mode of Russian politics and goals, and criticizes the influx of citizens from the Central Asian former Soviet republics. All these place him somewhere to the right of center on today’s political map. Some conspiracy-minded thinkers, and there are many, see Navalny as set up by Putin.

The other representative of the “Young Turks” today is Sergei Udaltsov who was just released from a 4.5-year term in a penal colony. In his first extensive interview, Udaltsov made three main points: First, that he seeks an amalgamation of parties on the Left with moderate Nationalists to create a Third Block as a counter to Putin’s United Russia. Udaltsev cannot lead the bloc, as he is banned from any federal elected position for the next 18 years. Second, he believes the people of Crimea and Donbas should have the right of self-determination to leave or join the Russian Federation. And third, he opposes “elites” and “soulless capitalists” who embrace a Western model for Russia.

The West has heralded Navalny and Udaltsov, but there are serious impediments to their becoming a meaningful balancing party, either separately or in

coalition. Neither the oligarchs nor several layers of affluent “New Russians” below them are inclined to give away their accumulated wealth. The middle class aspires to become the upper class, not to see it destroyed.

Neither objects to Putin’s recent wars or is prepared to campaign against new ones, which will not serve them well with the intelligentsia. In the best case, as Navalny has said, the wars are “too expensive for us.” The anti-war party “Yabloko” uses the same rationale to stop fighting in Syria: “One shot of “Kalibr” rockets could cover the salaries of 2,600 teachers or 2,000 doctors.” That’s it. The wars are not wrong or evil, just too damned expensive!

The most recent poll on people’s self-perception points out that reformists in any case would have an uphill battle. On August 21, 2017 VTsIOM conducted a poll of 1,200 people 18 years and older, about the core symbols of the Russian state. The three leading symbols of pride are: the Russian Hymn – 75 percent; the Russian Coat of Arms – 72 percent; and the Russian flag – 71 percent.

A poll conducted on August 25th shows that 81 percent of citizens approve of Putin’s work as president and 79 percent trust him. Had the elections taken place the next day, 65 percent would have voted for him. Only 11 percent expressed disapproval of his policies. Most revealing are Medvedev’s ratings – his positive and negative ratings are equal at 39 percent, and while 41 percent trust the prime minister, 50 percent do not.

Boris Akunin, a prominent contemporary writer, succinctly summarized the present problem: “The Russian people en masse are not ready yet to collect in political resistance. Fear of self-induced change is set deep into the Russian psyche, preferring the unbearable reality to unknown threats of the future.”

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Russia's Middle East Turning Point: 2012

by **NIKOLAY KOZHANOV**

Why was 2012 a turning point for Russia's presence in the Middle East? Because this was the point of transition in Moscow's post-Soviet regional posture. After 2012, Russia's leadership adopted a more strategic approach to the Middle East by seeing it as a region of growing importance for achieving the Kremlin's political goals. This period witnessed the return of Russian diplomacy to the Middle East and early reestablishment of the country as an important regional player. This status had been lost by Moscow after the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991. Yet, there is still no unanimity among scholars and policy analysts regarding the origins of this transformation in Moscow's vision of the Middle East and the region's priority within the framework of Russian strategic thinking.

To cope with the political and economic challenges caused by existing tensions with the West, Russia was compelled to adopt a more nuanced approach to the Middle East...

■ ***Conflict with the West***

Formally, the increased frequency of Russian contact with the Middle East since 2012 is connected to overall diplomatic changes caused by the Kremlin's confrontation with the United States and European Union. As a result of these tensions, Moscow had to try to shift its orientation from the West, which had been a key focus of Russian diplomacy

in 1991-2012, to non-European countries including in the Middle East. Addressing the Russian Federal Assembly on Dec. 4, 2014, President Vladimir Putin declared cooperation with the countries of the Middle East as one of the priorities of Russian diplomacy, and on Feb. 27, 2015, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov argued that "the turn to Asia" (which in Russian traditional understanding includes the Middle East) reflects long-standing national interests in the 21st century.

In reality, the situation appears to be more complicated. Indeed, the current rapprochement between Russia and the countries of the Middle East was mainly determined by Moscow's relations with the West. Russia's active policy toward the Middle East and Asia is aimed at the creation of leverage that can help it to affect the behavior of

the United States and European Union and to mitigate the negative effects of confrontation with the West on the economy, security, and international relations of Russia. Between 2012 and 2017, new tensions with America and EU countries, first over Syria and then over Ukraine, impelled the Kremlin to intensify its Middle Eastern contacts.

However, there are considerable

differences between the current situation and previous Russian attempts to build close relations in the Middle East. This difference is largely determined by the scale and intensity of Russia's conflict with the European Union and United States, which is more intense than at any time since the fall of the USSR.

To cope with the political and economic challenges caused by existing tensions with the West, Russia was compelled to adopt a more nuanced approach to the Middle East than previously required. In the past, the goal was just the creation of leverage that could be used to affect U.S. behavior or win additional concessions from it.

Now, the complexity of tensions with the United States and the European Union compels Russia to set multiple priorities for the region. Russia has had to revise its previous vision of the region as just a part of a global chessboard that is defined above all by Russia's relations with the West. The new approach is not a result of a full break with the past but a product of the transformation of the old policy that still places the Middle East within overall Russia strategy. However, it also now treats the Middle Eastern countries more in terms of what direct, bilateral benefits they bring to Russia, sometimes separate from the issue of relations with the West.

■ ***Putin and the Middle East***

Another factor determining the depth of the Russian foreign policy transformation in the Middle East is the personality of the country's leader. The current policy makers believe Russia, as a

country lying between Europe and Asia, should diversify its political and economic diplomacy that—in their view—had been excessively concentrated on the West since 1991. President Vladimir Putin’s vision contrasts with Russian views on the Middle East under Boris Yeltsin (1991–1999) and Dmitry Medvedev (2008–2012). The latter two considered the Middle East to be of secondary importance to Kremlin diplomacy.

revenge for political and economic losses in Libya and Iraq. Russia was among the first countries to cut military supplies to the Qaddafi regime; it also refrained from vetoing the UN Security Council resolution that paved the way for Western military intervention in the Libyan conflict. Russian leadership was frustrated that its silent support for the West in Libya did not receive acknowledgement in Washington or

presidential seat in 2012, Russian communications media started periodically explaining international realities via the prism of the Middle East. Thus, during the active military actions in Ukraine’s Donbas area in 2014–2015, Moscow’s propaganda argued against the effectiveness of Western military assistance provided to Kiev by addressing the West’s experience in Iraq. It was pointing out that American arms and instructors did not help the Iraqi army to stand up to ISIS.

While Putin labeled the United States and European Union as “new crusaders,” Medvedev expressed his satisfaction over the news of Muammar Qaddafi’s capture.

This difference between Putin and Medvedev-Yeltsin’s perceptions of the Middle East was clearly demonstrated by the controversy over the Libyan crisis of 2011. While Putin labeled the United States and European Union as “new crusaders,” Medvedev expressed his satisfaction over the news of Muammar Qaddafi’s capture. These differing reactions nearly led to a split in the Putin-Medvedev tandem.

It was therefore no surprise that, immediately after his return to the presidency in 2012, Putin began restoring relations with the Middle East, which had been seriously damaged under Medvedev. Thus, only two months after his election Putin met his Iranian counterpart, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. During that meeting he stated his interest in the further development of relations with Iran, calling it “an old traditional partner.”

The Putin of 2012 was also different from the Putin of 2000 and 2004: more authoritarian, more decisive, more anti-Western and extremely disappointed by the failure of the “reset” in Russian-U.S. relations. This could not but affect Russia’s stance on the Middle East. At least initially, the support provided to Bashar al-Asad’s regime was, in fact,

Brussels. This contributed to its decision to be more of a spoiler if its positions on global affairs were not acceded to by Western states.

■ *Russian Realities*

The domestic situation in Russia also favored changes in policy in the Middle East. Public discontent with Medvedev’s government and controversy over Putin’s re-election in 2012 compelled the leadership to shore up its support. From 2012, official propaganda started to appeal more aggressively to nationalistic sentiments of the population. These appeals received a positive response. A large proportion of the Russian population wished to see Medvedev’s successor more actively protecting their perceived national interests and cementing relations with the non-Western powers. Putin gave them what they wanted. Russian support for Damascus, closer relations with Tehran, and rapprochement with Cairo were supposed to symbolize a return to the old traditions of the Soviet empire for those missing the “imperial” glory of the USSR. Prior to its fall in 1991, the USSR had close political and economic relations with all these countries.

After the return of Putin to his

■ *Propaganda and Moscow’s Foreign Policy*

When covering Middle Eastern issues for a domestic audience, Russian politicians and the news media make bold and emotional statements with only rare attempts to restrain themselves. That is largely determined by a need to keep the public in a certain political frame of mind and constantly oriented to a set of basic ideas. For instance, in his interview with the Russian media on Apr. 22, 2015, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov openly accused Washington of being responsible for creation of al-Qaeda and the Islamic State, first by supporting the *mujaheddin* (holy warriors) in Afghanistan in the 1980s and then invading Iraq in the 2000s. Some pro-government analysts and journalists go even further. They exploit the traditional belief of the Russian population in conspiracy theories by spreading myths about the deliberate destabilization of the Middle East by America after the Sept. 11, 2001 al-Qaeda terrorist attacks and the absence of a real American interest in stopping the bloodshed in Syria and Iraq.

However, a liar eventually starts to believe in his own lies. Russian propaganda was not an exceptional case. From this point of view, the official discourse on Middle Eastern events in Russia may have a negative outcome for Moscow. Officials have already started to believe in some propagandistic statements as the truth. This over-simplifies analyses



Russian President Vladimir Putin with the late Libyan leader Muammar Qaddafi in 2008. (Photo: Kremlin.ru)

and leads to a misperception of the situation. For a long time, all Syrian rebels using Islam as an ideology to mobilize people for struggle were believed to be religious extremists (only in September 2015 did Moscow start to differentiate between moderate Islamists and the radicals). Meanwhile, the IS connection is suspected behind any terrorist activity in Russia or the post-Soviet space of former satellites and Soviet republics.

From this point of view, Russian propaganda is a factor that promotes Moscow's greater involvement in the Middle East. Currently, the Russian authorities believe that there was no option other than Russian military deployment in Syria. The Kremlin also trusts that Russia can effectively affect the development of events in the region and even challenge Western plans. Thus, when presenting the failure of the Obama administration to organize a military operation against Asad in 2013 as the result of Russian diplomatic efforts rather than the indecisiveness of Washington,

Moscow began to imagine that it could offset any U.S. and EU plans in the Middle East. This, in turn, encouraged Russia's further involvement in Syria and the above-mentioned experiments in Libya.

■ Arab Spring as Kremlin's Nightmare

Finally, Putin's intention to strengthen Russian relations with Middle Eastern countries was seriously fortified by the results of the Arab Spring of 2011–12. Initially, Russia ignored the uprisings, considering them minor turmoil unlikely to bring structural change. Even the fall of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak did not make Russian authorities reconsider. Russia "woke up" only after the killing of Qaddafi in October 2011. Trying to explain why the Middle Eastern political system that seemed to be relatively stable for the last 20 to 30 years was accidentally and unexpectedly destabilized by a chain of uprisings none could predict, Moscow retreated to its traditional narrative

of "color revolutions" (as in Georgia in 2003, Ukraine in 2004, and Kyrgyzstan in 2005). This theory accuses the West of attempting to destabilize the international system with (anti-authoritarian) revolutions and to impose its "improper" democratic values on other nations.

Considering the Arab Spring at least partially an American and EU plot, the Russian government felt it had no choice but to become more deeply involved to balance the "destabilization" of the political situation in the Middle East by Western powers to prevent repercussions in Eurasia. However, the Arab Spring also had an effect on Russian strategic thinking in the Middle East that had nothing to do with either Moscow's concerns regarding potential anti-regime uprisings in Russia or its confrontation with the West.

■ Losing Ground

In 2012, the Kremlin realized that it was very close to losing its political and economic presence in the Middle East for the long run as a consequence

of the popular Arab uprisings coupled with its vision of the region as an area of secondary importance for Russian geo-strategic goals. Indeed, during the Arab Spring, Moscow sustained heavy economic losses the real quantity of which is still to be determined. Russian arms exporter Rosoboronexport estimates its financial losses in Libya after the fall of Qaddafi at \$2 billion to \$6.5 billion. The Russian railway corporation RZD was another victim of the Arab Spring in Libya. Its immediate losses were estimated at \$2.2 billion. Given that RZD planned to work with Qaddafi's government for many decades to

Council (GCC) represent the most notorious example. Russian support for Syria's Bashar al-Asad diverted GCC countries (Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Bahrain, and the United Arab Emirates) from Moscow. After 2011, it took about two years before Russia could finally resume effective discussion of bilateral, regional, and international issues with Saudi Arabia and Qatar.

Third, the Arab Spring presented a serious threat to the dialogue between Russian authorities and the religious leaders of the Middle East. Russian support of Asad's Alawite [Editor: heterodox Shiite] regime caused criticism

which paved the way for the U.S. and EU intervention in Libya. Subsequently, Russia imposed sanctions on Libya and it was the first to stop arms exports to the regime of Qaddafi.

In the eyes of the pro-Western grouping of Russian ruling elite these steps were worth making. In 2011, Moscow still hoped to reset relations with Washington, and military contracts with France also played their role. Nevertheless, this time the losses did not justify gains. Medvedev's decisions on Libya probably determined the destiny of Qaddafi. In other words, previously, Russia only cheated on its Middle Eastern partners whereas in 2011 it betrayed the previously friendly regime of Qaddafi also.

Under these conditions, the image of Russia in the Middle East suffered heavily. According to traditions of the region, treachery (no matter who the betrayed person is) is never forgotten. Treachery also is considered a sign of weakness. So is the strategy of balancing between different forces; a strong player can afford to clearly demonstrate his preferences. This, in turn, assured the opponents of Russia in the region that in other cases the opinion of Moscow could be ignored. Consequently, Moscow had to reassess its approaches to the Middle East.

Russian losses clearly demonstrated that, apart from the dynamics of Kremlin's relations with the West there are at least two groups of factors that also determine the necessity of Moscow's presence in the Middle East: Russian economic and security interests. The fact that, after 2012, these factors acquired greater importance in Moscow's decision-making on the region was another reason for determining the depth of the transformation of Russian approaches to the Middle East.

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Political losses from the Arab Spring were also quite high. First, the fall of Moscow's old partners such as Qaddafi fundamentally clouded the future of Russian relations...

come the amount of lost potential profit could be even higher. Finally, in April 2008, Moscow forgave \$4.5 billion of Qaddafi's debts to the Soviet Union in exchange for the involvement of Russian companies in new joint projects in Libya. Russian oil and gas companies, such as Gazprom, Lukoil Overseas and Tatneft either were involved or planned to invest in the energy sector in Libya. Apart from the economic losses inflicted by the fall of Qaddafi, the beginning of the civil war in Syria also endangered Russian investments in that country.

Political losses from the Arab Spring were also quite high. First, the fall of Moscow's old partners such as Qaddafi fundamentally clouded the future of Russian relations with the countries previously headed by these dictators.

Second, the Arab Spring hampered the development of Russian relations with those countries whose governments had become interested in the establishment of closer political and economic ties with Moscow in the 2000s. The members of the Gulf Cooperation

from the Sunni Muslim-led GCC states. Meanwhile, the development of positive relations with these countries traditionally has been seen by Moscow as one factor directly influencing its own the political stability. Russian authorities have believed that until the majority of Sunni Muslim religious leaders consider the situation of the Russia's southern Muslim minority population as normal, limiting outside moral and financial assistance to radical Islamists in southern Russia would be difficult.

■ Time to Be Active

These losses were hard to explain by invoking the Western plot theory. Moreover, they clearly demonstrated that the Middle East itself was important for Russia and it was high time for Moscow to reject the old approach when relations with the region were used only as a trading item in bargaining in its relations with the West. In a certain way, Libya was a turning point. On March 17, 2011, the Russian government did not veto U.N. Security Council Resolution 1973,

U.S.-Europe Rift: Time to Patch Up and Face Russia

by **ARIEL COHEN**

The current murmurings of friction between the Trump administration and European leaders, including with German Chancellor Angela Merkel, appear to threaten the cohesion of the West as we know it. Despite smiles during the Trump-Macron summit in Paris, the key U.S. relationship in the Old Continent – with Germany – is in trouble. And while the special relationship with Great Britain remains intact, London is so preoccupied with Brexit and its divorce from the EU that its role as a European power will be greatly reduced for years. Nevertheless, the United States needs its European allies as rifts with Russia are growing fast and appear unbridgeable.

Consider this. The 100 kiloton nuclear weapon test by North Korea further escalates tensions on the Korean Peninsula, making this the most fraught Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) confrontation since the 1962 Cuban missile crisis and the 1973 Yom Kippur War nuclear high alert between the USSR and the U.S. Beijing and Moscow are wringing their hands, while potentially manipulating the situation to the detriment of Washington.

■ **Russia: Proliferation Policy**

Missile technology transfer from Moscow to Pyongyang is well documented, as is Iranian funding for Kim Jong-un's WMD program and proliferation to the worst regimes, including Bashar al-Assad's Syria. The plutonium nuclear reactor, built for one purpose only – to build the Syrian, Alawite A-bomb against Israel – was funded by Teheran, but designed in Pyongyang.

When the latest North Korean test

took place, Vladimir Putin was on his way to Beijing for the fifth meeting this year with President Xi Jinping. Before that, he published an article effectively defending North Korea, and essentially called on Washington to refrain from “intimidation” of Pyongyang. Putin is against sanctions and against use of force, forcing Washington effectively to admit a defeat.

Putin has reversed decades of Soviet and Russian foreign policy and the international consensus of great powers by

On issues close to its heart: climate and trade, Europe sided defacto with China, which quickly is fashioning itself – surprise – as a proponent of free trade, and fighting carbon emissions.

supporting Kim, a malignant proliferator who is threatening a nuclear war and is already selling nuclear weapons technology to failing regimes including Assad's. China has repeated platitudes about a “nuclear-free zone” on the Korean Peninsula, and called for the implementation of the Sino-Russian Plan for de-escalation, effectively playing in tandem with Russia and opposing Washington.

The fast pace of North Korea's atomic fission or possibly even hydrogen fusion bomb development, as well as missile technology advancement, suggests massive foreign technological, and possibly, financial support. To establish which countries could be participating in that is the urgent task for the U.S., South Korean, Japanese, and Western intelligence communities.

If China and/or Russia have participated in activities supporting North Korean nuclear weapons and missile development, it would mean that North Korea is jointly being used by China and Russia as a battering ram to provoke the United States, suggesting further escalation.

Washington needs to advise China and Russia that it may not succeed in preventing Japan and South Korea from developing their own nuclear and missile arsenals for their militaries. Tokyo

and Seoul are also likely to vastly expand their missile defense forces. The long-term implications of the current crisis may actually affect Russia and China's security negatively, increasing long-term instability in the Northern Pacific.

It bodes ill for the United States that Russia has become the anti-status quo power of the 21st century, while China looms behind it. Moscow's resentment, jealousy, and ill will is there for all to see.

■ **Pulling the Allies Apart**

On issues close to its heart: climate and trade, Europe sided defacto with China, which quickly is fashioning itself – surprise – as a proponent of free trade, and fighting carbon emissions. The United States of course, is retreating into the



President Donald Trump and NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg at White House on April 12, 2017. (Photo: White House)

cocoon of economic protectionism and leaving the Paris Climate Accords. The developing rift does not serve America's – or Europe's – interests. Both sides need to reverse the negativity before it is too late. America's peer competitors, Russia and China, and the global Islamist terror movement will be the only beneficiaries of an intra-Western quarrel.

The centripetal forces of the West – the ultra-nationalist Marine Le Pen in France, or the extreme anti-Semitic left in British Labor, or Central European conservative populists – could spell geo-strategic, economic and systemic disaster. U.S. and European national leaders need to carefully define and resolve differences over security and trade, not turn them into political fodder for isolationist movements.

For over 200 years, the United States has gravitated toward Europe. In the early nineteenth century, the then-young United States began its integration into the Euro-Atlantic sphere, starting with the Louisiana Purchase and the Barbary Wars fought by the U.S. Navy. America defeated imperial Spain (1898), and the Kaiser's Germany (1917-1918), and then played a key role in Europe's post-World War I reinvention, thereby bringing

American power and business to Europe.

Victory in World War II made America the leading superpower, supplanting the British Empire and confronting Stalin's Soviet Union. Then, victory in the Cold War created a unipolar moment for Washington that is now over.

Present and future conflicts involve radical Islamist movements, which this year alone reaped harvests of blood in Berlin, London, and Barcelona, but the global threats extend beyond terrorist groups. After a decade of post-imperial shock, Russia, like the USSR before it, has returned to an anti-status quo posture in Europe. One can only hope that China's economic expansion will remain peaceful for decades to come.

In the past, the Marshall Plan and the establishment of NATO built Euro-Atlantic unity. This alliance was borne not just of shared values, but also of necessity: the Europeans needed not only America's protection from the USSR but American leadership – and markets.

Today, however, forces on both sides of the Atlantic threaten the two-century old ties. First, demographic shifts have resulted in a American population that increasingly lacks historical ties to the

Old Continent. In fact, Barack Obama was the first American president barely interested in Europe, despite his wild popularity there. Donald Trump may not be interested for different reasons.

Trump's demands to balance NATO burden sharing, rectify trade deficits, especially with Germany, and his decision to quit the non-binding Paris Accords, may be justified in policy terms. However, the execution, at times in tweets and jarring public statements unnecessarily have called in question U.S. commitments to the Trans-Atlantic Alliance. Clearly, Germany and other European powers need to provide a much greater contribution to the Alliance. However, both sides have abiding national interests in managing and resolving the current disagreements and contain Russia - together.

■ ***Together: History and the Future***

We live in an unbelievably rich, free, and thriving community, in which the Northern Atlantic is reminiscent of Mare Nostrum ("Our Sea") in the Greek- and Roman-led civilization of the fifth century BCE through the fourth century AD.

Great Britain and the United States

have in the past dispatched Spanish, Dutch, German, and Soviet contenders for Atlantic hegemony to the dustbin of history.

The collective West is based on Judeo-Christian values, Greek philosophy, Anglo-Saxon common law – or Roman law in Europe – the Protestant

cannot continue paying over 70 percent of NATO expenses while Europe thrives.

The question is, whether more than 70 years after the fall of the Third Reich, and lacking Prussian militarism and a hegemonic ideology, can Germany carry Europe's security on its shoulders, sup-

borders impenetrable, and its security services and police more integrated, interoperable, and proactive.

Third, European and American leaders must collaborate to resolve trade disputes so that current imbalances even out and the U.S. gains jobs. Germany can increase its military acquisitions in the United States, thus strengthening German defenses.

Finally, on the climate debate we should agree to disagree. America is a leader in environmental technologies, and has not increased CO2 emissions for three years, due to higher shale gas consumption and growth in renewable energy. If the Paris Accords had been brought to the Senate as a treaty, ratification would have failed.

Leaders on both sides of the Atlantic have to recognize the treasure with which they are entrusted: a community of free nations. Their duty and responsibility is to preserve it and make it stronger – not to waste time on destructive squabbles – and to defeat the Russian challenge.

ARIEL COHEN, Ph.D., is Senior Fellow at the Atlantic Council, and Director, Center for Energy, Natural Resources and Geopolitics at the Institute for the Analysis of Global Security.

It bodes ill for the U.S. that Russia has become the anti-status quo power of the 21st century... Moscow's resentment, jealousy, and ill will is for all to see.

work ethic and democratic principles of the Founding Fathers – an astounding achievement of more than 2,500 years of human civilization.

It would be shortsighted to focus on the negative, highlight disagreements, and allow ties to fray. Instead, the United States and the European allies need to pursue closer cooperation in three vital areas.

First, defense and security: Europe needs to take more responsibility in deterring Russia. Germany has begun the painful process of transforming into a core nation for European defense. Challenged in the Middle East and in the Pacific, including by North Korea, the United States

ported by the French Force de Frappe (nuclear deterrent), and British naval power and its own nuclear arsenal.

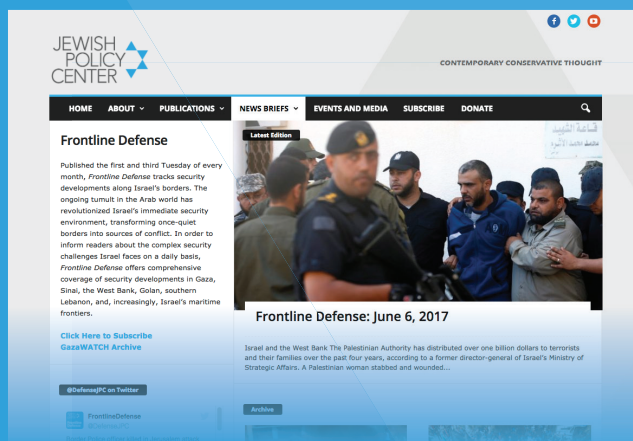
Nations of Eastern and Central Europe, and especially NATO members, cannot face Russia alone. However, NATO needs to evolve into a more equitable burden-sharing organization, which keeps Russia's ambitions in check, from the Baltic to the Black Sea. It also should be attracting the neutral Nordic countries, Sweden and Finland, into its ranks.

Second, Europe also must coordinate closely its anti-terror and immigration policies, making its maritime

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Russia: Enemy or Competitor

An *in*FOCUS Interview with Brig. Gen. Kevin Ryan, USA (Ret.)

Brigadier General Kevin Ryan, USA (Ret.), recently retired as Director of Defense and Intelligence Projects at Harvard's Kennedy School Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs. He served as Senior Regional Director for Slavic States in the Office of Secretary of Defense and as Defense Attaché to Russia. Brig. Gen. Ryan was Chief of Staff for the Army's Space and Missile Defense Command and founded the Elbe Group, a forum of former U.S. and Russian military and intelligence officers to discuss bilateral challenges and opportunities. He received his masters degree in National Security Strategy from the National War College. *in*FOCUS Editor Shoshana Bryen talked with him in August.

***in*FOCUS: LET'S BEGIN WITH THE RUSSIAN MILITARY BUILD-UP, WHAT HAVE THEY BEEN DOING?**

BG Ryan: Russian conventional forces today are much better than they have been since the end of the Cold War. They are bigger, they are a bigger threat to neighboring countries - Russia's so-called "near abroad" - and in limited regions abroad that are farther away, such as Syria. But those forces are not capable of true, long-distance power projection like the United States military. Those forces are not a threat to invade Europe proper, overrunning major countries. Keep in mind, though, that the Russian military is a threat to neighboring countries, so portions of countries or small countries could be overrun by Russia.

***iF*: WHAT IS THE LIKELIHOOD THAT THE BALTIC COUNTRIES COULD BE SNATCHED? WOULD NATO GO TO WAR FOR ESTONIA?**

BG Ryan: There's very little possibility that Russia wants to invade and occupy and then own Estonia, Lithuania, or Latvia. Those countries are not Slavic by nature and culture, although they have large Russian populations in them from the Soviet days, but Russia doesn't need or want those countries to be under its military occupation.

The real danger in Estonia, Lithuania, and Latvia is that with the large buildup of Russian forces on their side of the border, and the large and increasing build-up by the NATO forces on the other side of the border - they increased patrolling and flights - there will be an accidental clash, a shoot-down of an American or a Russian aircraft over disputed boundaries. The ramming of a ship, soldiers on patrol who get lost in the woods and end up across the border. And that this accidental clash could then escalate and spiral into a conflict.

A shoot-down along a border that has a lot of aircraft flying along it is not an unreasonable thing; in fact, I think it's just a matter of time. Do you know how many times the Russians, the USSR, the Soviets, shot down American airplanes along their border during the Cold War? Thirty-nine times; that includes famous shoot-downs like [U-2 pilot] Francis Gary Powers [in 1960]. It includes many U.S. spy missions that were secret at the time, so the United States didn't talk about them. And the Soviet Union didn't like to talk about clashes and its actions along its borders, so both sides had a vested interest in keeping these things quiet. But in today's world, keeping such a thing quiet would be impossible.

When the Turks shot down a Russian aircraft along the Syrian-Turkish border,

there were videos in the media almost immediately purporting, if not actually capturing the shoot-down and the parachuting of a Russian pilot and so on. So to think a shoot-down along the Baltic border today somehow could be kept quiet and not escalate is a fantasy. We don't want to put our president, or the Russian president, in the position of having to make a snap judgment on partial information because of an accidental clash.

And this is the real danger in the Baltic region: That an accident will lead to escalation, which will draw us into a war that none of us wanted in the first place.

***iF*: SO THAT RELIES ON EVERYBODY KEEPING THEIR COOL, BUT NATO ESCALATES TOGETHER. HOW LIKELY IS IT THAT GERMANY WOULD AGREE TO ANY RETALIATORY ACTIVITY AGAINST THE RUSSIANS?**

BG Ryan: This is a very important question and one that I don't think anybody knows the answer to because the possible different circumstances of an attack, let's say on Estonia. You could have a cyber attack. You could have an uprising of ethnic Russian citizens in the Estonian country who have no visible, or at least provable, immediate connection to Russia but are destabilizing the country and may very well be supported by Russia.

Under these kinds of varying circumstances, the question is very valid. What will each of the NATO countries believe is in their interest and how do we interpret what's going on there? Some countries may feel that an uprising inside Estonia is an internal matter for Estonia, whereas other countries may immediately decide it is a Russian provocation and an attack on Estonia. So while it's important for NATO countries to prepare for this kind of decision, I think a more likely outcome would be that at least some NATO members would view this as an attack, view some Russian provocation as an attack, and would come to the defense of Estonia in the form of forces, money, ammunition, material, and so on.

I think the United States, with or without NATO, would support Estonia if Russia clearly engages Estonia.

iF: IS THE CURRENT RUSSIAN MILITARY BUILD-UP SUSTAINABLE FOR THE LONG RUN? RUSSIA HAS HAD SOME GOOD ECONOMIC TIMES AND BAD TIMES, AND MOSTLY IT RELIES ON THE EXPORT OF OIL AND NATURAL GAS, THE PRICES OF WHICH ARE LOW. HOW ARE THEY GOING TO SUSTAIN WHAT THEY'VE GOT GOING?

BG Ryan: They're not. Let's call it military reform and really it's the return of a credible Russian military because Russia's military during the 1990s and early 2000s was not credible. They were under such economic and demographic pressure that they were not able to train above the battalion level or meet their requirements for recruiting and draft. They could not keep their ammunition safe and stored properly. They couldn't drive their tanks to the firing range to practice tank gunnery. These are things the Russian officers told me directly and that I saw with my own eyes in Russia during the 1990s and early 2000s. So that's an unstable and bad Russian military.

It may seem odd that an American would say this, but a country that



Brig. Gen. Kevin Ryan, USA (Ret.)

is not competent in its own military is an unstable and dangerous partner for anything that we would want to do. So it was a very bad situation for the United States for Russia's military to be in that situation, because it made Russian leaders very nervous. They're a dangerous actor in the international arena because they're uncertain of their own security. The United States would rather have a country like Russia be certain and feel confident of its own security so they would act as a stable, confident partner whether we're talking about European security or Syria or anything else.

iF: IS THERE A PLACE WHERE CONFIDENCE ROLLS OVER INTO AGGRESSIVENESS?

BG Ryan: Yes. And today, Russia has solved that problem at the basic level.

Let's say its conventional army is once again a capable force. They are at about 95 percent manning. They have about half or more of their forces, contract or professional builders now as, what we call volunteers. They have a much reduced officer corps but a much better one. But, they still have many problems. They still combat and struggle with the what we call hazing, or *dedovshchina* in Russian. But their military is much more capable and we've seen that exercised in Ukraine, Crimea, and Syria. Today that Russian military is much more capable. The country's leaders are much more confident of their own security. And the question is whether or not they take that confidence and continue to antagonize and meddle in neighboring countries or whether they stop there and are satisfied. They do not feel secure in their own borders, so they want a buffer region.

iF: MOVING BEYOND THEIR BUFFER REGION, TALK ABOUT GRAND STRATEGY AND SYRIA. IF YOU WERE LOOKING AT PRESIDENT PUTIN IN SYRIA, WHERE CLEARLY HE HAS BENEFITED WITH TWO NAVAL BASES AND AN AIR BASE, IS HE WORKING FROM GRAND STRATEGY OR IS HE AN OPPORTUNIST WHO'S TAKEN ADVANTAGE OF THE PARTS OF THE WORLD THAT ARE FALLING APART?

This is the real danger in the Baltic region: that an accident will lead to escalation, which will draw us into a war that none of us wanted in the first place.

BG Ryan: Putin is much less strategic than we give him credit for. I think he is an opportunist first. Where he can be strategic he will attempt to be, but in the case of Syria, you had a situation in which his hand was forced. The Syrian regime and Bashar al-Asad, his client were about to fail. The rebels were about to divide the western part of the country in Idlib province and near Latakia. And this was the homeland, this was the heartland of Bashar al-Asad's support. If the rebels had taken this, divided the province, and begun to break it apart, they estimated, and I think it was the correct assessment, that Asad would fall.

So they did again here what they attempted to do in Kosovo and Serbia during the Kosovo War. If you remember back to that war, they saw their client Serbia about to fail. The Kosovo War was going to be won by NATO and the West. And what did they do? They attempted to establish an air bridge by sending aircraft and troops in from Russia, but Bulgaria, Romania, and other countries did not allow them passage. So they sent a Special Forces unit from Bosnia, and they drove from there to Pristina, the airfield and capital of Kosovo. That almost started a war between the United States and Russia.

General Wesley Clark, the Supreme Allied Commander there at the time,

wanted to attack that Russian column, but a British general, Sir Michael Jackson, refused to do that. Instead we gave the Russians part of Kosovo. We allowed them to patrol and to do that in conjunction with Western nations.

The Russians failed in Kosovo because they were too weak and they worked too slowly. So when Russia had a similar situation with Syria a decade and a half later, it was a stronger mili-

tary and Putin did not want to make the same mistake, ending up with no say in what was going on, as Russia did in the Balkans. So he moved into Syria strongly and with a good, confident military force. And he turned the table.

iF: A GREAT ANALOGY. SO THE QUESTION BECOMES, IS HE PLANNING TO TURN IT OVER TO IRAN?

BG Ryan: I think Russia always had a military presence in Syria and it will continue to have one there. So I don't know they will turn Syria over to Iran. They will remain a player in Syria.

But the thing about Russians - and they know this better than anyone - is they cannot solve the situation in Syria; they don't have the money and the military power. At the same time, no solution in Syria can happen without Russia's support; Russia has a spoiler position. It must be included in any solution by the West, and will have the ability to help us. But if we don't include them, they will certainly scuttle any attempt by us to settle it in a way that's favorable to the West.

iF: SO IF THE UNITED STATES SAYS THAT IRAN CANNOT HAVE A LONG-TERM ROLE IN SYRIA, WHICH THE PRESIDENT HAD SAID BUT HE SAYS

LESS OFTEN THESE DAYS, DO YOU THINK IT'S POSSIBLE THAT THE RUSSIANS WOULD WORK WITH US TO LIMIT THE IRANIAN INFLUENCE OR DO YOU THINK THEY WOULD WORK WITH IRAN TO LIMIT OUR INTEREST?

BG Ryan: I think Russia will work to maximize its interests and to prevent the United States from having any, I don't know what you call it here, controlling interest in Syria. Which probably means that Russia will not support a complete separation between Iran and what's going on in Syria.

iF: THAT, OF COURSE, IS WHAT THE ISRAELIS WORRY ABOUT, IRANIANS NEAR THEIR BORDER.

BG Ryan: Nobody knows this place better than the Israelis.

iF: TRUE. AND THIS GOES HAND-IN-HAND WITH ISRAEL'S RELATIONSHIP WITH RUSSIA, WHICH HAS BEEN QUITE GOOD OVER THE LAST FIVE YEARS. SO THE ISRAELIS HAVE A GREAT INTEREST IN WHERE THE UNITED STATES AND RUSSIA AND IRAN GO IN TERMS OF SETTLING SYRIA.

BG Ryan: Yes. I'm not an expert on Iran, but I can tell you that Russia can be leveraged to help us get a situation in Syria that is at least acceptable, say, to the West.

iF: THEN LET'S MOVE BACK, TO RUSSIA AND A RUSSIA-RUSSIA QUESTION: NUCLEAR MODERNIZATION. HOW HAVE THE RUSSIANS BEEN DEALING WITH NUCLEAR MODERNIZATION? ARE THEY DOING IT AND DOING IT WELL?

BG Ryan: Both the United States and Russia need to modernize to keep their nuclear forces current and capable. America has started on so-called nuclear modernization because our ICBM [intercontinental ballistic missile] force is decades and decades older than it



Lt. Gen. Ben Hodges, Commander of U.S. Army Europe, shakes hands with Latvian soldiers during Operation Atlantic Resolve's welcome ceremony in Adazi, Latvia in 2015. (Photo: U.S. Army)

was originally intended to be. And the same goes for Russia. Steven Pifer did a great article a couple a years ago about, the sine/cosine wave of American and Russian nuclear modernization. When we're modernizing, Russia is finishing its modernization, and when our modernization is finished, Russia looks over and sees that we've modernized and it begins one of its own. But that's not just an arms race. It's not just that they got better so we're going to get better. But it's also a question of modernizing to keep the force from falling apart.

And I go back to my comment earlier about if you have a military capability but you're not sure that it will work, that makes you an unstable actor. So I think both countries have the right and, in a way, the obligation to keep their nuclear forces credible, safe, secure, capable.

iF: WHERE DO MISSILE DEFENSES FIT IN HERE? PRESIDENT TRUMP HAS ORDERED INCREASES IN OUR

MISSILE DEFENSE SPENDING. HOW DO THE RUSSIANS DO ON THAT? ARE THEY WORKING ON IT?

BG Ryan: The Russians, to my knowledge, don't have or did not have this hit-to-kill technology, and they did not have the money to engage in a major research and development effort to proliferate a missile defense system that the United States is moving toward. So they see our missile defense as a diminishing of their nuclear deterrent. Which they cannot match. So this is a new factor that makes calculating whether or not a deterrent is working or will work difficult.

This is the kind of thinking that results when one side is not sure that its nuclear deterrent is effective. The solution is to establish mechanisms or treaties or agreements that would give each side some level of confidence that the other side does not plan to gain an advantage so that it can launch a first strike. At the moment our missile defenses are

not developed enough that Russia has to worry about an American first strike, but they see the day coming and they, they're nervous about that future date.

iF: AND THAT WILL BE PARTICULARLY TRUE IF THE PRESIDENT DOES WHAT HE SAYS HE'S GOING TO DO, WHICH IS IMPROVE OUR MISSILE DEFENSES. THAT'S GOING TO ADD SOME TENSION TO THAT RELATIONSHIP.

BG Ryan: Exactly. And I want to see the United States build missile defenses, but we have to understand the impact on Russia. We don't want to create the war that we're trying to avoid.

iF: THERE COMES A QUESTION AS TO WHAT WE THINK RUSSIA IS. IF WE SEE IT IN SOME PARTS OF THE WORLD AS A COMPETITOR, BUT NOT AN ENEMY, SOME CONVERSATIONS ABOUT MISSILE DEFENSE AND REASSURANCE AND STABILITY

BECOME EASIER. IF WE SEE RUSSIA AS AN ENEMY, IT MAKES THOSE CONVERSATIONS HARDER. HOW DO YOU SEE RUSSIA?

BG Ryan: I think we should take a very strong position against Russia militarily right now. Russia has shown itself adventurous in the near abroad. It has projected its power into the Middle East. It has been threatening in its rhetoric about

they are deterred from using their military, they will use other forms of power. And the other aspect of hybrid warfare is that the Russians believe we're already in a war. We're constantly in a struggle. And these levers of power are constantly being used. So there is no true state of peace between the West and Russia. In a way this is very similar to Marxist-Leninist thinking and it sees the world as being in constant struggle and conflict.

assess and understand the capabilities of Russia are much better today. What I'm not sure we understand are the intentions of Russia or the intentions of the ruling elite in Russia. And there are two components of a threat. The capability to do harm or to injure us, and the intention of the adversary, whether or not they intend to do harm.

I think we see the capabilities very well. We don't have a good insight into all the time into the intentions.

...if you have a military capability but you're not sure that it will work, that makes you an unstable actor.

its own nuclear capabilities. So I think that Russia responds best to a clear and unambiguous military strength. Where we show our strength, Russia will recognize that and generally will not challenge it. So I think the United States needs to take a strong military position. We need to modernize our nuclear force. We need to ensure that our conventional capabilities in Europe are sufficient to deter Russia from further advances or assaults or attacks, whether they be military or non-military means. With respect to hybrid warfare, especially in Europe, we should see Russia as an adversary. They certainly have portrayed themselves that way.

iF: YOU MENTIONED HYBRID WARFARE, WHAT ADVANTAGES DO THE RUSSIANS SEE WITH IT AND WHAT THEY MIGHT WANT TO DO WITH IT?

BG Ryan: Hybrid warfare is not new; it has been practiced by everyone, including the United States. It means using all the levers of power, diplomatic, economic, military, informational and intelligence, cyber. It uses all these elements of power in order to protect and advance our interests. Or in the case of Russia, their interests. So where they can move militarily and say, occupy Crimea, they will do that. But where

iF: WE DISCOVERED AT SOME POINT THAT OUR ASSESSMENT OF THE SOVIET UNION WAS SOMEWHAT OVERBLOWN. HOW GOOD DO YOU THINK WESTERN INTEL IS NOW AND HOW GOOD ARE OUR JUDGEMENTS OF THEIR CAPABILITIES?

BG Ryan: I think our intelligence is pretty good, but we live in a different time and age now. Russia is much more open. Whether or not American spies can get physically to an objective in Russia is not as important today as it was during the Cold War. Today Russians themselves are writing about what's going on in their military, what's going on

iF: THIS MIGHT BE A PLACE FOR ME TO PROMOTE THE ELBE GROUP. ARE THOSE KINDS OF NON-OFFICIAL LINKS ANOTHER WAY THAT WE CAN MAXIMIZE OUR UNDERSTANDING OF WHAT THEY THINK AND HOW THEY THINK? WHICH GOES ALONG WITH THE QUESTION OF HOW HONEST DO YOU THINK THEY ARE WHEN YOU MEET?

BG Ryan: Well, to your first point, absolutely. This is the hope and the benefit of groups like the Elbe Group - that we will have a better understanding of the intentions or the thinking of the other side. And, at the same time that we can use these groups to relay our thinking and intentions to create transparency about how our side looks at the actions of the other side. This is what's lacking most at the moment. And what could lead to a miscalculation and to an error that can lead to a conflict.

So there is no true state of peace between the West and Russia. In a way this is very similar to Marxist-Leninist thinking and it sees the world as being in constant struggle and conflict.

in their country. We just have to read what they write. Of course, it's not quite that simple - the role of traditional espionage remains important. But I can sit here at my desk in New Hampshire and use Google to find out many things that were secret, highly secret during the Cold War in Russia. I think our ability to

iF: HOW HONEST DO YOU THINK THEY ARE? AND HOW HONEST ARE YOU?

BG Ryan: I think both sides of the Elbe Group are open and frank. By the nature of our background - military and intelligence officers - we are very conservative. We're patriots to our countries. We



Syrian President Bashar al-Asad meets with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow on October 21, 2015. (Photo: Kremlin.ru)

largely support the policy positions of our own country, so we don't find ourselves often disagreeing with our own national positions. And so when we say what we say, we not only are reflecting the national position but we're saying what we believe.

However, there are times during our discussions when members of both sides have disagreements. Maybe the most interesting times at the Elbe Group is when Russians argue with Russians and Americans argue with Americans about situations that we're discussing. At least in the Elbe Group, what you're getting is a good understanding of what the Russian security elite thinks, which is important by itself. And you're getting the best advice and commentary from security professionals from both countries.

iF: HAVE YOU DISCUSSED SYRIA?

BG Ryan: We've been discussing Islamic extremism since our very first meeting in 2010. When Syria became an issue we began discussing it. So after Russia had deployed forces into Syria in

September 2015, we talked a lot about Syria. The Russians were clear that they thought that the United States had no strategy there and that we were supporting rebel groups which included al-Qaeda and its associates.

iF: YOU HAVE HAD IN THE ELBE GROUP MORE THAN ONE COMMENT ABOUT NUCLEAR TERRORISM. AND ON YOUR WEBSITE WAS A STATEMENT FROM THE UN THAT BASICALLY SAID BAD ACTORS DON'T NECESSARILY HAVE TO STEAL THINGS, BUT CAN HACK THINGS, MAKING NUCLEAR TERRORISM SIMPLER. IF YOU DON'T NEED TO ACTUALLY ACQUIRE THE WEAPONS, ONLY A CYBER CAPABILITY, WHAT DOES THAT DO TO THE SECURITY OF OUR WEAPONS?

BG Ryan: Nuclear terrorism was our initial and original reason for meeting. We created the Elbe Group to pull experts together to discuss the threat of terrorists getting nuclear weapons. And getting nuclear weapons doesn't

mean just getting a nuclear bomb that's already made, say, by the United States or Pakistan. It means making a nuclear weapon. And that terrorists in a country like Afghanistan or Pakistan up in the mountains could make a nuclear device - not just a dirty weapon, but one that would implode and give a nuclear yield. This idea is still difficult for many people to accept and support. And we felt that it was a threat that was being underrated. That is the nuclear terrorist threat we were concerned about.

That is not the only threat. There is a threat if they acquire one. Or if they can hack into a nuclear power station and create some sort of nuclear disaster on the scale of Chernobyl. We're looking at different kinds of nuclear threats. And the terrorists do have an intention to get these kinds of weapons and to use them.

iF: THAT WON'T MAKE US SLEEP BETTER. BUT ON BEHALF OF THE MEMBERS OF THE JEWISH POLICY CENTER AND THE READERS OF IN-FOCUS QUARTERLY, THANK YOU.

Russia's Neo-Feudal Economy

by ANDERS ÅSLUND

For the last 18 years, Vladimir Putin has ruled Russia. The overt impression is one of stability. Since 2003, Putin has not pursued any market economic reforms, while he has systematically eliminated political and civil liberties. In reality, however, Russia has gone through a tectonic change. On the surface, the state sector has expanded, but in reality Putin and his cronies have taken over. They have eliminated one institution after the other, leaving Russia with a new feudal system under a ruling class that has already developed a hereditary aristocracy.

When Boris Yeltsin appointed Vladimir Putin his successor on New Year's Eve 1999, Putin looked weak, shy, and accidental, yet he was anything but. As wise budding authoritarians are, he was everything to all people while consolidating his power. As Chairman of the Federal Security Service (FSB, the

was to take over the two leading television channels from two oligarchs. He took them one after the other, treating it as an economic problem and denying that he wanted to control the media, which he did.

Another big step was a major judicial reform adopted in late 2001. Russia badly needed such a reform because the courts were corrupt, underfunded, and arbitrary, controlled by the regional governors. Most of the elements of the reform were positive, such as better funding and procedural codes, but the giveaway was that Putin called for a "dictatorship of law." Soon it turned out that the key change was that the judiciary would be subordinate to the presidential administration rather than regional governors.

During Putin's first term, 2000-2004, the new big businessmen, the so-called oligarchs, maintained great power

flawed privatization, but later for tax fraud in the Yukos oil and gas company. All along, Putin insisted that he had nothing to do with it, though it was obviously his initiative. Khodorkovsky was sentenced to two long prison terms. Putin also claimed that Yukos would not be nationalized, but it was confiscated, and its assets were transferred to the biggest state company, Rosneft.

■ *Pushing Aside Competitors*

By taking out the biggest and most vocal businessman, Putin had quashed them all. Soon afterward, his chief of staff Alexander Voloshin, whom he had inherited from Yeltsin, retired in protest, and Putin sacked his prime minister, Mikhail Kasyanov. Both had been seen as connected with big business and functioned as counterweights to Putin. The Duma election in December 2003 became a not-very-democratic landslide to Putin's benefit, and he was easily re-elected in March 2004 in an even less democratic election. Putin had consolidated his power.

The new businessmen who had taken over a few oil companies boosted their production by half from 1999 to 2004, and in the fall of 2003 the oil price boom took off. Putin could put the economy on autopilot without bothering about more market economic reforms, and he did. During his second term (2004-8) Putin built state capitalism.

According to the Russian Antimonopoly Committee, the share of Russia's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) produced by the state sector has increased from 35 percent in 2005 to 70 percent in 2015. In Vladimir Lenin's words, the state has regained control of the "commanding heights" of the Russian economy. Yet, the state control of the big companies is rather illusory. The real rulers are a small group of men close to

State control of big companies is rather illusory.
The real rulers are a small group of men close
to President Vladimir Putin... They control these
companies as personal representatives of their old
friend Putin.

old KGB) in 1998-99, he had already secured the heart of Russian power. As prime minister in the fall of 1999, he gained political standing by starting a second, very bloody war in Chechnya. In 2001, he sacked the ministers of Interior and Defense, replacing them with his own people.

Immediately after he had become president, he established his "vertical power," reining in the 89 freewheeling regional governors. Putin forced them to obey Moscow's laws and to pay more taxes to Moscow. His other early step

and influence. Putin held a meeting with a score of them once a year. At their first meeting in 2000, Putin declared that they would be allowed to keep their wealth if they stayed out of politics. The richest of them, Mikhail Khodorkovsky, CEO of the enormous oil company Yukos, did not accept that. He reformed corporate governance in his company and publicized his wealth, spending large amounts openly on building civil society. He behaved like a free man.

On October 25, 2003, Khodorkovsky was arrested, first for an allegedly



Mikhail Khodorkovsky, former owner of Yukos, in a defendant's cage during his trial for fraud and tax evasion in 2005 in Moscow.

President Vladimir Putin – former KGB officers, ministers, and senior officials from the presidential administration. They control these companies as personal representatives of their old friend Putin.

Putin took over one big state company after the other, by appointing one of his close associates chief executive and another chairman of its supervisory board. In May 2001, he had seized control over the jewel in the crown, Gazprom. His right-hand aide Igor Sechin transformed Rosneft from a small firm to the biggest listed oil producing company in the world by gobbling up good private companies through corporate raiding, with Yukos being the first one.

In 2006-7, Putin went on the offensive, merging whole industries into large state companies with hundreds of firms, such as the United Aircraft Building Corporation and the United Shipbuilding Corporation. In 2007, he did something quite extraordinary. He formed six state

corporations, each with a special law. These state corporations are legally nongovernmental organizations and not subject to any external control. Their property was privatized. Thus, \$116 billion of state assets and funds were transferred to nongovernmental organizations that were controlled by one man, Vladimir Putin. The most important of these state corporations were the old Soviet foreign trade bank, Vnesheconombank (VEB), the Russian Atomic Energy Company (Rosatom), and the armaments company Rostec (Russian Technologies).

State capitalism is usually associated with state strategies for investment and technological development, but Russian state capitalism involves neither central planning nor strategy. Instead, the top managers are entitled to do whatever they care to with what Russians call “manual management.” In fact, this is not even state capitalism but crony capitalism. The beneficiary owners are not the Russian state but Putin and his friends.

■ **Self-Dealing Crony Capitalists**

Putin has the legal privilege to transfer vast state funds to private companies or individuals at will. VEB can issue loans of billions of dollars not expecting to them to be paid back. State companies can favor friends through discretionary procurement or sell assets to them at submarket prices. Gazprom is the biggest source of such outflows.

The long tenures of Putin's associates as chief executives of big state companies make evident that economic efficiency, profit, innovations, and other economic performance criteria hardly matter. Instead, trust, personal loyalty, and the transfer of funds to friendly circles appear important. No CEO of a large company anywhere in the world has destroyed more capital than Gazprom's CEO Alexei Miller, who has lost a market capitalization of more than \$320 billion. Yet, Miller sits firm after 16 years of disastrous management. Law is no restriction,



The Moscow headquarters of Gazprom, Russia's state-owned natural gas monopoly.

while Putin's will is everything. All too obviously, Putin approved of the intricate corporate raiding by Rosneft CEO Igor Sechin of Yukos.

Certain national interests do matter, especially geopolitical interests that are seen as crucial for the sustenance of the regime. Thus, Gazprom has obediently cut off gas whenever the Kremlin has requested the punishment of a recalcitrant neighbor, even at major commercial cost. Rosneft is happily taking over the responsibility for Venezuela, and VEB has thrown vast amounts to any harebrained scheme suggested by the Kremlin, notably \$50 billion on the Sochi Olympics. Gazprom is diligently supplying the whole country with gas regardless of payments, and the big state companies maintain employment in the many company towns.

The CEOs of Russian state corporations are handsomely paid. Standard salaries of the big companies have been \$25-\$50 million. Members of supervisory boards are also well remunerated. As president, Dmitri Medvedev insisted on these salaries being published. It was done for a few years, but Igor Sechin, a close associate of Putin, has successfully turned them secret. Putin has awarded his lords their fiefdoms, which they are

entitled to treat at their discretion. Symptomatically, his lords build themselves palaces modeled on the late 18th century, when Catherine II ruled Russia. Putin had a tasteful Italian palace built for himself for \$1 billion near Sochi, since he had only 20 official residences to that point.

In 2008, Putin resigned as president after two consecutive terms, but he did not leave. He remained the dominant rul-

they have continued in like manner. Genadiy Timchenko and Arkady Rotenberg receive a large share of Russia's state contracts, notably for building gas pipelines, and they face no competition. A third major crony, Yuri Kovalchuk, is CEO of Bank Rossiya, which the U.S. Treasury has sanctioned as the spider in Putin's financial net. Kovalchuk has also become the main owner and manager of most of

Russia's crony capitalism has bred a small class of incredibly wealthy individuals, whose children are given top state positions, allowing them to become even wealthier.

er as prime minister, while his weak aide Dmitry Medvedev became president. Rather than building up state enterprises, Putin had been indulging in rampant asset stripping together with a few close business friends from St. Petersburg. This asset stripping seems to have taken off from 2004-6. The two opposition activists Boris Nemtsov and Vladimir Milov assessed that Putin and his friends tapped Gazprom for \$60 billion in 2004-7, and

Russia's television channels that are no longer publicly owned.

The irony is that since Putin has systematically destroyed any rule of law in Russia and thus property rights, he and his friends feel compelled to transfer their cash abroad. Estimates of Putin's personal wealth varies from \$50-\$200 billion. It is channeled through a large number of offshore havens, but in the end most of it is likely to have been invested in real



Demonstrators commemorate the second anniversary of the killing of liberal Russian politician Boris Nemtsov, shot dead February 27, 2015.

estate in the United States and the United Kingdom. The IMF estimates total Russian capital outflow from 1992-2016 at some \$750 billion, and all the small off-shore island havens can only account for a fraction of that amount.

The reason Putin and his friends accumulated such amounts of money is not that they intend to retire. Putin is running on personal authoritarianism, and a dictator cannot retire – only die or be ousted. Putin needs all this money to maintain power, and he needs the power to keep his money. If he did not have both power and immense wealth, he would lose out in a society without property rights.

■ **Nepotism, Corruption, and Resentment**

Putin and his many male friends are all around 65 years of age, which is a normal retirement age. Some have retired, but most hang on. Putin has clearly made his choice for the future: nepotism. The sons of his best security service friends have become vice presidents of large state companies at 25-30, and the sons of the cronies are taking over their fathers'

companies. Russia's crony capitalism has bred a small class of incredibly wealthy individuals, whose children are given top state positions allowing them to become even wealthier. Meanwhile the career path to these top positions is no longer open to others, breeding resentment among the young, able, and ambitious.

The Russian model of crony capitalism does not appear accidental but quite deliberate, though the Kremlin naturally does not embrace it openly. Basically, this is a recreation of an ancient feudal model or patrimonialism that the dean of Russian history, Richard Pipes, described so well in his classic *Russia Under the Old Regime*. It offers maximum freedom for the ruler, with far-reaching delegation to the feudal lords. That model lasted for centuries. In effect, the state corporations have transferred public property into tsarist ownership.

Can this system continue when the oil rents are drying up? It depends. Putin believes in macroeconomic stability. He has allowed the "systemic liberals" to impose hard budget constraints even on the large state companies. If the oil

price stays around \$50 per barrel Russian oil rents will remain substantial. Yet, the system offers no incentives to enhance productivity. State control and sheer lawlessness are becoming ever more stifling. A broad consensus expects a steady growth rate of 1.5 percent per year, but this system seems too ossified to last. At present, Russia feels quite a bit as in 1984 before Mikhail Gorbachev, *glasnost* and *perestroika*, although it is so much wealthier, cleaner, and more modern. Yet something needs to happen to break the system up.

Times have changed and with them education, openness, and income levels. This 18th century feudalism appears dangerous for Russia's future social and political stability. In his recent documentary film about Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev's alleged corruption, seen by 24 million people, opposition leader Alexei Navalny has cast the glove.

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Cybercrime: Russian Tools to Infiltrate, Subvert, and Control

by PAUL M. JOYAL

Russia and its next generation warfare, sometimes called hybrid or non-linear warfare, understands cyberspace as a decisive arena for modern combat in which information can become weaponized. Chief of the Military General Staff Vladimir Garasimov explained this in a 2013 article titled "The Value of Science in Prediction." Understanding that the line between war and peace had become blurred, he wrote:

Nonmilitary means of achieving military and strategic goals have grown and, in many cases, exceeded the power of weapons in their effectiveness... The information space opens wide asymmetrical possibilities for reducing the fighting potential of the enemy... It is necessary to perfect activities in the information space, including the defense of our own objects.

Gerasimov called for asymmetrical action that combines Special Forces and information warfare to create "a permanently operating front through the entire territory of the enemy state." This is exactly what unfolded in Crimea.

Long-distance, contactless actions against the enemy are becoming the main means of achieving combat and operational goals. The defeat of the enemy's objects is conducted throughout the entire depth of his territory. The differences between strategic, operational, and tactical levels, as well as between offensive and defensive operations, are being erased.

Garasimov's views reflect those of that were first voiced by Vladimir Markomenko in 1997 in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*. Then-deputy director of Russian Federal Agency of Government Communications and Information (FAPSI), Markomenko was the first Russian official voice to define Russian Information Warfare. He posited four components:

1. Destruction of the enemy's command and control centers and electronic warfare against its information and telecommunications systems.
2. Electronic intelligence to intercept and decipher information flows transmitted via communications channels.
3. Hacking into the enemy's information resources to steal, distort, or destroy the normal operations of these systems.
4. Psychological warfare to disseminate disinformation or tendentious information for influencing the opinions, intentions, and orientation of society and decision makers.

Russian Military Doctrine, published in Spring 2010, stressed the importance of information warfare during the initial phase of conflict, directed against enemy troops and populations. If the information dimension fails, the Russian military can resort to kinetic options.

In the 2008 invasion of Georgia, the first target for the Russian air force was the Harris Corporation military communication system co-located at the forward command base of the Georgian military. Georgia was quickly without the command and control of its forces and had to rely upon cell phones – that Russia easily intercepted. For Crimea, cell phone networks had already been

disabled in Kiev at the outbreak of the Russia invasion and occupation of Ukraine to prevent communications among members of the government and to sow confusion. Today cyber attacks against Ukraine continue to be a constant feature with noted attacks on the electrical infrastructure of the country.

■ **Russia's Cyber Operations Principles**

The use of the term "cyber war" is an unfortunate formulation because it stovepipes attention into a narrow spectrum of today's conflict. Rather it is better to understand Cyber Operations within the spectrum of low intensity conflict or unconventional warfare, more precisely part of Information Warfare or Active Measures.

Information technology has lowered the barrier between war and peace, creating an opportunity for the re-emergence and adaption of traditional Soviet Active Measure doctrine to today's cyber-information age. The Russian military has been developing an advanced information warfare doctrine since the mid-90's in combination with highly accurate military weapons and non-military means of influence to disorganize the targeted state administration.

The ultimate objective of this so-called hybrid warfare is to achieve complete information dominance over the opponent within the "battle space," which includes political/economic matters. It is designed to destroy state and societal institutions, create mass disorder, degrade the functioning of society and ultimately collapse the state. And



The relocation of the Bronze Soldier monument to the unknown Soviet war dead was a pretext to a Russian cyber attack on Estonia's parliament, banks, ministries, newspapers and broadcasters. The memorial, pictured here, in Tallinn in 2007. (Photo: Aleksei Verhovski)

most importantly, it seeks to achieve the most critical political and economic objectives without direct military contact with the opposing forces and without using high intensity armed combat – in which Russia cannot compete against Western military forces.

These principles have now been incorporated into Russia's whole government and private sector formulation of hybrid or non-linear warfare. It has information warfare as the centerpiece of strategy. It should not be surprising that criminal organizations play an important role in its operational execution.

■ Criminal Hacking Groups

As was demonstrated in Estonia in 2007 (cyber only), and in the 2008 Russo-Georgian war (cyber and military), cyber-attacks bring with them an implicit psychological impact. In 2006, Estonia experienced the debilitating effects that can occur with Botnet Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) cyber-attacks on banking and governmental networks.

Estonia suffered a 10-day attack on its Internet services, causing major disruption to its financial system. Estonia is commonly referred to as the world's most Internet-connected country and it was paralyzed. This attack, while orchestrated by the Kremlin, was executed by criminal cyber organizations, illustrating that criminal organizations must be viewed as a Russian cyber army in reserve. They can execute operations while Russia can deny its active involvement.

In a further twist, criminal hackers hijacked American identities and software tools, using them in an attack on Georgian government websites during the Russia-Georgia war in 2008, according to *The Wall Street Journal*. Furthermore, they changed common Microsoft Corp. software into a cyber-weapon and collaborated on popular U.S.-based social-networking sites, including Twitter and Facebook Inc., to coordinate assaults on Georgian sites. Additionally, identification and credit-card information stolen from Americans was used to register nine of these attack sites, while

one site was established using information stolen from a French citizen.

It is important to understand how Russian aggression preceded the attack. A significant number of Georgia's Internet servers were eventually seized and taken under external control by hackers from late Thursday, August 7, 2008 forward. The StopGeorgia.com website posted instructions on how to attack 36 servers in Georgia. Its message was, "We the representatives of the Russian *hako* underground will not tolerate provocations by the Georgians in all its manifestations. We want to live in a free world, but exist in a free-aggression and Setevom space." This web site was directly linked to individuals officially associated with RBN. Russia's troops invaded Georgia on Friday, August 8. As Richard Weitz explained in *World Politics Review* in 2009:

The attackers did not conduct any preliminary surveying or mapping of sites, but instead immediately employed specially designed software to

attack them. The graphic art used to deface one Georgian website was created in March 2006 but saved for use until the August 2008 campaign. The attackers also rapidly registered new domain names and established new Internet sites, further indicating

Ukraine's critical infrastructure suffered a series of assaults before Crimea was annexed.

they had already analyzed the target, written attack scripts, and perhaps even rehearsed the information warfare campaign...

In Estonia's case, the cyber-attacks were preceded by riots and a constant haranguing by Russian-language web forums criticizing Estonia for relocating the Unknown Soldier statue, a Russian icon. These websites incited "patriots" to protect Mother Russia from the "F--cking Estonian Fascists" and called for vengeance by destroying the e-government and business systems – one of Estonia's greatest achievements and an engine for its economic growth and efficiency. Messaging was used as the kindling to activate an army of hacktivists to attack the Internet infrastructure with massive DDoS attacks.

As with all Russian military operations, and now combined arms hybrid strategy, Russian deception (*maskirovka*) operations contributed to Georgia's overconfidence in its government. This included the manipulation of Georgian intelligence sources in the Russian military in the run up to the KavKaz Russian military exercise in the North Caucasus. Disinformation on Russian readiness capabilities prepared the groundwork for perception management or reflexive control of Georgian decision-making. The intelligence reported that Russia did not have the readiness or will to invade.

This was a successful ruse to lure Georgia into false confidence.

An important propaganda messaging campaign accompanied these conflicts: the target country and certain elements were labeled "fascist" in the Russian media for both internal and external

perception purposes. The term has an extremely negative connotation within the Russian population after years of Soviet propaganda surrounding its victory over the Nazis in "The Great Patriotic War." It had a profound effect, providing Putin an effective means of bolstering domestic support for Russian covert cyber operations and political/military activities.

■ Cyber War on Infrastructure

Ukraine's critical infrastructure suffered a series of assaults before Crimea was annexed.

Mobile phone and Internet connections were severely hampered by equipment installed immediately after the invasion by Russian Special Forces within Ukrtelecom networks in the Crimea region under control of Russia. Government websites were overwhelmed with DDoS attacks, social networks were corrupted, and Russian forces cut some of Ukraine's phone and Internet cables. One of the first set of military objectives for Russian "green men" was to capture Ukrainian telephonic switches and install special technical devices to take control of the cell networks.

Estonia, Georgia and Crimea/Ukraine all illustrate how cyber warfare is best understood within the continuum of low-intensity conflict, specifically, information operations (IO) and information warfare (IW). Cyber can lead the way in the run up to war and

be an integral part an information and kinetic war.

These cyber-attacks were conducted covertly, with cutouts, cyber criminals who were used for mobilizing patriotic youth, or other criminal organizations. It is for this reason cyber-attacks should be considered as an "Active Measure" according to Russian intelligence doctrine.

■ Terror as an Adjunct to Cyber Operations

While cyber operations clearly play a critical role, especially in initial phases of covert war, terror also plays a role during covert and overt phases of conflict, including cyber attacks.

This past August, the Head of the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU), Pavlo Hrytsak told a Kiev briefing:

Russia's FSB continues to deploy its sabotage groups to Ukrainian soil to commit terrorist attacks in our territory. Among their main targets are strategic infrastructure facilities, while another goal is the assassination of certain public and political figures. As a rule, they should be some high-profile personas, no matter their political affiliation – the ruling forces or the opposition. The aim is for the assassination of such figure to yield the expected public outcry...

He continued:

Over the last month, the Security Service exposed three such groups. In particular, in Kharkiv on July 17 we detained the leader and the main executor, the organizer of such a group, trained by the Main Directorate of the General Staff of the Russian armed forces. The group was instructed to assassinate several public figures and Ukrainian government officials. Subversive efforts are manifested in internal destabilization, the efforts of subversive reconnaissance groups, attempts to commit acts of sabotage and terrorist acts...

He concluded the press briefing with this:

I will only recall the last few key activities that the Russian Federation is engaged in, while constantly accusing Ukraine of violating Minsk agreements. It's the attempts to incite and provide media support for pseudo rallies on ethnic grounds; systemic spins of fake news, such as about the supply of missile engines to North Korea and detentions in Crimea and in occupied areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions of sabotage groups allegedly sent by the SBU.

■ **Assassinations and Terrorist Bombings Destabilize Ukraine**

Ukraine regularly experiences assassination and terrorist actions as the conflict continues in Eastern Ukraine. On December 19, 2014 members of the Ukrainian SBU arrested a suspected saboteur in central Kiev who, acting under instruction of her Russian superiors, had transported a powerful bomb from Luhansk under control of Russian-backed militants from the so-called "Luhansk People's Republic." She was picked up in Kiev's busy center right after she left a handbag with a bomb inside. It was St. Nicholas Day when the area would have been filled with families with young children.

In one of the most high profile murders, Russian State Duma member Denis Voronkov, expected to become an important witness in a treason trial against Russian-backed ex-president of Ukraine Viktor Yanukovich, was shot dead in the center of Kiev. The Prosecutor General of Ukraine asserted that the person who ordered the murder is now in Russia, has links to criminality, and has "live contacts" with the Russian special services. He added that "The executors were mainly citizens of Ukraine, most of them have been identified, and those with proven facts have been detained."

In June 2017, a car bomb in the heart of Kiev shredded a black Mercedes being driven by senior intelligence leader, Col.

Maksim Shapoval, chief of the Ukrainian military special-ops forces intelligence. This was merely the prelude to the main event: a massive, well-disciplined cyber-assault aimed to bring the Ukrainian state and society to a halt. A wide range of institutions including vast swaths of the private sector were targeted by cyber hacks, ransomware, and malware.

■ **Flooding Social Media Outlets with Trolls**

Russia continues to engage in global information and social media campaigns to shape international opinion around its invasion of Ukraine. It activated troll armies by recruiting and training a new cadre of online trolls that have been deployed to spread the Kremlin's message on the comments section of top American and Western websites and media centers to promote a number of false narratives. These include the idea that the people of the Crimea, in a free and fair elections nearly unanimously voted for succession from Ukraine. Another described the ouster of President Viktor Yanukovitch as a coup by fascists.

A document on Russian structure and strategy for its army of trolls was leaked and reported in BuzzFeed by Max Seddon in 2014. The details are illuminating:

Russia continues to engage in global information and social media campaigns to shape international opinion around its invasion of Ukraine.

Foreign media are currently actively forming a negative image of the Russian Federation in the eyes of the global community. Additionally, the discussions formed by comments to those articles are also negative in tone. Like any brand formed by popular opinion, Russia has its supporters ('brand advocates') and its opponents. The main problem is that in

the foreign Internet community, the ratio of supporters and opponents of Russia is about 20/80 respectively.

The document provided instructions to the trolls and detailed their expected workload each working day: They should post comments on news 50 times a day. Each blogger is required to maintain six Facebook accounts publishing a minimum three posts a day and participating in news groups at least twice a day. "By the end of the first month, they are expected to have won 500 subscribers and get at least five posts on each item a day. On Twitter, the bloggers are expected to manage 10 accounts with up to 2,000 followers and tweet 50 times a day."

■ **Target America**

The timing and coordination of physical and cyber-attacks in Ukraine might have been a signal to the United States, which had embarrassed Russia in Syria. The United States had announced the day before the assassination of Shapoval and the cyber attacks that Syria was preparing a chemical-weapons attack, which American forces were prepared to disrupt.

Using attacks in Ukraine to send messages to America might not be as far-fetched as it seems. Even the renewed de-

bates in the American news media and foreign-policy circles over the extent to which the Russian government should be, or should have been punished for its systematic interference in the 2016 U.S. presidential elections might have been a consideration for Russian actions. In truth, Russian cyber-attacks on the Democratic National Committee (DNC) are only the visible tip of the iceberg of Russia's massive

cyber campaign targeting American institutions. According to FBI agent Clint Watts in congressional testimony:

Hackers proliferated Western networks and could be spotted amongst recent data breaches and website defacements. In conjunction with

400, with a budget of at least 20 million rubles (roughly \$400,000) a month as reported by an earlier *NYT* story. The ads were not directly about a particular candidate but the hot button issues associated with them.

On January 6, 2017 the Director of National Intelligence (DNI) released an

agencies, state-funded media, third-party intermediaries, and paid social media users or “trolls.”

■ Conclusion

Russia has the strategy, the intellectual and scientific capital, the will and the organization to implement and carry out cyber and information warfare on a global scale. It does not have the global military capabilities of the Soviet past and knows it cannot match the United States in a toe-to-toe confrontation. Russian use of political and economic subversion has increasingly become its favored method of seeking to exert control and influence over foreign governments, increasing its political influence operations not only in Ukraine but also throughout Europe and the United States. It is a cheaper and less risky option to re-establish itself as a world power. Russia is a superpower in its neighborhood and has additional effective means with this doctrine to extend its influence and project its power.

The controversy that grips the American political system and public life today illustrates the effectiveness of Russian capabilities, the overriding goal of which is to weaken the target country. And the

...hundreds of fake Facebook accounts and pages bought \$100,000 in political ads during the presidential campaign last year. These fake accounts and pages were connected to a Russian company...

these activities were honeypot accounts – attractive-looking women or passionate political partisans – that appeared to be befriending certain audience members through social engineering. Above all, the FBI observed hecklers, synchronized trolling accounts that would attack political targets using similar talking points and follower patterns. These accounts included overtly Kremlin supported sites that promoted Russian foreign-policy positions. These activities targeted key English-speaking audiences throughout Europe and North America. From this pattern of activities, it was clearly a deliberate, well-organized, well-resourced, well-funded, wide-ranging effort commanded by Russia.

The New York Times reported in September 2017 that hundreds of fake Facebook accounts and pages bought \$100,000 in political ads during the presidential campaign last year. These fake accounts and pages were connected to a Russian company called the Internet Research Agency, a company well known for using troll accounts to post Kremlin-approved messages on social media and post comments on news websites. One Russian newspaper put the number of employees at

unclassified version of the report: *Assessing Russian Activities and Intentions in Recent U.S. Elections* (ICA 2017-01D). Its findings concluded:

We assess Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered an influence campaign in 2016 aimed at the US presidential election. Russia’s goals were to undermine public faith in the US democratic process, denigrate Secretary Clinton, and harm her elect-

ability and potential presidency. We further assess Putin and the Russian Government developed a clear preference for President-elect Trump.

It also stated:

Moscow’s influence campaign followed a Russian messaging strategy that blends covert intelligence operations—such as cyber activity—with overt efforts by Russian government

Russia has the strategy, the intellectual and scientific capital, the will, and the organization to implement and carry out cyber and information warfare on a global scale.

United States is the main adversary. Today, our institutions are under attack, our trust in government is challenged, and our allies are filled with doubt. The pressing challenge of the day is how the United States and its people will respond to this new form of warfare against the United States and its allies.

PAUL M. JOYAL is managing director of law enforcement and public safety practice at National Strategies (NSI).

The Invention of Russia: Putin's Rise & Fake News

review by SHOSHANA BRYEN

Books should generally be read as stand-alone. Read them, learn something, and move on. The *Invention of Russia* by Arkady Ostrovsky, however, cannot be read alone, because as useful as it is, it is enormously (though not quite fatally) limited by the absence of the Soviet Jewry movement and American government policy in the narrative leading to the collapse of the Soviet Union. Natan Sharansky doesn't even get a mention in the index.

That might have been grounds to reject it altogether, and it was close. But the groups Ostrovsky limns thoroughly and entertainingly are not well understood in the United States, and they should be. There is the intelligentsia and there are the oligarchs, and through cross-fertilization, some in each group become communications media masters. The intelligentsia receives the lion's share of credit for collapsing the Soviet Union. The oligarch/media masters are credited with creating Vladimir Putin and modern Russia.

The "Fake News" in the updated title is a clear attempt to capitalize (no pun) on the current American obsession with the media, and the introduction tries and strains to make the point that both the United States and Russia have problems, but in the case of Russia, the limited number of media outlets – particularly television stations – makes the idea of a media-generated candidate a reasonable one.

Let's start where Ostrovsky starts and later fix the problem of no Ronald Reagan, Henry M. Jackson, Sharansky, Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), or Helsinki Final Act.

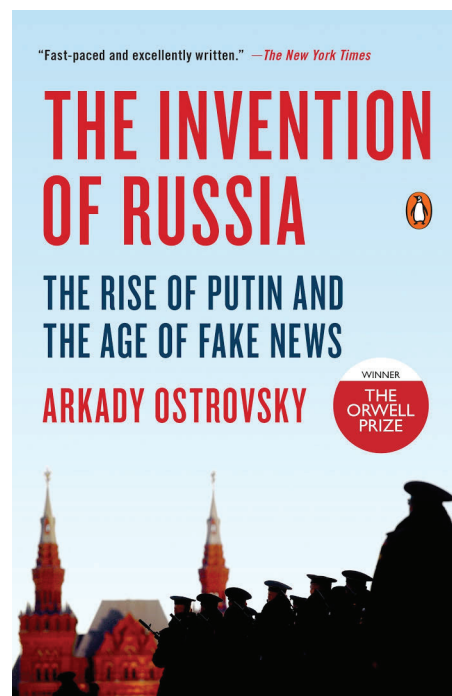
■ *The Thaw*

The intelligentsia was romantic. Children and grandchildren of the Revolution, Stalinism, and WWII, they were graduating universities shortly after Stalin's death and during Khrushchev's "thaw." They believed in communism as a means to social justice and the thaw "gave them encouragement and a chance to pursue political careers without becoming either murderers or victims... Most were well-educated, like-minded liberal intelligentsia, largely pro-Western and certainly anti-Stalinist." Stalinism was considered a distortion of "true" communism. Their understanding of the depth of the perversion of the Stalinist state was clear:

Civil life is poisoned by lies. Presumption of guilt is a guiding principle. Two hundred thousand different instructions tell a person he is a potential villain. One has to prove integrity with references and certificates. Conformation is seen as a sign of trustworthiness... For thousands of years we have been ruled by people and not by laws... We are talking about is not the dismantling of Stalinism, but a replacement of a thousand year old model of statehood.

Alexander Yakovlev, later the leader of Gorbachev's *perestroika*, wrote, "I came to hate Lenin and Stalin – these monsters who had cruelly deceived me and crushed my romantic world of hopes."

They were seekers of a socialist utopia, and the 1960s were fine with them. They "did not want a return to the hyper tension of Stalinist times. It was striving



*The Invention of
Russia*

Arkady Ostrovsky
Atlantic Books
2015



Former Russian President Boris Yeltsin with the writer Viktor Astafyev, right, in 1996.

for a measured, safe and comfortable life. Its main goal was to stay in power without fear of being purged.”

The Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 was the beginning of their disillusionment. If Alexander Dubcek’s “communism with a human face” couldn’t be tolerated in an ally, it wouldn’t be tolerated at home. And it wasn’t. They spent the next 20 years trying to justify themselves and their fathers (almost always fathers) for betraying the “thaw.”

Russia has always been an intensely literary society, so newspapers, journals, plays and essays were the preferred media of the intelligentsia – perfect for an intellectual class trying out new ideas. Television was a latecomer quickly understood to be able to reach across an enormous country – and who better to run it than people with a lot to say?

That’s what they thought, but they were out of their element. “Television,” said one, “must help an individual to go back to his own world, to find values outside of politics. Our task is to make politics occupy as little space in our lives as possible.” Ostrovsky adds, “But politics kept bursting in and television soon turned into a battleground.” After the collapse of the Gorbachev government and the rise of Boris Yeltsin, the media threw itself behind various factions and individuals,

putting out material designed to ingrain politics deeper into the system and find ways to monetize their contacts.

It wasn’t difficult.

■ **The Oligarchs and the Change in Russia**

The second half of the book is focused on the rise of oligarchs and the distribution of state assets to allies and partners of the ruling elite – and the rise of Vladimir Putin from mousy KGB official in Lenin-grad to Russia’s president. This, according to Ostrovsky, was planned and executed by the media monopoly that had taken advantage of Boris Yeltsin’s frail health and frequent absence from governing. Determined to cement their gains, they chose a figurehead who was not opposed to capitalism and was an avatar of Russian nationalism and the Orthodox Church. When Yeltsin first appointed Putin prime minister, his rating in the polls was within the margin of error. That’s where the book becomes really interesting.

Many Russian liberals perceived Putin as an authoritarian modernizer who would restore the functioning of the state and the economy. The media saw him as a blank slate onto which they could write their own narrative...The educated, well-off,

Westernized middle class saw Putin as a center-right, economically liberal president – a Russian version of Augusto Pinochet.

Ostrovsky takes us through the various media personalities – including members of the intelligentsia, some of whom became oligarchs themselves – and how they played together or in opposition to one another, always with the goal of furthering the interests of people with money. But he hedges on the actual effect of the media:

The Oligarchs’ idea that a few men could anoint the future president actually worked. But while the oligarchs, the media, and the political technologists fought battles, claimed victories and engaged in cunning projects, thinking they were the prime players, real events were taking place in the country that were outside their control but not beyond their ability to exploit. As a politician, Putin might have been a media invention, but the events that turned him into a president were not.

The Chechen Wars figure prominently here, as does the media/government control of information during the loss of the Russian submarine Kursk. But so does a rising economy and the emergence of a young, urban, and Europeanized class of people – the children of the intelligentsia of the 1950s and 1960s and the children of the oligarchs. Many of these entitled and privileged sons (still mostly sons) have been groomed to take over the companies the oligarchs acquired from the state. Wealthy and mobile, they are still looking for a “normal” life in a “normal” country – but with more money. Their halcyon days, like those of their parents 50 years ago, are presently running into increased repression by the state.

The final chapter is devoted to the closing of independent media and censorship of social media, along with an increasingly heavy-handed Putin determining

what the Russian people can see to attempt to orchestrate how they will respond.

At the age of 70, Yakovlev was asked to become chairman of a television station. He wrote the epitaph of his generation:

Something peculiar was emerging in Russian life – very different from what was conceived at the beginning of perestroika. My rosy dreams died when I got myself immersed in the television whirlpool. Chasing mon-

one point, mention a brain drain caused by the departure of 1,000,000 people from Russia. He can't however, seem to acknowledge that they were Jews – taking with them an enormous supply of education, entrepreneurship, culture and technological skill. Moreover, the success of Soviet Jews in making their case for exodus internally and the United States as a crucial and active ally were both part of cracking the façade of a seemingly invincible Soviet Union.

people Ostrovsky doesn't seem to know or chooses to ignore.

Keep in mind that one reason for the success of the Soviet Jewry movement is a counterpoint to Ostrovsky's picture of Russians always trying to create Russia as a "normal" country. Normal countries allow their citizens to come and go at will. The combination of internal pressure by Soviet Jews to leave and external pressure from the United States to allow them to leave was more than the hoping-to-be-normal USSR could tolerate.

Natan Sharansky doesn't even get a mention in the index.

ey, constantly squabbling about who will get paid more, falsehood, lies. For the first time in my life I saw corruption in action, in its naked form.

■ The Soviet Jewry Problem

Ostrovsky's version of the demise of the Soviet State is about the success of the intelligentsia, the failure of Gorbachev, and later the success of the oligarchs and finally of Putin. He does, at

To counteract the problem, read a book devoted to the rise of Jewish self-awareness and the first-parallel, then-intertwined Russian and American Soviet Jewry movements. *When They Come for Us, We'll be Gone* by Gal Beckerman is useful – written in alternating Russian and American chapters. Even if you know the story, Beckerman's detail will remind you of the hardship, sacrifice and prison time of

■ Conclusion

The Invention of Russia is worthwhile to broaden one's understanding of the forces inside Russia that worked against the communist system, but that failed – for very Russian reasons – to create a 21st century modern state with rule of law at its core. This state has begun to regress into its nationalist history complete with peasants and the heavy hand of a rapacious governing class under an absolutist tsar.

But generally without Jews. They're gone and that's OK.

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■ *A Final Thought ...*

Fear or Anticipation: Zapad 2017

As *inFOCUS* went to press, Russia began the Zapad 2017 military exercise. The large drill, held in the Baltic region on September 14-20, has been occupying the attention of Western governments and Russia watchers since the beginning of the year. The concerns surround not only the number of troops involved, but also the crucial area in which the maneuvers take place. Some analysts fear that the exercise is a cover for Russia to occupy Belarus or to take control of parts of Poland and the Baltic states.

The United States and others have accused Moscow of leveraging the exercise build-up, magnified by the lack of Russian transparency surrounding it, as a means to “destabilize” security throughout the entire region. At the same time, the focus toward Zapad is drawing attention away from potential developments involving Russia elsewhere, such as in Ukraine and Moldova.

The concern has always been that one day this might be the “real thing.”

The most vulnerable point in the region is the 40-mile wide Suwalki Gap separating Kaliningrad from Belarus, and potentially the Baltic states from the rest of NATO and the EU, and any NATO reinforcements intended for the region.

Unlike other recent exercises, information about Zapad has been intermittent, if not taunting. The first reference was the disclosure in November 2016 of 4,162

specially chartered rail cars for the exercise, normally used for transporting mobilized reservists, in this case as many as 50,000 to Belarus. On the ground, Lithuanian intelligence and others believe that Russian and Belarus troop numbers may exceed 100,000.

On September 1, the commander of the US Army in Europe called on Russia to allow outside media to observe the drills, noting that Russian inspectors attended NATO exercises all the time.

Moscow suspended its adherence to the Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty indefinitely in 2007. Regional hotlines designed to avoid escalation and misunderstandings have since been dismantled, and matters are further aggravated by Moscow’s non-compliance with existing arms control agreements. Notification 42 days in advance is required under the 2011 Vienna Document of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) for maneuvers involving more than 13,000 troops.

The most favorable hoped for outcome is that the exercise goes ahead, albeit with excessive numbers but few incidents, which Russia legalistically explains away by saying that each of the armies and national forces conducted separate exercises.

– Adapted from article written by **Bruce Jones**.

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